Cloud, The Smiter

by Arthur Gask, 1869-1951

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This is the story of a Master-Criminal and his associates in crime. How, for years they defied all the forces of law and order in the great Commonwealth of Australia, how they plotted in the obscurity of a lonely bungalow by the sea and how finally they were run to earth by minds more subtle even than their own. A tale of thrilling interest, it tells how one word spoken on a lonely road at night proved the undoing of the whole band and loosed the avalanche that engulfed them all.

Chapter I

Sowing the Wind.

One beautiful summer's evening a young man was bicycling slowly along the Military Road that runs between the great Outer Harbour of South Australia and Glenelg. The road was one very seldom used and wound a lonely, sinuous way among the sandhills by the sea.

Dusk had just fallen and the young man was riding slowly and anxiously along. He was not anxious because the surface of the road was shockingly uneven and bad, but he was troubled because he was riding without a light.

He had not expected to be out so late and there was no oil in his lamp. He had ridden out from Adelaide early that afternoon fully intending to be back long before night had fallen, but twice he had had trouble with his tyres, and dusk had now caught him seven miles at least from the city and on a road that was quite unknown to him.

Indeed he was a stranger to all these parts. A medical student from Sydney, two days before he had come alone to Adelaide, on holiday, and was now amusing himself by touring the district on a bicycle that he had brought with him to the city.

He pedalled slowly along.

Presently, and just as the road passed deeply in among the blackness of two high sandhills, he heard low voices away in front of him, and against the last

lights in the sky caught sight of two figures coming towards him. They were men, he saw at once, and one, he thought, was wearing a policeman's helmet.

The young man frowned angrily at his bad luck, for he had no mind for the annoyance of being brought up before the authorities for riding a bicycle without a light.

Quickly, therefore, and without noise, he alighted from his machine and then, lifting it carefully from the ground, he tiptoed off across the road. There was a thick bush close near upon the sands and, crouching low behind it, in a few seconds he lay buried in the shadows.

Rather to his astonishment, for he had made quite certain he had not been seen, the voices had stopped the same instant that he had dismounted, and he was beginning to believe that both his eyes and ears must have deceived him when two men, stepping softly along in the dust that lay thick and deep on the side of the road, drew level with him where he lay.

He was not five yards from them.

They stopped walking and stood absolutely still. In the dim light he could just see from their attitudes that they were listening—listening and peering hard along the way down which he had just come.

Presently one of them spoke, very softly but very distinctly. "You always were an ass, Phil, always on the jumps."

"Ass, yourself. Burke. Everyone's always ass or fool if they don't think exactly with you. I know I saw someone distinctly, just in front."

"Well, what if you did? There's nothing in that—the road's public to anyone, isn't it?"

"Yes, there might be nothing in it if he'd passed us, but where's he gone?—that's what I don't like."

"I don't believe you saw anyone. I'd got my eyes skinned same as you, and I saw no one. It's just one of your damned ideas, always giving everyone the creeps."

"Look here, Burke, I've had no drinks and I've got no creeps, but I'll swear I saw someone coming towards us down that rise. I saw him as plainly as I see you here. He saw us too, I'm sure now, and that's why he disappeared. It's funny and I don't like it."

"Well, it doesn't worry me and I'm going in."

"No, nothing worries you, and you've got no eyes. Nothing worried poor old Rook, and he'd got no eyes. He'd have been here now if he'd used his eyes. He'd not be doing seven years if he'd seen the tram conductor follow him. You know that right enough."

"Oh, chuck it, Phil. Come on now; the Smiter will be in one of his rages if we're late," and greatly to the young man's astonishment they turned off exactly at right angles to the road and proceeded over the sandhills in the direction of the sea.

To the watcher in the bush the whole business seemed very extraordinary and not without a certain sinister significance.

That the men were evil-doers he somehow felt quite sure, but then he fell to wondering what evil they could possibly be doing in so lonely and so uninhabited a spot.

The young man was not afraid, but he shivered, as brave men often do when exposed to a sudden and unexpected situation.

A close observer of physiognomy would not indeed have expected any fear, for it was easy to see the watcher was no coward. His face was the face of a man not unaccustomed to take risks. His eyes were grave and deep set, his jaw was square and firm, and there were lines about his mouth that had been carved there in Gallipoli and France.

A tense two minutes' waiting, and he followed warily after the two men. He was curious as to where they were going and his curiosity was soon satisfied.

To his surprise again, in less almost than two hundred yards, he came upon a low, flat bungalow built deep in the hollow between two sandhills. It seemed quite a fair-sized building as far as he could see in the dark, and a verandah ran all round the sides.

There were no signs anywhere of the men he was following, but just as he caught sight of the building he heard the clang of a shutting door. There were lights in the place.

He turned back the way he had come, and making a wide detour, in a few minutes approached the bungalow on the side facing the sea.

Everything was quite still. All the windows were closely shuttered, but he could see plainly the cracks of light from within.

Silently he tiptoed up on to the verandah and very cautiously and without noise placed his ear close to where the light was coming from.

He could hear the hum of low voices, but to his disappointment he could pick up no word of what was being said.

Then suddenly—so suddenly that there was not the slightest chance of his preventing it—he received a stunning blow on the back of the head and was sent sprawling on his face to the verandah floor. Someone leapt on to his back and pinioned his arms to the ground. At the same time an exultant voice cried shrilly, "Come out, you beggars, quick. There's a blasted spy here and I've downed him. Quick! quick!"

There was a great shuffling of feet and the noise of a chair being overturned; then a door banged open and three men ran out. They all fell on him at once, and in two minutes he had been dragged inside the house, and, with his arms tied painfully and tightly behind him, had been bundled roughly into a chair.

He found himself in a large room with a good-sized table running down the centre. At one end of the table there was a heap of articles that had apparently been hastily covered with a cloth. His attention was drawn to this by one of his captors frowningly adjusting the end of the cloth, so as to make sure he should not possibly perceive what was underneath. The four men sat down to the table and one of them, producing a revolver, laid it significantly down just in front of him.

Then they all regarded him intently, without speaking, for quite a long time.

The young man, in spite of himself, felt uneasy. The man who had knocked him down was the first to speak, but it was to his companions that he addressed his remark.

"So, I was an ass, was I?" he sneered exultingly, "and I had got the jumps, eh? Where the devil would we all have been if I hadn't stopped outside to make sure? I knew I'd seen someone out on that road there, and directly he turned back I knew at once he was a spy. It was you who were the damned fool, Burke, at any rate this time."

"Oh, shut up, Phil. Never mind about that now. Who the hell is this man?—that's what I want to know. Who are you, now?" And half rising from his seat the speaker leaned frowningly across the table to peer closer at the student.

The latter was still dazed and heavy with his fall, but he answered coherently enough.

"I'm no one in particular," he said. "I'm a medical student and my name is Page."

"You're in the police!"

"Oh no, I'm not. I'm a medical student I say, and I come from Sydney."

"You followed us out here—you were spying."

"No, indeed, I wasn't. It was quite an accident."

"Accident, be damned! We saw you in the road."

"Yes—I know that, but I thought you were policemen yourselves. I am bicycling to Adelaide, and I've got no oil in my lamp. I saw you coming and thought one of you had got a policeman's hat. So I hid until you had gone by, that's all."

His interrogator sneered contemptuously.

"And that's why you came sneaking round the verandah; that's why you went right round the other side of the sandhill, so as to take us unawares! That's why you stood listening, too, under the window! You fool! Again I ask you what did you follow us for?"

The student hesitated a moment and then replied a little lamely, "I wanted to see if I could borrow some oil."

There was a snarl of dangerous laughter, and then a third man broke in.

"See what he's got about him, Phil; that'll help us a bit."

The young man's pockets were quickly emptied of their contents and his clothes searched generally. The man they called Phil seemed purposely rough in his handling, but the victim bore patiently with the roughness, realising perfectly well now that things were in a dangerous way.

The search yielded nothing of interest. A little money, some keys, a pocket knife, a few odds and ends, and nothing more. No papers or letters of any kind. The student had left his pocket-book and all his valuables locked in the trunk at his hotel.

The searchers were dissatisfied. The very absence of any papers seemed to them suspicious, and they glared darkly at the young man.

Then suddenly the fourth man spoke for the first time, and the student started as if he had been stung. He had not heard that voice before and the cruelty in it struck at him like a blow. It was a voice, cold, suave, and pitiless, without a trace of mercy in its tone. It was the voice of a man who would hesitate at nothing if he thought it necessary—a man with no scruples whatsoever.

"See if he's got any name," he said quietly, "on the collar of his shirt or in the pocket of his coat."

The student regarded him intently. He was a rather fat man with a white flabby face, and neither short nor tall. He had a square broad forehead, and his mouth was set in a hard straight line. His eyes were sleepy-looking and appeared to have no particular expression in them. The man reminded him strangely of someone in his past life, but he could not remember whom.

They found no name either in his pocket or on his shirt, and after a short silence the fourth man spoke again.

"Whom do you know in Adelaide?"

The student shrugged his shoulders.

"I know no one," he said; "I only arrived the day before yesterday. I am stopping at the Southern Cross Hotel."

Again a short silence and the interrogation went on.

"You say you're a medical student."

"Yes—in my third year."

"Tell me the branches of the carotid artery."

For a moment the student was amused—then he reeled them off glibly.

"What's your father?"

"A bank manager in Sydney. Manager of the Coulter Street branch of the Bank of New South Wales."

A significant glance passed between the men, and the student distinctly saw the eyes of the man they called Phil turn quickly to the covered-up end of the table.

The fourth man spoke again, coldly and deliberately as before.

"I believe you're a liar."

For the first time the student was angry.

"What if I am? I've done you no harm. But I'm not. Everything I've told you is true, except that I kept back that I was curious to know what your two friends were about."

"What made you curious?"

"What I heard them say."

"Exactly, you're a spy."

The student bit his lip in vexation. He knew that like a fool he had given himself away. He ought never to have let them know that he had heard anything at all. Now, if they had got anything to hide, they knew that they had aroused his suspicions and it might be dangerous for them to let him go.

He looked at them from one to another, but three of them now averted their eyes. Only the fourth man was looking at him still.

There was a long, dreadful silence and the young man shivered. He realised that he was in the presence of death.

Once before he remembered such a scene as this, in a little village in the far-off days in France. He had been on orderly duty, and they were examining a spy. The examination had been concluded and there had been a moment's silence before the officer had told the spy he was about to die. He sensed that silence now.

The fourth man made a peculiar sign to the one they called Phil.

"Take this young gentleman outside," he said suavely, "while we think over what we must do. Don't unloose his arms. No," he continued, turning back to the young man, "you'd better go quietly. We're not going to hurt you, but we have valuable properties here and we should like to be quite certain you didn't come after them. We shall inquire into your story and see if it's all true. The Southern Cross Hotel, I think you said. Well, we'll phone up. We shan't keep you long."

The student got up stiffly. He knew quite well that the man was lying, and that they were going to do something dreadful to him, but he made a pretence of being relieved and smiled confidently.

Still pinioned and with an escort on either side, he was piloted through the house and across a small yard to a substantial-looking motor shed on the far side. The moon had just risen and he could plainly see the padlock on the door.

The man they had called Burke produced a key and, opening the door only just wide enough to admit of his entering, unceremoniously pushed the prisoner in and clanged and padlocked the door again behind him.

It was almost dark inside and the vicious push he had received caused the student instantly to overbalance. He fell painfully upon a big heap of wood and for quite a minute lay dazed and stunned exactly where he fell.

Then he rolled over in a feeble attempt to sit up, and the first thing his hands touched was the cold, smooth blade of an axe.

For a moment he thought nothing of it, and then it suddenly flashed through him that if the blade were only moderately sharp he could very quickly cut through the cord that held his wrists so painfully together. At once he began rubbing the cord and blade together.

The axe proved sharper even than he had dared to hope and almost immediately he was free of his bonds and was breathlessly chafing the blood back into his cold, numbed hands.

All the while he was looking intently about him. The moonlight came in faintly between the chinks of the door and, more accustomed now to the darkness, he could take in all his surroundings without difficulty.

There was no car in the garage and it was apparently being used as a wood shed only.

His thoughts succeeded one another quickly. He was sure he was in great and deadly peril, for if ever he had seen murder in anyone's eyes he had seen it in those of the white, flabby-faced man who had questioned him last.

What their business was he could not imagine, but he believed he had stumbled inadvertently upon some sinister secret, and that it would not be safe therefore for them now to let him go.

He shuddered to think what they might be intending to do to him, but if his four years in the war had given him courage, they had also given him quickness and resource. Action followed almost immediately upon thought.

Directly sensation had come back fully into his hands, he stood back a few feet, well away from the wall, and swinging the long axe over his head brought it down fiercely upon the door.

Once, twice, three times he swung it and then, crash, the door burst open and he sprang exulting into the moonlight.

There was no hesitation then about his actions. With a loud cry of defiance, for he knew it would be quite hopeless to imagine the breaking down of the door had not been heard, he hurled his axe contemptuously upon the roof of the bungalow, and raced like a greyhound for the sea.

He knew his only chance lay in flight, and he judged rightly he could run best over the broad level sand at the margin of the waves.

He reckoned that if he could get only a hundred yards from the house he would be safe, for it would be quite improbable that they would have a loaded rifle ready.

Racing over the yard and down towards the low fence that bounded the long stretch of grass in the front of the house, he heard voices shouting to him to stop and then three times in quick succession someone from behind fired with

a revolver. The hiss of the bullets sounded unpleasantly close, but he was quite unharmed.

He had reached the fence and was adjusting his stride to leap over it when for the fourth time the revolver spoke. The bullet missed him as before, but the report made him miscalculate his jump. He sprang short and hitting the top rail fell with a heavy crash back on to the ground. His forehead struck a jagged paling and in an instant he was blinded with blood.

He felt terribly sick and made no attempt to rise. Two of his late captors ran up.

"My God," cried one of them. "Smiter's hit him in the head. He's killed him. Fetch the others quick."

But there was no need, for the other two came running down as he spoke. There was a low and hurried consultation and then the Smiter issued his orders like a man who was accustomed to be obeyed.

"Put him in the sea," he said sharply; "with this tide running he'll be out of the gulf by morning. Quick now; the shots may have been heard. Lift him, don't drag him down. You needn't go in deep. The tide'll be dead off shore."

With no further discussion the limp body of the student was bundled up and hurried to the sea.

He was quite conscious and had missed no word of what had been said, but he felt too sick to worry about anything. It crossed into his mind that he was prepared to die.

A few stumbling yards and they were over the sands and by the sea.

"Now swing him; one, two, three. .. .. ."

Instinctively he knew what was coming, and he took in a deep breath.

Splash—he was free of them at last.

The sweet warm water of the sea closed over him, but instantly as he sank his brain was cleared of its oppression, and the magic love of life came back.

He felt revived at once.

Why should he die in any case? He had so much to live for, and, after all, he could not be very much hurt.

With the sea warm as it can be on an Australian summer night, he knew he could remain in it for hours without being chilled, and he had only to drift gently with the tide speedily to draw clear from the murderers.

He chuckled to himself at the simple way in which they had let him go.

Very gently he allowed himself to rise to the surface, until his face was just clear, and then he opened his eyes.

The moon was disappearing behind a cloud, and in a few seconds it was almost pitch dark.

He was about twenty yards from the shore and dimly he could see the figures of the two men who had thrown him in.

They were watching to see what had become of him.

He drifted very slowly away.

Chapter II

A Year Later.

IT was the Christmas Cup Saturday at Morphettville Racecourse, Adelaide, and old Andy McIver had got his betting boots on and was doing well. A rich man and in no need of money, he was, of course, winning all along the line. After three races in succession he had gone up to draw money from the paying-out windows of the totalisator.

He had had twenty-five pounds on Bottle King in the Hurdles and it had returned him a dividend of over eight to one.

Then he had had fifty pounds on his own animal, Lightning, in the Welter and, although it only came in second, his money was returned to him exactly doubled.

He had next plunged heavily on Clara in the youngsters' race and the beautiful little filly, coming like a whirlwind at the finish, had pipped the favourite easily by a length. Nearly six hundred pounds had then been added to the already thick wad of notes in his breast pocket.

He was very pleased with himself, nor did he mind who knew it.

"Splendidly, my boy," he called out loudly in answer to the inquiry of a friend two rows in front of him on the grand stand, "I'm picking them all out. It's as easy as shelling peas."

He walked out, and down to where the band was playing, wondering what he should back for the Cup.

Suddenly, when turning round to admire two pretty girls who were passing, he banged into a big stout man, almost knocking the race glasses the latter was carrying out of his hand.

"Curse you, Andy," expostulated the corpulent individual sharply. "What are you swerving all over the course for? Leave the girls alone, can't you? I should have thought you were too old for that sort of thing now—you wicked old gambler."

"Hullo, Charlie—beg pardon, old man, but weren't they peaches? Pretty as two-year-olds and just about as skittish, too. The little dark one smiled at me; I'll swear she did."

"I shouldn't wonder either. Your old red face would make anybody smile. I could grin myself any day when I see you; but how are you doing to-day?"

The old man beamed with happiness like a boy. "Dinkum, dinkum, Charlie, I'm drawing money every time. Now, bless me if I don't back your animal in the Cup. I wanted a good outsider, but I never thought of Boxer till I saw you. Any chance, do you think?"

The owner of Boxer frowned.

"It'd win if they'd let it," he growled, "but, damn them, it never gets a chance. You know the grudge they've all got against me."

Old Andy knew it well enough. Boxer was a good stout horse and beautifully bred, but for over a year now he had been under a cloud. Back in his two-year old days he had been a hot favourite once, in a classic race at Victoria Park. He had finished very badly, however, and the irate owner, whom report said had backed him heavily both off and on the course, had sworn that the horse had been deliberately pulled and thereby prevented from winning.

In a great rage, he had had the jockey up before the Stipendiary Stewards, but the latter, upon deliberation, had found no proof of pulling, and the rider had got off unscathed.

A great to-do had been made about the matter at the time and it was rumoured generally that all the jockeys had sworn among themselves that Boxer should never win on an Adelaide racecourse again.

It might, of course, have been only a rumour, but strangely enough. Boxer never had won since.

A splendid galloper at exercise and on the track, and always most highly spoken of by all the touts and sporting correspondents who had watched him, he had, however, never been able in many subsequent attempts to catch the judge's eye.

Something always seemed to happen to him when he came on to the racecourse. Either he got off badly, or something bumped into him at the start, or some other horse compelled him to run wide at the turn, or he got boxed in at the finish and could not get an opening to run through.

Whatever it was, intentional or not, he never seemed to get a fair chance and was certainly the most unlucky horse in training.

"He's been doing well on the track, hasn't he?" asked Andy. "I saw Rapier wrote the other day that he'd never been going better."

"He's fit to beat anything in the Cup," replied the other, gloomily; "he's only got eight stone and the distance just suits him. But there you are—some damned bad luck will come to him as sure as we're talking here. I tell you, Andy, they won't let him win."

"You've got young Lane riding him to-day? I read it somewhere."

"Yes, I'm alright there. Lane's one of the most promising riders in the West. It's quite by chance I got him, too. I heard he was here on holiday with his father, and I asked the old man if he'd let the boy ride. I know he's only an apprentice, but he's a fine judge of pace and a clean, jolly little fellow altogether."

"Well, let's have a word with him, Charlie. I'm going to back your horse and chance it, anyhow."

They went round by the weighing-room and found the boy. He was talking to his father. He certainly did look a nice little chap. Old Andy was introduced.

"Mr. Andrew McIver?" queried the elder Lane. "I know you very well by reputation, sir, for my brother worked on your station at Woolaroo for many years, and a very good master he said you were. He was never tired of telling us of your kindness and the way you always treated all your men."

"Tut, tut," replied old Andy with his red face redder now than ever. "I remember Bob Lane well and a better man I'll never meet. I could trust him anywhere; but look here now, we've come to you about this race. Mr. Horrocks here is my great friend, and I'm most anxious to see Boxer win. I'm backing him heavily myself, too."

"Well, sir, my lad'll do his best. You can depend on Ted."

"I know that, but I expect you've heard by now that people say Boxer's never going to be allowed to win. You've heard that, haven't you?"

The jockey's father looked rather uncomfortable.

"Yes, sir, I've heard something," he replied, and then he added proudly, "but my boy's no fool, although he looks a kid. He'll see that no tricks are played. Won't you, Ted?"

The boy grinned.

"Got my riding orders, sir," he said. "Win almost from start to finish if I can. I've had a spin on him and I don't want anything better."

"Good boy, sonny," broke in old Andy admiringly. "I'll have a packet on your mount and if you win there'll be a hundred of the best to go into your money box, see?"

The boy grinned impishly this time.

"Well, don't give it to dad, sir. I'll come for it myself, sure I will."

In high good humour Andy patted him on the back.

"By Jove, you'll do, I can see. I'll have to have an extra fiver on the tote to pay for your present. I really do believe, Horrocks, that we're going to win."

The bell rang and the little jockey ran off. It wanted twenty minutes yet to the starting time, but business was already brisk at the totalisator and the figures under the various horses' names were changing and mounting almost with every second.

Already nearly 3,000 had been invested and he would have been a smart man who could have determined from the figures exactly which horse was going to end up favourite.

There were sixteen runners, but four horses alone were being heavily backed, and of these Rose Darling held just a slight predominance over the others. Over 500 had been posted to her credit.

Andy McIver smiled knowingly when he saw the figures. "Boxer at any rate has got a poor following," he said to that horse's owner who was standing beside him. "Only 52 so far. Why man, it'll pay forty if it's no better backed than it is now."

"Well, I'm going to have fifty on," growled Horrocks; "that'll make 'em think a bit."

"Don't have it on yet, Charlie; I'm going to have fifty on, too, and perhaps a hundred. Wait till towards the end. Wait till everybody's put down their money and then we'll go in together for a good slapping win. Damn those jockeys, I say; it'll be the sell of their lives if Boxer wins and I do believe he's going to—something tells me he is."

"You're a real baby, Andy. I've had that feeling hundreds of times in my life—and a nice penny it's cost me. But we'll wait until the last three minutes and then we'll go on to the rise and see our money lost."

Two minutes before the race was due to start Andy and his friend hopefully advanced to the 5 window and a big jump of 150 was immediately recorded to the investments on Boxer.

Confidence in Boxer even then looked rather small, less then 260 in a total of over 6,000 being all that was under his name.

The start took place just opposite the stands, and the sixteen horses were getting ready to line up.

Boxer was drawn number eleven, and the two friends soon saw that the youthful jockey had all his wits about him.

Pinkeye, drawn number ten, started kicking and plunging and little Lane expostulated shrilly.

"Now then, keep your old bus away, will you? Have you drawn my number as well as yours? Keep away now."

The other jockeys laughed good naturedly.

"Alright, baby," said one, "you shall have the whole course to yourself in a minute when we've started—so don't worry now."

"You want some of the lads from Perth here," went on the little chap. "They'd teach you to line up properly anyhow."

The crowd round the rails were much amused.

"That's Boxer he's riding," said a tall thin woman who appeared to know everything and everybody on the course.

"Yes, and Boxer'll get boxed in," replied her friend, equally knowing; "he always does, you see. I wouldn't back him to-day at a hundred to one."

"Oh, that's nonsense. He'll win some day."

"Not till they let him," her friend replied meaningly, and she lowered her voice. "Do you know, they say that whenever Boxer runs there are two jockeys always told off specially to prevent him winning."

"Oh, I've heard that, of course, but whether it's true or not goodness only knows."

"Well, you see if I'm not right. He'll never get a look in."

The start was delayed quite a long while. Several of the horses seemed fractious and to be almost purposely refusing to come into line. The newspapers said next day that Boxer was certainly the worst offender, and perhaps they weren't far wrong. Certainly young Lane appeared to be having a lot of trouble with his mount, and time after time it was Boxer alone who prevented the field being sent off.

The starter was most patient—perhaps partly because the rider was a stranger to South Australia, and partly also because he could not have been unaware of the cloud the horse was under.

The boy did not seem a bit flurried, however, and took everything most deliberately. He said afterwards that the jockeys on either side squeezed in directly he came near—so he just invariably made Boxer back out, and tried again.

Andy McIver was watching everything most intently. He smiled gleefully at Horrocks.

"The little devil," he chuckled, "he's doing it on purpose. With any luck he'll poach a flying start."

And a flying start he did poach. When for about the tenth time Lane tried to take his allotted position without being squeezed, and for the tenth time it seemed that purposely both his neighbours closed in, the starter called out sharply to them to keep their mounts straight, and then instantly after let the tapes go up. Lane had been hustling the gelding forward quickly to take the clear opening that had been made for him, and the start caught him on the move.

He got off a clear length in front of everything else.

"Good boy," roared old Andy, "he's smart as paint. A fiver to nothing now, he rides a good race."

The boy on Boxer was quite aware that so far the luck had been all his way, and crouching low in his saddle he thankfully regarded the clear open course before him. He was sure they had been trying to beat him at the start.

The race was a mile and a half, and Horrocks's trainer had given him implicit directions as to how to ride his mount.

"Keep well up, lad," he had said, "for the first half of the journey; then ease him a bit and make your run two furlongs from home. Boxer can sprint as well as stay. Don't be afraid if you're laying back a bit just as you come round the bend, but if you've escaped so far look out for trouble there. They'll try to run you wide at the turn. Don't use your whip too much."

The boy was sensible enough to follow instructions, and instantly he was clear began to make the most of his mount.

He urged Boxer along at good rattling pace, and it thrilled every nerve of his wiry little body to feel the way the good animal responded to his call. Boxer was only a four-year-old and had not been over-raced. He had a beautiful even motion and covered the ground in a fine devouring stride.

Half a mile from the start he was going like the wind, and still in front. Out of the tail of his eye, however, Lane could just see the fine black head of Beetle Boy looming on his flanks. In the middle distance Boxer was still first, but Beetle Boy was now level with his girths, with Rose Darling just about a head farther behind.

"Has he shot his bolt, Charlie?" anxiously asked old Andy on the stand.

"No, no," testily replied Horrocks, without taking the glasses from his eyes. "Good boy, riding to orders, that's all."

Half a mile from home Boxer had dropped back to fourth on the outside, but his jockey could feel him full of running, and had eased him only because of the definite instructions he had received.

He was running dead level with Repeater, alongside him, but the latter was all out and Lane could see he was tiring and was obviously a beaten horse.

Suddenly, a good fifty yards before the turn for home, Repeater began to swerve badly, threatening to carry Boxer out wide with him. His jockey appeared to have lost control.

In an instant Lane had seen his danger and throwing his instructions to the wind, he suddenly urged on Boxer to topmost speed. He struck him sharply with the whip and Boxer leapt forward like an arrow from a bow.

He escaped interference by a hair's breadth and ruthlessly cutting down his other opponents entered the straight for home a good length ahead.

The boy felt rather frightened then at what he had done. He knew he had commenced his final run quite two hundred yards earlier than he had been told to, but he consoled himself with the belief that he had done quite rightly. If he had not speeded Boxer up he would inevitably have been driven out wide by the fast-tiring Repeater, and would have then entered the straight in an entirely hopeless position.

Now, at any rate, everything was clear and if Boxer were only good enough, he should win.

He knew he could not ease his mount, even ever so little again. He had started Boxer on his final run, and he judged it best to keep what advantage he had gained by his sudden and premature speeding-up.

All at once his anxiety left him. A born judge of a thorough-bred, the glorious and perfect action of his mount enthralled him. Boxer was putting in a tremendous pace, but he was still running with a beautiful easy motion, and there was no sign whatever of any tiring or distress.

A fierce excitement thrilled through the boy. Again, as when they had first started, he was leading in front of them all and again he had the great wide staring course open and free before him. On, on the whole field thundered.

Crouching low against the tremendous rush of wind he rode the gelding only with his hands.

The shouting from the stands came up to him like the roar of some mighty hurricane, and then slowly and stealthily so it seemed, the form of another horse loomed up close alongside of him, on the rails.

He did not, however, turn his head. He just stared hard and patiently at the black spot in the distance that he knew was the judge's box. Every second it was getting bigger and bigger.

The horse near to him came farther into view. Its head reached level with Boxer's girths, it came nearer and nearer still and then it stopped.

Without turning he knew it was Rose Darling. Her jockey was flogging her savagely with his whip. The judge's box was very near now.

The boy was sorely tempted to strike Boxer, too, but instinct told him the gelding was all out and a cut now might make him swerve and lose the race. So he just held patiently on in a grim agony of suspense.

Only about five yards farther to go now and still Rose Darling was just by Boxer's neck. A mist came over the boy's eyes, and for a moment his heart stood still.

A mighty roar of sound and it was over. Boxer had won by a head.

Old Andy wiped the perspiration from his forehead and then solemnly shook Boxer's owner by the hand.

"By gad," he almost whispered, "but what a race and what a little artist the chap is! If he'd lifted his whip once, ever so little, he'd have lost us the race."

The apprentice jockey received a tremendous ovation from the crowd. Nearly all of them had lost their money over the race, but the masterly way in which the little fellow had matched himself against the jockey of Rose Darling, one of the finest riders in the State, appealed vividly to their imaginations and they cheered heartily when he came in.

The boy at first tried hard to appear bored, as he had seen the crack jockeys always did, but his youth was not proof for long against the cheering he received and he soon showed his delight in a broad and impish grin.

Over 7,000 had been invested in the totalisator, and Boxer returned the handsome dividend of 18 15s. 0d. for every pound that had been invested on his chance.

Old Andy asked for his dividend in the largest notes available, but even then he found his breast pocket inconveniently small for all the money he had received.

Some of his friends remonstrated with him for drawing so large a sum of money on the course.

"Why man," urged one of them reprovingly, "it's tempting Providence to walk about with so much money here. Why on earth didn't you leave it until next week and draw it at the offices in the city? You're always pointed out as a dreadful gambler and lots of people know by now that you've had two good wins."

Andy laughed happily.

"Let 'em all know it—I don't care. I want to handle the money in good plain notes to see what I've won. None of your uninteresting cheques for me. I get plenty of them every day."

"But surely you're not going home alone."

"Certainly I am, and in my own good car. I'm driving myself too. I've been here all this afternoon quite alone."

But Andy McIver was mistaken here. He had never been quite alone. The whole time long, Death in a dreadful form had been hovering near him. Death at the hands of a pale-faced and insignificant-looking man. He was disguised, this man, and he wore a false beard. Never once had his eyes left Andy since he

had arrived on the course. He had followed him every minute of the time. He had watched him laugh and talk and seen him gather in his winnings with a dreadful smile. He knew all about Andy, and he had marked him down.

Andy McIver was looking his last upon this gay scene, and it was well he could take in the beauty and the happiness of it all, for it was his last day on earth.

Never again would he come here in joyful health and strength, never again would he blithely smile and greet his friends, never again would he see the glory of those long low hills.

He had had a long life had Andy, but the sands were running low now and Fate was calling him for his last race. His colours were 'all black' and it was Death who rang the saddling bell.

The racing was all over a few minutes after five, but it was quite half an hour later before old Andy left the course. He had found so many friends to chat with, that time had passed much more quickly than he thought.

"By Jove," he exclaimed presently, looking suddenly at his watch, "I shall catch it. We dine at six and there'll be the very devil to pay if I am late," and with a final nod and wave of his hand he bustled to his car.

A police inspector came by just as he was getting in.

"Hullo, Inspector," Andy called out genially; "how are you to-day? Still the best-looking in the force, I see. My word, but you've been quite a picture to-day."

Inspector Romilly turned sharply to see who was addressing him so familiarly and then, recognising McIver, allowed his face to break into a pleased and pleasant smile.

He certainly was a good-looking man, this Inspector of the Adelaide police. He had a fine strong face with good clear-cut features and a pair of very thoughtful grey eyes. He wore a military moustache, with the ends slightly waxed, and carried himself proudly as becomes a man who had fought with distinction in the great war. He was about thirty-five years of age.

"Good evening to you, sir," he replied with his eyes twinkling. "Yes, I'm still in the Beauty Competition, but I don't seem to come in for any prizes somehow. Beauty unfortunately doesn't count yet for promotion in the Force."

"Never mind, Inspector, it'll come soon. They can't pass over a face like yours for ever. But, tell me, have you backed any winners this afternoon?"

"No, I've had no luck, but I only had one bet. I backed Rose Darling."

"Poor chap—and I backed Boxer."

"A very fine race, Mr. McIver. The little chap quite deserved his win."

"Yes—it was lucky for us he was riding. Do you know, Inspector, I've won over 2,000 here to-day and drawn it all in cash. I've got my pocket absolutely full of notes."

The inspector frowned.

"Do you mean to say, sir, that you've got over 2,000 on you, now?"

"Yes, and it bulges me out quite uncomfortably too."

The inspector shook his head gravely.

"It's not wise, Mr. McIver; it's very foolish. Lots of people must have heard you have won."

"Oh yes, they were looking out for it. I got an unexpected cheque for 300 yesterday and told several friends I was coming here to-day to give it a run. I showed a lot of people my tickets, too, before I cashed them; but bless your

heart, I'm not afraid. I've got a good automatic at home, and a big dog that would account for anybody who dared to come prowling round. But good night, Inspector, I must be going. My niece will raise the roof off, if I'm late."

The inspector watched him thoughtfully as he drove away.

"I'm not sure," he muttered, "that I oughtn't to give the station at Glenelg a call to look after his house to-night. He's a jovial old soul, but indiscreet—very."

Andy McIver's car was a speedy one, and in less than a quarter of an hour the old man was at home and getting ready for dinner.

He lived in a big substantial-looking house on the seafront between Brighton and Glenelg. A far-seeing speculator, he had years before bought a large stretch of land on the foreshore and he was now reaping the benefit of his enterprise. Upon part of the land he had built houses which he let to about a dozen tenants, but upon the best portion he had erected a beautiful house for his own enjoyment.

The house was built on slightly elevated ground and commanded a magnificent view of the sea. A wall about seven feet high ran all round the house and garden, and there was admittance to the domain only through two gates. One entrance—the main one—was at the back of the garden, and the other, a much smaller one—faced the front of the house and led down towards the sea.

The old man lived with his widowed sister, Mrs. Carter, and a niece—the only daughter of a dead brother. There were three maid-servants and a gardener-chauffeur.

Mr. McIver was very merry at dinner that night and commiserated with his niece that she had not been at the races in the afternoon.

His niece was a tall, stately-looking girl, in her twenty-third year. A decided brunette, she was undeniably very good looking. She had beautiful dark eyes, and a creamy olive complexion. She was of a rather reserved disposition, however, and people generally considered her cold and proud. Apart from being an heiress, she had many admirers, but she appeared to have very little interest in the other sex, and so far no one had succeeded in engaging her affections. She was very fond of her uncle and looked after him in a motherly sort of way.

"I won over 2,000 to-day," announced Andy, "and if you had been there you would have joined in the good luck."

"Good gracious, uncle," ejaculated his niece in pretty surprise, "and what on earth are you going to do with it?"

"Put it in the safe, my girl. I'm too tired to count it to-night; but what would you and your aunt like for a present?"

Mrs. Carter always had plenty of wants and the evening was for the most part passed in animated consideration as to exactly how many of these multitudinous requirements were going to be supplied.

At ten o'clock the old man retired as usual to his bedroom. It was a large square room, luxuriously furnished. It had large French windows that opened right to the ground and led into the garden at the back.

He passed out into the garden, and crossing a narrow strip of lawn made his way to a small building directly under the wall, wherein was housed a big dog of the boar-hound type.

By day the dog was always kept strictly confined behind the high bars that surrounded his exercise yard, but at night he was always let free, to roam round the garden and the outside of the house.

The dog was very ferocious-looking, but in the day-time he was really quite a good-tempered animal. At nights, however, he was a very different creature, and it would have gone ill with any intruder whom he caught prowling round the place.

Andy McIver was very proud of the animal and always felt quite safe under his protection in the hours of darkness.

He never troubled about locking any of the doors or windows of the house.

The carriage gate and the little gate in front were the only places that were ever locked at all.

The old man unloosed the dog and immediately he treated himself as usual to a good scamper round the grounds. It was a beautiful moonlight night and his master affectionately regarded the great beast enjoying his run.

"You were quite mistaken, Mr. Good-looking Inspector," he chuckled to himself, "quite mistaken. There'll be no danger to anyone here as long as Vulcan's about. He's as good as a whole squad of your police. Hullo, old chap, what is it, what is it?" for the dog had suddenly stopped in his mad gallop and, instead, was sniffing about in short circles on the lawn. "What have you found? Come here, Vulcan, come here."

Reluctantly, so it seemed, the great beast advanced to his master. "Good old Vulcan, you're a dear old thing, aren't you?" and bending down he squeezed the great big head between his hands. "So you love the old man, do you? Well, the old man must go in now, for he's not as young as he used to be and wants his bed. Good night, old boy, good night," and with a last look round at the tranquil beauty of the scene Andy McIver went back into the house.

Chapter III

The Crime.

It was the next morning, Sunday morning, a few minutes after eight. Inspector Romilly had just come on duty at the Police headquarters in Victoria Square when the telephone bell rang sharply. He picked up the receiver.

"Police headquarters, Inspector Romilly, what is it? What—where—at Clyde House, Glenelg? At Mr. McIver's—what, Mr. McIver himself? Good Lord! Who's speaking?"

For about a minute the inspector stood intently listening; then he rapped out quickly,

"All right, we'll be there in less than half an hour. Leave everything exactly as it is and see that no one goes off the premises till I come, you understand? Be very strict about it," and he hung up the receiver with a jerk.

"Murder, Sergeant," he said with a very white face to another officer in the room, "at Clyde House, Glenelg. Old Mr. McIver strangled in his sleep. I knew him well. I'm going at once. I want three men with me. Ring up Dr. O'Grady and tell him I'm calling for him on my way. Now be quick, please."

In five and twenty minutes at most a large police car pulled up sharply at the gate of Clyde House.

The gates were shut but a policeman was on watch inside and immediately opened them to admit the occupants of the car.

"How many of you are there here?" asked Inspector Romilly who was the first to get out of the car.

"Three, sir," replied the man saluting. "Sergeant Crow's in the house."

"Well, shut the gate again. We won't bring in the car," and the inspector, accompanied by Dr. O'Grady, the Senior Surgeon of the Police, approached the house.

A stout police sergeant met them at the door.

"You've been very quick, sir," he whispered, "I hardly expected you so soon. Not the slightest thing's been moved and everything is exactly as we found it. Everyone, too, who slept here is still in the house."

Quickly but quietly the three men entered the chamber of death.

There was a large bed in the middle of the room. The bedstead was of plain brass and the rails were large and wide between.

On the bed lay a dreadful huddled form. The limbs were turned and twisted and the face was swollen and of a blackish colour. The body was at the top end of the bed with the head pulled close up to the rails. One arm was bent back through the rails.

There was a thin cord round the neck, with the loose ends trailing through the rails on to the floor at the back of the bed.

The head was forced almost at right angles to the body and the chin was bent forward towards the chest.

The inspector moistened his lips.

"Unpleasant form of death," enunciated the police surgeon professionally; "see how he fought for breath. And yet—yet he couldn't have been conscious very long." The surgeon pointed with his finger—"See those knots in the cord there, one on each side of his neck. Well, the man who tied those knew something anyhow. They are pressing on the great vessels of the neck and the pressure there would bring unconsciousness very soon, much quicker than just squeezing the cord round. I don't suppose the poor chap made even a sound."

The inspector drew in a deep breath.

"I knew him well," he said hoarsely. "I spoke to him yesterday after the races. He had a lot of money on him. I warned him. I warned him."

The surgeon went on with his examination.

"No rigor mortis yet, no stiffness: see, the body's hardly cold. How old was he? About sixty-five. Well, he can't have been dead much more than six hours: probably he was killed just before dawn. I'm going to take off the cord now."

In a few seconds he held it up. "About five feet," he went on. "It looks like window cord, but I leave that to you." He looked thoughtfully at the body. "Yes, the pressure from those knots would very quickly induce coma. There's about six or seven inches between them and the distance is just right. Yes, a man with some anatomical knowledge did this, I should say."

For some minutes there was silence in the room. "Well, I've finished all I want to," said the surgeon at length. "Everything's quite plain. I'll do the post mortem this afternoon. Kindly find out for me what the deceased had for his last meal and exactly what time he took it. That will help me to determine the exact time he was killed. Now is there any way I can help you, anything you'd like to know?"

"You might please just construct the exact way he was killed, doctor," replied the inspector. "I take it the murderer must have been a fairly strong man."

"Not necessarily anything very out of the ordinary. You see, he had his victim so completely at his mercy that, once the cord was on, everything was plain sailing. He came behind the bed here and very gently adjusted the cord. You will probably find the deceased was a heavy sleeper. Well, he crossed the cord over and got it into the exact position before he exerted any pressure. Then he pulled it tight suddenly and forced the head as you see it, right up against the rails. He jerked the man up above the pillow. He must have used some considerable force there, but if he put his foot against the bottom rail here he was in an ideal position for exerting all his strength. You follow?"

"Yes, doctor, but how long would he have to hold on?"

"Three minutes at the outside."

"And how would he know his man was dead?"

"By the relaxing of all the muscles of the body. He could very easily tell when it was safe to leave go, the collapse would be so complete." The surgeon delicately fingered the dead man's neck. "Quite, quite scientifically done. Yes, I should say the stranger was certainly no ignorant man."

For quite half an hour after the police surgeon had left, the inspector remained by himself alone in the room. As far as possible, without touching anything, he examined everything minutely. Every part of the chamber he placed under review and the reason for the particular position of each article of furniture was carefully weighed up in his mind. For quite the last ten minutes of his stay he stood perfectly still. Only his eyes moved very thoughtfully round and round the room. Then he pulled a sheet over the body of the dead man, and abruptly went out.

He spoke a few hurried words to the sergeant in the hall and then asked for one of the maids to be sent to him.

"Please ask Miss McIver," he said, when the girl almost immediately appeared, "if I can speak to her for a minute. Tell her it's Inspector Romilly of the Adelaide Police. I'll wait in the dining-room."

The dining-room was a long room facing the sea and like all other rooms of the house it told of the luxury and ease that money alone can buy. The inspector was just sadly considering from how many beautiful things the murdered man had been cut off when Maude McIver came in.

She was ghastly pale and there was a look of frozen horror on her face, but for all that she had lost none of her dignity, and it was with the coldest little bow possible that she now greeted the inspector.

"You asked for me," she said quietly, "I'm Miss McIver." The inspector instantly took in everything about her. He noticed the proud, clear-cut features, the beautiful dark eyes, and the queenly head with its wealth of rich dark hair. He thought with a pang that she was very lovely.

"Yes, I had to send for you," he replied gently. "It's my duty to speak to you all. I have to see everybody who slept in the house. It's a ghastly business for you, Miss McIver, but unhappily it must be gone through. Now can you help me in any way? You have four servants here?"

"Oh, none of them could have done it," she answered quickly. "It would be impossible to think so."

"I don't think so, either, although I haven't seen them; but please tell me about them."

"They've all been with us a long time."

"How long?"

"The cook since I was a little girl, and the other two for more than four years."

"And the chauffeur?"

"Since he was a boy—he's about twenty-five now."

"Well, I'd like to see them now, please, and afterwards I'll have to bother you again. You, I expect, will be able to help me more than the others."

The cook came in first. She looked very frightened.

"You're the cook here, aren't you?" said the inspector pleasantly. "No, don't be frightened. I just want to ask you one or two things. You were the first to go into your master's room?"

"Yes, sir."

"You go in first always, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, I take him his cup of tea at half-past seven."

"Well, what happened this morning? No, don't cry. Be a woman. Remember we want to punish the man who hurt your master. Now tell me, you went in as usual?"

"Yes, sir, I knocked and opened the door and took in his cup of tea."

"You didn't notice anything until after you had put down the cup of tea on the table?"

"No, sir, I never usually look at the master at all when I go in. I just put the cup on the table and go out."

"Well, what made you look at him this morning?"

"I don't quite know, sir, but I think it was because the curtains were pulled across the big French windows. Master never does pull them in the summer. He says they keep the air out."

"Well, what did you do when you saw your poor master this morning?"

"I ran at once and called Miss Maude."

"You didn't touch anything in the room?"

"No, sir, and I haven't been there since."

"Very well, then. Now can you think of anything to help me; anything unusual. Did you hear any noise in the night?"

"No, sir, nothing at all."

The cook was dismissed and the two other girls called in. They knew nothing, however, and the inspector passed quickly to examine the gardener-chauffeur—Jack Iredale. He was an open-faced, pleasant young fellow and at once impressed the inspector favourably.

"Now, Jack," said the inspector coming at once to the point, "tell me all you can to help me. We want to catch that damned brute who killed your master, and perhaps the most trivial thing you tell me may help me find him. You sleep over the garage, don't you?"

"Yes, sir, at the end of the garden."

"Well, what time did you go to bed last night?"

"Just before ten."

"Before your master?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know?"

"Well, he never goes before ten and, besides, I heard him when I was in bed talking in the garden."

"Who was he talking to?"

"Vulcan, the dog, sir; I heard him undo its gate when he let him out."

"Did he always let him out?"

"Yes, always the last thing, so that he could run about the garden during the night."

"Well, did you hear any noise during the night?"

"No, sir, I slept until just before six and then I got up at once."

"Who told you your master was dead?"

"Cook. She came running down as I was cleaning the car."

"You have charge of the dog, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir, I do everything for him, except to let him loose at night, master always did that."

"You shut him up in the morning, then?"

"Yes, I always shut him up when I come down, and give him his breakfast in the yard."

"Where was he when you came down this morning? Was he in the garden I mean?"

"No, sir, he was asleep in his yard."

"Is that usual?"

The chauffeur hesitated for a moment and then replied slowly. "No, sir, it isn't quite usual, as least not in fine weather like this. In wet weather he always goes in, but when it's sunny I generally find him out on the lawn."

"Then what do you think made him go in this morning?"

The man seemed puzzled. "I don't know," he replied lamely. "I never thought."

"He's supposed to be a good watch dog, isn't he?"

The young fellow brightened up at once. "Oh yes, and he is too. He won't let a cat even come into the garden at night. He hears almost when a leaf falls and can smell ever so long after if a stranger's gone up the path."

The inspector sniffed doubtfully. "How do you account then," he asked very sternly, "for the fact that he let some unknown man come in last night and murder your master. Remember, whoever came in crossed the garden twice, with an interval of perhaps ten minutes between, and he had to cross over not only the lawn but over the path as well. How could the dog not have heard?"

The chauffeur looked mystified and uncomfortable. "That's what I can't make out. I don't understand it at all."

"The dog's all right this morning, isn't he?" went on the inspector sharply.

"Oh yes, at least I think so. He went at once to his food when I put it down."

"Well, we'll go out and see."

The dog's enclosure was not fifty yards from the house and the inspector was soon standing before the bars.

"Let him out," he said curtly, "we'll see what he does."

But the big hound showed no inclination to come out. He did not get up even but just stared stonily at the two men.

"Why, he's not eaten any of his biscuit," exclaimed the chauffeur suddenly; "it's just as I gave it to him. He's been sick too and he looks funny."

"You great calf," snarled Inspector Romilly angrily, "can't you see the brute's been doped? Look at the droop of his eyes. Can't you see it yourself, man? Where's your intelligence? You're a fool."

"I'm very sorry, sir."

"Sorry—what's the good of being sorry? It's men like you that make it so easy for rogues to live. But come now, was he like this last night? Was he doped then?"

"No, sir. I'm positive of that. He was quite lively and jumping against the bars to be let out; besides, I heard him growling."

"You heard him growling—when was he growling?"

"A little while before I went to bed, about a quarter to ten. I thought he'd heard some cat."

Inspector Romilly eyed the young man icily up and down.

"Well, you're a bright young fellow, aren't you?" he sneered bitterly. "Here I've been talking to you all this while and now at the end you just mention casually and quite by chance what ought to have stuck out in your mind from the very first. Your master's been murdered and everybody's been considering and puzzling how the murderer got in. You remember the dog growling before he was let out and yet—you forgot to say anything about it. Now isn't it enough to make even a policeman swear?"

The chauffeur looked very crestfallen.

"I'm very upset, sir," he mumbled. "I can't think of anything properly."

"Of course you've been upset," went on the inspector testily, "but tell me, quickly now, did he growl for long?"

"No, only three or four times at the most. He couldn't have seen anyone in the garden or he'd have made no end of a fuss. If anyone had been over here getting into master's room, he'd have seen him at once, for the moon last night made everything as plain as day. Besides, if a stranger had passed anywhere here Vulcan would have nosed it at once directly master let him out. He can smell a strange track I say hours after, when anyone has passed by."

The chauffeur waxed quite eloquent in his anxiety, to make his point, and for the first time that morning the grim face of the inspector relaxed into a smile.

"Good," he said encouragingly, "now at last you're beginning to reason and think."

For some few minutes longer the two men remained in conversation and then the inspector re-entered the house and asked for Mrs. Carter. The examination here was very brief. Mrs. Carter was quite hopeless, very hysterical, and rather rude. She seemed to resent it as an insult that the inspector wanted to question her at all.

The latter soon finished with her, and asked for Miss McIver again.

"I'm very sorry to distress you," said the inspector gently when the girl appeared, "but I want you to come into the room with me. No—everything's been covered on the bed. What I want you for is this. I understand you always help the maids in doing your uncle's room. Well, I want you to come and look carefully round and tell me exactly what has been moved; to tell me, in any way, what is different now from the usual order and placing of everything. You see, the most trivial thing may any time start us on the right trail."

The girl made no reply but at once led the way to her uncle's room. She held her head up bravely and the inspector, as he walked behind her, noted with admiration that there was no trembling whatsoever about the beautiful white hand that hung listlessly by her side.

They entered the chamber and the girl stood silently looking round.

"Now don't be in a hurry," said the inspector, and he purposely made his voice as business-like as he possibly could. "Just look over everything carefully before you speak."

The girl stood for a long while quite still, and then in a low voice she said wearily to the inspector,

"There's nothing very much different. The curtains are drawn when they shouldn't be, that stool there is never so near the wall, and my uncle never put his hair-brush on that side of the dressing-table. His diamond ring is gone, too."

"Is that all?" asked the inspector quietly; "are you quite sure?"

"The door of the safe's open, of course, and my uncle never threw his clothes about like that, but," and she shook her head and sighed, "I don't see anything else."

"Do the curtains make any noise when you draw them?" asked the inspector thoughtfully. "Whoever came in would have to draw the curtains if he was going to use any light—even an electric torch, and he'd have to have a light to go through the safe."

"Oh, yes, they're so high that you have to swing them hard when you draw them. The brass rings are big and they always rattle on the rod."

"Then, if they were drawn in the usual way in the middle of the night, the sound could be heard outside this room, even with the door closed."

"Yes—easily. They make quite a noise."

The inspector walked up to the curtains and swung one of them back. The rings clanged loudly on the brass rod.

"So the man had to stand on something to draw them without making any noise," he said to the girl, "and if the stool's been moved, as you say, he probably stood on that. Now why should he bring that stool up, when the chair there was so much nearer? Let me think."

He went over and examined the stool. "Yes, the cloth here's been smoothed straight. He evidently didn't want to leave the marks of his feet and show it had been used. But why didn't he use the chair? it's about the same height. I should say he's probably a heavy man, and the chair didn't appear solid enough to bear his weight. Now I'll try the height."

He moved the stool to the side of the curtains and stood up on it. He stretched up his arm and could just reach the curtain rings.

"I'm five feet eleven," he went on, musingly, "and if he was as tall as I am he could move them too. If he wasn't then he'd have to have had something to help him. Ah! that's where the brush would come in—he'd get another eight inches then."

He turned to the girl. "You're quite positive the brush had been moved?"

"Quite—my uncle was most methodical and always put everything in the same place."

"Well, I may, of course, be wrong, but things rather point to a person shorter than myself and heavier. Now I want you to look at the safe, please. Do you know what was inside?"

The girl shook her head. "I never had anything to do with it," she said, "and don't know anything about what's inside, but he told us something at dinner last night."

She paused for a moment to get control of her voice. "He told us he had won over 2,000 at the races yesterday and was going to put the money in the safe."

"Did he put it in, do you think?"

"Yes, I heard the safe door bang soon after he had come in from going to see Vulcan."

"It was those notes the murderer came after, Miss McIver," said the inspector sternly. "They're gone now. I spoke to your uncle on the course yesterday and

he told me what he'd won. Unhappily I wasn't the only one that knew; he made no secret about it."

There was a silence for a moment and the girl choked back a sob.

"Thank you, Miss McIver," said the inspector at once. "Please go now. You've been very brave. There'll be the inquest to-morrow and you'll have to come. I shall have to see you again myself, too. It's an awful time for you, I know, but I'll take care you're bothered as little as possible. Thank you again."

The girl inclined her head ever so little and their eyes met. How beautiful and liquid were hers, thought the inspector, and then he frowned crossly to himself.

He found Sergeant Crow outside and together they proceeded to examine the garden.

"Now where did he get over?" queried the inspector. "Most likely at the back. He doped the dog somehow and knew the coast was clear there. In the front some of the girls might have been awake and seen him. We must go over every inch of the wall."

But very quickly they found out all they wanted. At the corner of the garden farthest away from the garage there were unmistakable marks of footprints on the celery bed, and a few yards distant a turned-up seed box propped against the wall showed clearly how the intruder had made his exit.

On the other side of the wall, corresponding with the disturbance in the celery bed, a stout gimlet had been screwed into the mortar between the bricks—giving a sure foothold for anyone who had wanted to climb up. Some attempt had evidently been made to withdraw the gimlet but the wooden handle had apparently come off, and the steel blade had been abandoned where it was.

"Looks as if he knew the place well," remarked the inspector thoughtfully, "and had nothing to leave to chance. I don't think we need worry any further about how he got over, eh? It's quite clear to my mind. Now we'll get a vet. down and find out what we can about that dog."

The veterinary surgeon nodded his head grimly immediately he was brought up to the great boar hound.

"Opium, opium," he said decisively, "not the slightest doubt. Look at the pupils of his eyes—just pin points. Poor brute, he's feeling very sorry for himself, I'm sure."

"How do you think it was given him?" asked the inspector.

"In a bit of meat probably. Dogs are the easiest things in the world to poison if you tuck the stuff away in something tasty. He's been pretty bad, too, this chap here. He'll get over it now but he won't be right for a couple of days. When do you reckon he got the dose?"

"Well, it's mostly guessing, doctor, but we think he picked it up directly he was let loose last night, just after ten o'clock. I suppose he'd have found it pretty easily if it were thrown, say, on the lawn there?"

"Oh yes, at once. It might have been rubbed, too, with a drop of aniseed to attract him and then he'd have smelt it a mile away."

"Now, suppose he picked it up about ten," went on the inspector; "when would it begin to act?"

"Well that, of course, would depend entirely on the form in which it was given. If it was given him in powder, which was probably the case, he would begin to feel the effect in about an hour, and in three to four hours at most he would be quite unconscious and in a state of absolute coma."

"Then why didn't the dog die?"

"They gave him too much probably, and it made him sick. It was being sick that saved him. You see, his poisoner made the common mistake of thinking a big dog necessarily required a big dose. It isn't so. These big dogs are peculiarly susceptible to some drugs, particularly to narcotics, and a very little brings them quickly under its influence. Give them a big dose and they're generally sick at once, and so get rid of most of the poison. Don't you make any mistake—this dog was intended to die and he's had a narrow escape, I can tell you."

Later in the day the inspector rang up Miss McIver. "Don't worry about to-night please," he told her. "You shall be well protected and, if you would like it, one of my men shall sleep in the house—not for a moment that we expect anything, but just to reassure you. Now another thing I want to tell you. If any of you hear noises about you're not to be afraid. We're going to try and get some idea of what went on outside in the garden last night and we may be about late. You might kindly tell the chauffeur and ask him to have the dog shut up."

About a quarter to ten that night Inspector Romilly and two plain-clothes detectives were standing outside the garden wall of Clyde House. It was a beautiful still summer night, and the moon shone clearly and bathed everything in silver radiance.

The inspector seemed quite cheerful. "We are lucky," he whispered to his companions, "to have everything almost exactly as it was last night. We are practically in the identical surroundings that the murderer was then, and I want to do everything exactly as he did, and according to time table. If we carefully follow all his known lines of action they may lead us to the unknown lines too."

Still keeping outside they moved up to the wall behind the dog's house.

"Now this is where he probably stood," the inspector went on, "precisely at this time last night. He knew exactly where to throw the piece of doped meat. We can take it for granted all along that he knew everything about the garden and house. Everything points to careful premeditation and preparation, and my opinion is that he did nothing unless there was a clear reason for it. Well, he couldn't throw the meat directly over into the dog's yard because of the iron roof that almost covers it—so he threw it on the bit of lawn there, just in front, where the dog would be certain to find it directly he came out. The dog heard something to disturb him and started growling. Probably he only heard the piece of meat falling on the lawn, for the chauffeur says he only growled once or twice and then stopped. I don't think for a moment the man himself could have been in the garden then. He couldn't have dared risk the dog scenting him when he got out. So, as I say, he threw the meat on to the lawn, it being the only certain place where the dog would find it at once. Well, he could only have thrown it on the lawn from somewhere about here. Now let's look round."

"He must have taken a big risk," remarked one of the detectives, "if he came and stood here in the open moonlight. He was in plain view of the front of that house there and anyone might have been about and seen him."

He pointed to a house that stood among some trees about two hundred and fifty yards away. It was quite a small house, painted white, and stood about a hundred yards on the other side of the road which ran by the end of the dead man's garden.

"Is it occupied do you know?" asked the inspector.

"Yes, there was a light in one of the side rooms as we passed."

The inspector measured the distance from the house with his eye. "Less than three hundred yards," he said at length. "Yes, as you say, anyone here could have been easily seen, but I don't suppose the man stopped here. He would have just flung the meat over as he walked along. Well, we'll go now to where we know for certain he got over the wall, where he screwed the gimlet between the bricks."

The detectives had not seen the place before and for some minutes there was a quiet but animated discussion among the three men.

"What I don't understand," remarked the inspector thoughtfully, "is why he chose to get over the wall here. He had to traverse a much further length of the garden than if he'd got over on the other side and he's still in full view of that white house, too. He seems to have been taking chances here that one wouldn't expect."

"Well," argued one of the detectives, "if he'd got over the other side he'd have had two houses in view of him. He could have been seen from either of those big ones there."

"Yes, but they're much farther away, a good hundred yards farther at least," remarked the inspector, "and as a set-off against the very small added risk there he'd have had a much shorter and safer passage in the garden. He wouldn't have had to go near the garage, where he knew for certain there was the probability of being seen if accidentally he made the slightest noise. Getting over here as he did, he had to pass right in front of the garage both going and coming, and, as I say, the slightest sound might have upset everything."

There was a long silence and the three of them stood thinking hard.

"I think we'd better have a look at that white house," said one of the detectives, suddenly. "When you come to think of it, there does seem something funny about the beggar seeming quite to ignore the idea of any danger there."

"A very good idea, Jackson," replied the inspector. "We've a good three hours to wait to the time he strangled McIver—Dr. O'Grady reckoned he wasn't killed until about two—and between now and then we'll have a good look at that house. It'll be interesting at all events to see how this place looks from over there."

"We'd better go round to it quietly from the back," said the detective. "It might frighten anybody out of their lives if they saw three men coming up, after what happened last night."

"Of course, of course," replied the inspector. "Whoever lives there mustn't see us at all. We'll go round by the sea first. But just a moment, before we leave here. One thing begins to puzzle me a lot." The inspector paused for quite a long time and then said very impressively—"If the murderer threw the doped meat over at a quarter to ten and strangled McIver about two, what did he do with himself during those intervening four hours?"

The three men looked at one another without speaking. Long accustomed to crime as they all were, they seemed awed for the moment at what their imaginations conjured up.

The murderer had prepared for his ghastly work, he had got everything ready and had made his first step towards the destined goal in the chamber of death. Then for four long hours he had had to remain inactive, waiting, watching and full of suspense. However great his courage, what must have been his thoughts as he lay crouching somewhere like some foul beast of prey? They could picture him in the black sweat and torture of his own doubts.

"Look here," said the inspector presently, "what I want to know is where he went. He couldn't have just thrown the poison over and then have gone away and come back quite casually in four hours. He would have to remain in touch with the place the whole time. There were a lot of things he would want to know. He would want to make sure that the dog had taken the meat and that the dope had acted somehow. He would want to know too that they hadn't found out anything about it. The chauffeur might have gone out late to meet a girl and come home and found the dog poisoned and roused the house. He would have to be certain of a lot of things and I don't see how he would have dared to let the place out of his sight even for a single minute. Well, where could he hide; from where could he safely watch the place? Mind you, it was for four hours, not for two minutes or a quarter of an hour. Now where did he go?"

"It isn't possible for a moment," said Jackson, one of the plain-clothes men, "that he walked round and round the place the whole time. He couldn't risk attracting attention. He couldn't hide in the sand either, for then he would be missing everything that might go on in the house. But I agree with you that he must have watched from somewhere."

The three men moved off towards the sea and for more than two hours went carefully over the surrounding country. Towards one o'clock they were stealthily making their way towards the white house that they had noticed earlier in the night. Their wanderings had taken them in a wide circle and they were now approaching the house from the back. Their approach was quite hidden by a small clump of trees.

"We can get to within a hundred yards," whispered the inspector. "It will never do for us to be seen. As you said, it might terrify the people in the house."

They crawled carefully between the trees and rounding a small hillock of sand came suddenly in view of Clyde House.

The inspector drew in his breath sharply. "My word," he muttered, "the very place to keep watch. Just what the beggar wanted."

He might well have been surprised, for from where they lay, not only the house but almost every part of the garden came easily under view. They could see the dog's enclosure, the strip of lawn in front, the door of the garage, and the long French windows of the dead man's room. The house itself was not three hundred yards away and with the moon bright as it now was, even small objects in the garden could be picked out easily with the naked eye.

The inspector fished up a pair of small opera glasses from the depths of his coat pocket and focussed them on the house.

"By Jove," he went on to himself, "what a soft thing if he was watching from here. With a pair of binoculars he would have seen right into McIver's bedroom and probably have been able to see him go to the safe too."

For several minutes the watchers lay silent on the sand and the inspector was just on the point of suggesting an equally silent retreat, when he suddenly felt someone grip his arm tightly and Jackson whispered very closely to his ear.

"Look on the verandah there, on the bed. We're not the only ones watching here it seems."

The inspector whipped his glasses round at once in the direction indicated.

They were close to the small white house, and rather to the side of it. They could, however, just see the end of the verandah running in the front, and there was a bed there. On the bed was a man. He must have been there when they first arrived, but apparently he had been lying down then, and had escaped

their notice. Now, however, he was leaning up on his elbow and intently gazing through a large pair of binoculars undoubtedly turned in the direction of Clyde House.

For a full minute he remained absolutely motionless, then he abruptly lowered the glasses and his head immediately disappeared from view.

"Good Lord," whispered the inspector, "can it possibly be the man we're after? It's been too jolly easy to be true."

For a quarter of an hour they waited expectantly and then up came the man's head again. About a minute's intent stare and then down again went everything as before.

The same thing happened twice and then the inspector, signing to his two companions to follow him, wriggled cautiously back along the sand between the trees.

"Look here," he said impressively when he was quite sure he was out of earshot of the watcher on the verandah, "we must know about the people in this house. Certainly it looks peculiar. It may be only morbid curiosity, of course. It's quite natural that they should be interested now in what's going on, even perhaps to the point of missing part of a night's rest, but still it looks funny, and we'll inquire well into them to-morrow. In the meantime I must get back to the garden there; it's nearly two o'clock. I particularly want to see how the moon served that man last night when he got into McIver's room. But it isn't necessary we should all go, and you, Jackson, can wait here and see exactly what this johnny does when he sees us go over the wall. Here are my opera glasses; go back to where we were lying and keep an eye on him the whole time. You will see us come out of the garden and half an hour later we'll be waiting for you in the car just by the jetty. You understand?"

Leaving Jackson to watch by himself the inspector and the other detective by a roundabout way returned to Clyde House. They got over the wall in exactly the same place the intruder had selected on the previous night, and making their way slowly across the garden arrived at the long French windows of the murdered man's room.

They peered through them. The body had been removed that afternoon to the city, but they could see the bed in exactly the same position that it had always been. Fully half of the chamber was bathed in the moonlight, but the bed itself and all behind it were buried in the shadows.

"As I thought," muttered Inspector Romilly. "He would have required no electric torch to set about his bloody work. He wanted the torch only when he came to look inside the safe, and that's why he drew the curtains. Any light could have been seen from the chauffeur's room."

For a few minutes they stood looking thoughtfully into the room and then they returned slowly the way they had come.

"I don't think there's anything more to be learnt just now," said the inspector when they were over the wall again. "We know for certain, however, that the murder was no chance crime. Everything was deliberately planned and the man knew the premises from A to Z. Now we'll go and wait for Jackson."

Half an hour later Jackson joined them at the jetty as arranged. He had little to tell but what he did tell the inspector considered very interesting.

"Of course, I saw everything you did," the detective said, "and could even easily distinguish between you. The man on the verandah wasn't watching you the whole time. He missed you going over the wall, but he bobbed his head up

when you were standing before the window and never moved his glasses from you after that. When you had gone out of sight he got off the bed and went inside the house. I saw a light come up then at the back of the house. It looked like the kitchen, I think. I waited about five minutes but he didn't come out again. He evidently knew he had come to the end of the show."

The inspector made no particular remark and almost in complete silence the three men motored back to the city.

Chapter IV

The Suspicion of the Inspector.

The crime at Clyde House created a great sensation not only in the State of South Australia, but throughout the whole great Commonwealth itself.

The well-known personality of the dead man both in commercial and sporting circles, the dreadful and baffling nature of the crime, and the apparent ease with which the murderer had escaped with his booty, all tended to excite the interest of the community to fever point.

The newspapers naturally made a great feature of the case and everything was discussed and considered from all points. It was generally conceded, however, that the murderer would never be caught. The police authorities had been most reticent at the inquest, but their reticence was only believed to cover an entire absence of any clues likely to lead to the apprehension of the criminal.

The sole remaining brother of the dead man, Mr. Thomas McIver, a wealthy squatter, came down to the city post haste from Broken Hill. He was very much upset at the awful end of his brother, and immediately offered a reward of 2,000 for the discovery of the murderer.

"That ought to make someone speak," he said confidently; "and if it's the work of a gang, as it probably is, it may make it difficult for them to hang together. If any blackguard knows about the murder and didn't actually do it himself—as likely as not now he'll come forward and give us information on the quiet."

He called on Inspector Romilly at Victoria Square—the Scotland Yard of South Australia—and told him what he was doing about the reward and of his hopes of getting news through some member of a gang.

The inspector shook his head doubtfully. "I only hope you may be successful, Mr. McIver, but, myself, I am quite sure it was the work of only one man."

"One man?" asked his visitor frowning, "but what makes you think that?"

The inspector was at some trouble to explain. "Well, you see," he said, "in minor crimes criminals often work together, but in crimes like murder, deliberate murder, they invariably work alone. And if you think for a moment, you will at once see why. However many men may be planning a murder, the actual deed must fall on one man, and one man alone. In the event of discovery, he has to bear the brunt of the punishment himself. He knows the others will get off with terms of imprisonment, but it's a swinging matter for him himself. Why should he risk it then—why should he pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the others?—for you may be certain he'll only get an equal share of the plunder if all goes well.

"Besides, another thing—murderers, deliberate murderers, are very rare. Men of crime, as a type, fight very shy of shedding blood, and generally only resort to violence when in a state of panic or in actual self-defence.

"There was no panic about the killing of your brother—no call for self-defence. It was a deliberate, callous, intentional and most carefully-planned murder. It was in every way the work of an expert, and I am convinced that if we ever find the man he will prove to be a master criminal, with some black record of crime already trailing behind him."

The inspector spoke deliberately and without hesitation and the brother of the dead man was impressed in spite of himself. He had come to the city with the casual, poor opinion of the police that most people usually have, but the few minutes' conversation he had had with the quiet, confident inspector had quite altered his view of things.

"He's a fine man, that inspector," he said to his niece that evening at dinner, "and quite a gentleman too. He told me nothing in particular of what the police are doing but somehow he made me feel quite hopeful of things generally. He seemed to have got a grip somewhere and was just waiting to tighten his hold. You see—we shall hear from him soon. I'm sure." And hear from him they did, almost immediately.

Two days after the funeral Inspector Romilly telephoned Miss McIver and asked for an appointment, urgently. He came up to Clyde House that afternoon.

He was a fitting and splendid type of the majesty of the law in his smart blue uniform, and the parlour-maid who answered the door privately informed the cook afterwards that he looked as stern as a judge.

"I'm glad I've nothing to hide," she said thankfully, "for I'm sure that man would find it out at once if I had. He looks as if he could read everyone like a book."

He was received in the drawing-room by Miss McIver and her uncle. The girl gave him a pleasant smile, but her uncle came forward at once and shook hands.

"I'm very pleased to see you," he said heartily. "I told my niece yesterday I was sure we should be hearing from you soon. Have you found out anything now. You haven't got the man?"

The inspector shook his head. "Unfortunately," he said gently, "things don't move quite so quickly as that. But I want very particularly to speak to Miss McIver; everything may depend on what she is able to tell me."

He looked at the girl as he spoke, and again he thought how beautiful she was. She looked sad and troubled, as she had done when he had first seen her, but somehow she looked more gentle now.

Her uncle was decidedly disappointed. "Oh, I did think, inspector, when you 'phoned up that you at least had something important to tell us; but never mind, it'll come soon, I've no doubt. Now, how can my niece help you?"

The inspector, as was his custom, came bluntly to the point. "Look here, Mr. McIver," he said calmly, "it was your niece I wanted to speak to—she's the only one who can help me. I shall, of course, be very glad if you will be present, but I want you please to understand that not one whisper of what I am going to say must get out of this room, or it will spoil everything."

Thomas McIver was for a moment too indignant to know how to reply. He quite saw what the inspector meant. The man was doubtful about his being able to hold his tongue. He was just framing what he considered a suitable

reply when the inspector, sensing his annoyance, went on quickly: "Pardon me, please, but I don't know you yet and I don't want our chances, slight as they unhappily at present seem to be, jeopardised by any indiscretion straight away. Your poor brother was one of the most generous and open-hearted men I ever met, but I believe he came to his death simply through being indiscreet. He let people know too much."

The girl looked scornfully at him. "I really think," she said icily, "that we can, both of us, be depended upon to hold our tongues, if that's all you mean."

"Oh, please, Miss McIver," remonstrated the inspector quickly, "I don't want to begin by prejudicing anyone against me. I'm only doing what I consider my duty. What I mean is—I am going to say something to you which is so important that if the very slightest hint of it leaks out everything will instantly be spoilt. If you mention it, perhaps even to Mrs. Carter, if you discuss it at meals, or if the servants get any idea of it, well," and he shrugged his shoulders despondently, "we may lose our only chance of discovering the murderer."

The girl seemed in no way mollified, and still regarded the inspector coldly. For the first time, however, it struck her he was very good-looking. He puzzled her too. Only a policeman as he was, there was no servility at all about him. He was quite at his ease, and spoke almost, indeed, as if he were addressing his inferiors.

Her uncle broke in emphatically. "But you're quite right, inspector, and I respect you for it—you don't know me and it's your duty, as you say, to prevent things leaking out. But still for all that you can trust me; I'm not an old gas-bag. I know when to hold my tongue and if you let me into your confidence you won't regret it."

The inspector nodded his head thoughtfully and for a moment hesitated as if weighing his words. Then he said very solemnly: "Miss McIver, I believe the man who killed your uncle passed for one of his friends."

There was a long silence and the room seemed very still.

"What do you mean?" asked the girl at length with a puzzled frown. "One of his friends?"

"Yes, one of his friends. A man who knew everything about him—who knew his ways of life—his habits and the things he always did—a man who knew this house, and all the rooms in it, who knew the inmates and who probably has often shaken you by the hand."

"How do you know it?"

"It seems clear to me now. Listen, and I'll explain. I spoke to your uncle just after the races on Saturday and one thing in particular that he told me remains in my mind. He said he had received 300 on the previous morning which he hadn't expected, and that he had mentioned to several of his friends that he was going to the races to give the money a run. Well, he made, as you know, over 2,000 and someone killed him to get that money. He was killed because he had that money—someone killed him who knew he'd got it. Now do you think for a moment that some stranger just by chance happened to see your uncle winning money and there and then made up his mind to break into the house in the middle of the night and commit a murder to get it? Do you think such a crime as this was resolved upon only on the spur of the moment; that someone said to himself just about half past five after the races on that Saturday evening: 'There goes Mr. McIver with all that money: I'll go at once and buy some poison to kill his dog, and then later in the middle of the night I'll break

into where he lives and strangle him to get the notes?' Can anyone think if the idea of murder only came for the first time into some strange man's mind when he was on the racecourse that afternoon—that he could arrange and carry everything through, in a few hours, as mathematically as the murderer did?"

The inspector paused for a reply but neither Mr. McIver nor his niece spoke. They both regarded him intently. The inspector went on.

"Now look on the other side. Suppose a so-called friend of your uncle heard him say on the Friday that he was taking 300 to bet with at the races the next afternoon, and expected to have a good day; and suppose the man who heard him say it was secretly a criminal—what would he do? Wouldn't he say to himself 'Well, I'll keep an eye on you, Mr. McIver, and if you do happen to win a decent bit of money I shall know at once how to get it from you. I know your habits, I know all about your house, I know about your garden, your chauffeur, your dog and all about your servants too. I have all the information I require at my fingers' ends and all I have to do is to get a few things ready in case I may require them to-morrow night.'

"Now which of these two men I have imagined seems to you the more likely to have committed the crime—the stranger who carried out everything on the spur of the moment, or the man who deliberately prepared beforehand to murder if he thought it worth his while?"

Mr. McIver shook his head as if he were not by any means convinced.

"But why, Mr. Inspector," he asked brusquely, "why do you say it must have been a friend? Surely there are lots of people who knew all about my brother and the house without being his friends. Men who have worked on the premises, for instance. Carpenters and plumbers and such like."

"Quite so, sir, but I am going on what your brother told me. He said he had told some of his friends about that 300 and I suggest that that must have first put the idea of committing the crime into someone's mind." The inspector turned to Miss McIver. "You knew your uncle had received a cheque for 300?" he asked her.

"Yes, it came on Friday morning."

"Could you give me any idea of the friends he met that day?"

"He hardly saw anyone as it happened. He didn't go up to the city at all. He took the dog for a run on the sands."

"Was he by himself the whole of the time?"

"No, I think he said he met Major Poole and Mr. Eadie and went for a short stroll with them."

"Major Poole lives in Glenelg, I know him—and Mr. Eadie lives in the white house there across the road. Mr. Eadie's a tenant of yours, isn't he?"

"Yes, and my uncle knew him fairly well." The girl smiled rather sarcastically. "Do you suspect Mr. Eadie?" she asked.

The inspector frowned. "Unhappily, Miss McIver, I suspect nobody at present," he replied, "but all the same I should like to learn all I can about this Mr. Eadie. Do you know what he is?"

"He's nothing now, but he's been an artist, I believe. He's a highly educated man and he's travelled a lot."

"How long have you known him?"

She thought for a moment. "Under a year—yes, about nine months. He came to the White House last autumn."

"Do you know anything about him?"

The girl shook her head. "Nothing very much; he lives over there alone with one man-servant. He goes out very little. He's rather lame and is not in good health. He has been to lunch here several times and once to dinner. That's all I know about him, I think. He's a very interesting man to talk to."

"Does he go to race-meetings, do you know?"

"Oh dear me no," the girl laughed. "He's a student and I believe hates all form of sport."

Half an hour later the inspector left. He had got very little information and was not over-pleased with his progress. He was more than usually interested, however, in Mr. Eadie and made his way without delay straight across to the white house.

The little front garden was well stocked with flowers and very tidy and beautifully kept. "A man of method and order at any rate," muttered the inspector whimsically to himself as he walked up the path; "two very essential factors always towards success in crime."

He rang the front door bell and it was almost immediately answered by a staid-looking man dressed in black. He was of about middle age.

"Can I speak to Mr. Eadie, please?" asked the inspector.

"I'm sorry, sir," the man replied very respectfully, "but my master is out."

"Do you know when he will be in then?"

"I can't say, sir, but not much before eight, I'm afraid."

"I suppose you couldn't tell me where I should be likely to find him? I want to see him rather particularly."

"No, sir, I have no idea where he is."

The inspector stood thoughtfully regarding the man. Here, at any rate, he told himself disappointedly, there was no cause for suspicion.

The man before him was of medium height, plump almost to stoutness, and had the sallow face associated with a life passed much indoors. He had unmistakably the quiet deferential manner of one accustomed to receive and obey orders. "An ideal type of a well-trained gentleman's servant," regretfully thought the inspector; "nothing doing here."

"Can I give my master any message, sir?" asked the man respectfully.

"No, I'm afraid that wouldn't do," replied the inspector, "I'm Inspector Romilly, of the Adelaide Police, and I wanted just to ask him a few questions about the late Mr. McIver. I suppose you've had lots of people already inquiring here."

Just a flicker of very faint amusement seemed to cross over the man's face.

"Yes, sir, and we've had two detectives here too."

"You had nothing to tell us—I expect—of anything you saw or heard on the night of the murder?"

The man looked very grave again. "Unhappily no, sir. You see master and I nearly always go to bed before ten. My master is not very strong and we never sit up late. We make up for it by being early risers."

"Very well," smiled the inspector pleasantly, "I won't bother you with any more questions, but I'd like to see your master if I could to-morrow. How would eleven o'clock do?"

"Very nicely, I should think, sir. I am sure my master will arrange to be in."

Returning to headquarters that night the inspector at once sent for Detective Jackson.

"When you went up inquiring to the White House tell me what opinion you formed of that man Eadie's servant?" he asked.

"Harmless and most obliging," replied the detective without hesitation. "I liked him better than I did his master, too. Mr. Eadie himself was rather off-hand with us, but I put it down to his being annoyed because he was hurried out of his bath. He wasn't ready when we called and his man had to go and fetch him. As I told you, we got nothing out of them. The master seemed a bit of a crank, too, and I should say the servant has rather a bad time."

"Well I'm going to see Mr. Eadie myself to-morrow, but I'm afraid we shall have to wipe them both off the slate. I agree with you: the man-servant seemed quite alright."

Punctually at eleven o'clock the next morning, Inspector Romilly returned to the little white house. It was a glorious morning, but very hot, and the inspector was not surprised to find all the sun-blinds down on the verandah.

He had barely touched the bell when a high-pitched voice, and one that to the visitor sounded rather irritable, called to him to come in.

"Inspector Romilly, I expect—please come in. Excuse me getting up, but my leg's rather bad this morning."

The inspector pulled open the wire door and found himself in the refreshing coolness of the small lounge hall. The light was naturally very poor and, coming out of the glaring sunlight, for a moment he could distinguish little in the place. Soon, however, his eyes were able to pick out the speaker. The latter was sitting back on a large wicker chair with one of his legs stretched out and resting on a stool. Apparently he had been reading for there was a newspaper on his knees. Seated as he was, he seemed rather a biggish man.

"Pull that curtain if you don't mind," he went on more pleasantly, "then we shall be able to see each other better. I always hate talking to anyone when I can't see his face."

The inspector did as he was bid and pulled back the curtain that was covering a small window at the side of the hall. It certainly did improve the light a little, but the hall was still left in comparative gloom. The man in the chair, however, came much better into view. His face was tanned to a rather dark brown, he had a protruding upper lip with rather prominent front teeth, and he was wearing glasses slightly coloured. He was stylishly dressed and wore a large diamond pin in his neck-tie.

"Mr. Eadie?" queried Inspector Romilly.

"At your service, Inspector," and the man in the chair inclined his head courteously. "I understand you want to speak to me," he drawled. "I am sorry I was out when you called yesterday."

The inspector was taking everything in and his senses were very much on the alert. There was nothing whatever suspicious in the manner of the man he was confronting, but at the same time it somehow struck him at once that there was something carefully studied in the reception he was receiving. It seemed to him to have been rehearsed.

"I just wanted to ask you a few questions, Mr. Eadie," he said at length. "You were a friend of Mr. McIver, I've heard, and you went for a walk with him on the Friday, the day before he was killed, didn't you?"

"Yes, I had a little walk with him on the sands when he was exercising his dog."

"Well, what I want to know is—did he happen to mention to you that he was going to the races the next day?"

Mr. Eadie hesitated for quite a long while.

"I couldn't tell you that for certain, Inspector. He may have and he may have not. You see, I'm not a bit interested in races myself and if he had mentioned it to me it would have made no impression on my mind."

"Then you didn't hear anything about 300 he was taking with him to bet with?"

"No, I didn't hear anything about that."

"But Major Poole says he was talking a lot about it?"

"He may have been but he never usually talked racing to me."

"Did he meet anyone else when you were with him—except Major Poole, I mean?"

"Not when I was with him, but he may easily have done so after I left, for I came in when they were both still on the sands."

The inspector was thoughtful for a minute. "You see, our point is—the murder over there was premeditated. Mr. McIver was incautious and let everyone know that he was going to bet in big ready money, and we believe someone was waiting to take advantage of it if he won."

Mr. Eadie looked bored. "Very probably," he remarked, "and quite in accordance with my own views." He sniffed rather contemptuously. "But I always hold that people who go racing mix with the very scum. In my opinion they deserve all the risks they run."

Inspector Romilly felt nettled. "Of course, everybody knows," he replied sharply, "that racing appeals to a bad class as well as to a good. It's a form of adventure and attracts those who are pleased to take risks. It doesn't appeal to a bad man just because he happens to be bad but probably simply because he's venturesome. I've been a policeman fifteen years and I've always noticed all my life that there is one quality shared equally by very good men and very bad, and that is—courage."

"Most interesting, most interesting," sneered the man in the chair.

"Yes," went on the inspector almost angrily. "You mustn't run down racing because bad men go to it any more than you must decry coinage because most law-breakers possess it."

Mr. Eadie appeared amused.

"Then, according to you, Mr. Inspector, the criminal is a rather praiseworthy individual—a man to be admired, eh?"

"Not for his crime, but for his courage he may be," returned the inspector. "Look at the crime here now. Think of the courage that man must have had. To scale that wall in the dead of night, to cross over the garden under the full moon, to tiptoe into McIver's room, knowing that at any moment he might get a bullet for his pains. Surely what higher form of courage in a way could you wish to see?"

The inspector stopped abruptly. The expression on the face of the man in the chair had altered suddenly and it caught his eye.

Mr. Eadie was no longer sneering.

"Really now," he laughed, "if I were a great criminal, I'm sure I'd choose you to write my biography. I see you're quite a student of crime."

The inspector was annoyed. He had come to pump this man and unwittingly he had been drawn into a discussion in which he had done most of the talking. He got up to go.

"Well, I suppose there's no way in which you can help us?" he asked as a parting question. "No suggestion to make? You didn't notice anyone about late that night?"

Mr. Eadie shook his head. "No, we always go to bed before ten. I'm not very strong and we never sit up late. We make up for it by being early risers."

The inspector almost started in delight. Now here, at last, was something suspicious. The master was using exactly the same formula that his servant had used the previous day and in almost exactly the same words. "We always go to bed early—not very strong—never sit up after ten—early risers instead." Could it possibly be accidental? If not—then master and man must have arranged beforehand what they would say—and that implied conspiracy and something to hide. What did it mean? He looked hard at Mr. Eadie and for the first time during the interview he thought that gentleman looked embarrassed. Was it, he asked himself, because the man knew he'd made a slip?

But Mr. Eadie at any rate gave the inspector no further time for reflection. He pressed him hospitably to have a glass of wine, and upon the inspector's refusing seemed to be quite disappointed.

"Well, at any rate," he said heartily, "never hesitate to come up at any time if you want to ask me anything. I only hope you will catch the wretch. My man, Martin, gets quite nervous at times and wonders if he's going to be the next. Well, good-bye, if you must go. Excuse me getting up."

All the way back to the city Inspector Romilly was very thoughtful. Later, alone in his room, he took stock of the whole situation.

"Now let me see where I am," he said to himself, "and sum up clearly why I seem to suspect that man. To begin with, he was a friend of McIver. He knew the house and he knew all McIver's ways. He talked to him the day before his death, but denies hearing any mention of that 300. On the other hand, Major Poole says McIver was full of it, and it would have been unlikely a man of McIver's temperament would not talk it over with all his friends, whether they were interested or not. Is the man Eadie lying then, and if so why? Then there is the position of Eadie's house. An absolutely ideal spot for the murderer to have worked from, and if the inmates are implicated it would explain at once the complete indifference the assassin undoubtedly showed to being overlooked from that quarter. Then in regard to the man himself—does he fit the bill as the probable murderer? I can't be sure about his height because I have only seen him sitting down. He certainly is a heavy man but he looks about as tall as I am. As far as appearances go, however, the man-servant would better answer to the description I should be inclined to give of the murderer. He would fit in with my ideas exactly. Now as to my interview with Eadie to-day, he seemed open and to have nothing to hide—but there was something funny in the way he received me. What was it? He seemed to be posing for me and had tucked himself away in a corner where the light was not too good. Apparently he wanted it to appear that he had been reading his newspaper, but he couldn't have read very comfortably where he was. It was about the worst place to choose in the hall. I got a bad view of his face the whole time, although he made a brave show of asking me to pull that curtain. He must have known it wouldn't do any good. Why mightn't he have wanted me then to see his face? Was he

afraid I should recognise him as an old lag or was he disguised? Then he seemed pleased when I said the murderer must be a man of great courage, but—I may have imagined that. Of course, if he had had anything to do with the murder one would have expected him to be pleased, for most criminals are always vain. Then he used exactly the same words as his servant: 'Not very strong—we are early risers instead.' That looks most damning in one way. Undoubtedly, master and man had agreed exactly what they should say. Why had they agreed? Had they anything to hide or was it simply to save themselves the annoyance of more interviews and more questionings? Then there is that affair of the man watching on the bed. That looks a bit suspicious, because they neither of them said anything about it afterwards. Whoever saw us in the garden of Clyde House that night—whichever of them it was—couldn't have been positive we were police officers, and if everything were above board, surely it would have been the most natural thing in the world for them to have said something about it afterwards? They would have been only too anxious to mention it. Now, who is this man Eadie? He's not been here a year and they say he came from the Malay States. He passes as an artist and is certainly an educated man. No one knows much about him. He hardly goes anywhere except to a few shops in Glenelg, and as for his servant no one appears to have seen him except the McIver people and the tradesmen who deliver at the door."

The inspector thought for a long while.

"I'm puzzled. I'm puzzled," he muttered slowly. "There's nothing much to go on and yet—and yet, instinct, if not anything else, makes me sure there's something strange about that house." He frowned thoughtfully. "I'll have him watched," he exclaimed suddenly; "we'll watch both of that precious pair. No watching now, I know, will tell us what they did a week ago, but it may tell us if they are trying to find out if they're being shadowed and if they act like men upon their guard."

Half an hour later the inspector gave his orders to the detective Jackson.

"Look here, Jackson," he said sharply, "I want that white house watched. You and another man—take Frognal if you like—must start on it straightaway. I've arranged for you to watch from the garage of Clyde House. You must watch day and night and take it in turns. I want everything they do put down in black and white; in black and white, mind you. Everything about Eadie and his man—on paper, please. As far as you can find out, I want to know all they do. What time they get up and what time they go to bed. When they go out and when they come in. Everything you can tell me. I'm suspicious about them and I want to find out if they act like men who're afraid they're being watched. One thing you can tell me now. When you called to see Eadie the other day, you didn't think he was in any way made up, did you?"

The detective shook his head. "It never struck me that he was. When we saw him he was in his dressing-gown, only partly dressed. The man answered the door and hesitated at first when we said we must see his master. He said he was in his bath. The man went to see and we were then asked into the sitting-room and told to wait. We heard a lot of splashing about and in about ten minutes Mr. Eadie appeared. His hair was all ruffled and he looked very savage, he hadn't shaved. No, I don't think he was made up."

"Did you see him plainly—in a good light, I mean?"

"Well, no, I can't say we did that. Everywhere in that house is dark. McIver's chauffeur says they always pull the sun-blinds directly they get up."

"Well," continued the inspector, "you know what I want now. An exact report every twenty-four hours of what goes on and everything to be written down. I'll send for it every night. Now mind and don't you be seen. Keep away from the window and remember those binoculars of his."

Chapter V

The Unknown Quantity.

Three days later the detective was again closeted with Inspector Romilly in his room. The latter looked worried and his handsome face was drawn up into a puzzled frown.

"Well, Jackson," he said grimly, "I've read your precious report and if you stop fidgeting with your feet I'll read it over again. I've read it a dozen times already, but I want to read it again as if I'd never read it before. An idea that came to me the very first time that I read it has developed now almost into a certainty. I'll read it out and we'll see how it strikes you."

"Report of watch kept on house of Mr. Charles Eadie, Barton Road, Glenelg.

Monday 9 P.M. Commenced watch in room over garage in garden of Clyde House. Noticed one light burning in front room of white house.

9.45 Light went out.

10.5 Saw someone smoking cigar on front verandah.

10.37 Heard fly-proof door click. Smoker disappeared.

10.40 Someone again smoking cigar on verandah.

Tuesday 7.48 A.M. Man-servant came out on verandah in trousers and shirt—stretched himself—yawned. Pulled down sun-blinds. Put milk can outside on step. Went back indoors.

7.55 Milkman came and filled milk can.

8.37 Boy threw newspaper on lawn in front of verandah.

8.38 Man-servant came out and fetched paper—still in trousers and shirt. Smoking a pipe.

9.2 Baker called. Knocked on back door. Man-servant came out—dressed this time. Baker left one loaf.

9.4 Man-servant came out. Watered flowers in front garden. Left hose sprinkler running on front lawn.

9.13 Man-servant went in.

10.5 Mr. E. came out. Smoking a cigar. Turned off hose on lawn. Went to back of house and got a rake. Worked on flower beds.

10.42 Butcher called. Mr. E. spoke to him over gate and butcher went away.

10.45 Mr. E. went in.

10.48 Heard front door click. Mr. E. came out with stick and in different hat. Limped off slowly towards Glenelg.

12.10 Mr. E. returned. Went in back door.

2.31 Man-servant came out. Did a bit of gardening. Banked up potatoes, smoking pipe all the time.

4.5 Man-servant went in.

7.6 Mr. E. came out. Put hose sprinkler on lawn and watered flowers. Pulled up sunblinds.

7.18 Major Poole called. Sat with Mr. E. on verandah. They had drinks from small table on verandah.

8.10 Major Poole left. Mr. E. walked with him to garden gate and then returned to verandah. Sat smoking on verandah.

9.3 Mr. E. went in. Saw light go up at back of house.

9.47 Light went out.

10.22 Someone smoking on verandah."

The inspector paused and looked up at the detective. "These are the first day's notes and the second and third days are much the same, except that the butcher called at 12.17 on Wednesday and Mr. Eadie didn't go out until the afternoon—at nine minutes past three to be precise. I notice also that the man-servant went out yesterday evening at 8.9 and returned at 8.53—the first and only mention you make of his leaving the house. I won't read any more. I think I've got the impression I want. Now, Jackson, what do you make of it yourself? What do you think?"

But the detective hesitated and from the expression on his face was seemingly disinclined to commit himself. Before he was ready with his reply, however, the inspector leant over the table towards him and tapped him lightly on the arm.

"Look here, Jackson," he said impressively. "I don't wonder you hesitate. I guess what your thoughts are, and I believe they are the same as mine. Either we are tackling two very quiet and inoffensive men, or else," and here the inspector leant forward nearer still and dropped his voice almost to a whisper, "or else we are dealing with a great artist—a very prince of crime. I know what you think. You have asked yourself as I ask myself now—Are there two men in that house or—is there only one?"

There was a tense, deep silence and the inspector went on very slowly. "You have watched there now for seventy-six hours. In your notes I read fifty-one entries about these two men—fifty-one separate entries and yet not once—never once do you record having seen them both together at the same time. Could it be chance, do you think? Could it be chance that these men are always away from each other? It might easily happen for a few hours or even perhaps at a stretch, for a whole day. But for three days—for seventy-two hours, with them both in such a small house, surely it is impossible. Of course, perhaps it strikes me more than it does you, because in reading down your notes I can take in the happenings of all one day in a single glance of the eye. I am not confused as you may have been by the waiting periods in between."

The detective nodded his head. "I believe, Inspector, it's as you say," he replied gravely, "but the idea came to me first in quite a different way. It never for a moment crossed my mind until I happened to notice suddenly on the second day that both men looked up from their work—as they were doing the garden I mean—in exactly the same way when anyone went by down the road. They both jerked their heads up sideways in a peculiar sort of way. I pointed it out to Frognal and after that we watched for it."

"But look now how everything fits in. It seems as clear as day to me, sitting here."

"That's what I said to Frognal. Servant goes in—master comes out. Master goes in—servant comes out. It quite amused us after a little while—long before we thought there was anything fishy about it. We joked to ourselves and said they were taking it in turns to mind the baby."

The inspector was thinking hard again. "We can't be making a mistake," he said after a short pause. "The trick is so simple and yet so very clever." He turned back to the detective's notes. "You see, Eadie never goes out until the tradesmen have been. Of course he doesn't want them to notice that the house is locked up. He knows the different hours and days they come and lays his plans accordingly. He always leaves by the front door—I notice once you mention hearing it clicked to—and comes in by the back. Now what does it mean?"

"Something fishy," replied the detective; "he's in hiding there, for sure, and his game's quite easy to understand. One person living all alone would perhaps make people inquisitive, but two persons," he shrugged his shoulders. "Well, no one would give them a thought."

"By Jove," exclaimed the inspector, "if we're right, how that beggar took me in. The servant looked respectability itself. I would have gone bail for him as being only just what he appeared to be. No wonder, too, he used exactly the same words as his master." He shook his head. "But still, I'm not satisfied yet. You must go back, both of you, and watch again. A third man must go with you and when either Eadie or his servant leave the house one of you must go and make sure that it is empty. If it's empty we shall be certain of the trick." He paused for a moment and then went on slowly. "I should like to see his finger-prints too. If there's only one man, and he's playing this game, he's in hiding, as you say. For sure he's wanted in some other State. He wouldn't be just an ordinary criminal. He'd be an old hand up to all the game. I tell you, Jackson, I don't like it. We may now be hot on some important scent, but, if we are, we never, never needed more care. The slightest hint, the faintest idea that we are watching, and he'll trail off or at best if he's in anyway implicated, destroy all trace of the McIver affair. Now go off again and report the instant you have anything to tell. Meantime I'll get the warrant ready. In any case, 'phone to me directly it gets dark and you can slip away from the garage without the chance of being seen."

For a long while after the detective had gone away Inspector Romilly remained alone and wrapped in his own thoughts. He was an ambitious man and just now was very worried over his want of success in tracking down the assassin of McIver. It was the first big case that had ever been entrusted entirely to him alone, and he was beginning to think he would never have got it at all had there been any reasonable chance of discovering the murderer.

A well-educated man, he had entered the police force of South Australia at a much later period of life than the ordinary constable. He was an only child and his father had been a captain in the P. & O. line of steamers, but dying before Mark Romilly was twenty the latter had early been thrown upon his own resources. Always with a great love of adventure, he had drifted from one thing to another without for a time lighting upon any settled career or occupation.

Things had not gone very well with him, however, and finally, tired of continually knocking about, he had, almost in desperation, so it seemed, become a policeman.

It was not an occupation his few friends would have ever thought fitted to him, for it necessarily entailed a strict subservience to discipline. They prophesied very early trouble and gave him three months at most before his bold and adventurous spirit would get him turned loose upon the world again.

But no—young Romilly had pulled himself together, and in a few months there was no smarter nor more efficient policeman in the force. Strange to say, he suddenly became ambitious too, and religiously set himself to acquire whatever knowledge he thought might be useful to him in his new career.

A man of imagination he became an ardent student of criminology, and there were few important crimes with the history of which he had no acquaintanceship. When occasion arose his suggestions were often received with favour at headquarters.

At first promotion had come rapidly in a way and seven years from joining the force he had become an inspector. Then the great war had intervened and for four years he had been absent from the Commonwealth. In the A.I.F. he had risen to the rank of major. He had been twice mentioned in despatches and had been decorated with the D.S.O. With the war over, he returned to his old position in the Adelaide Police, but found, as so many others had found, that however meritorious were his war services, the years he had been absent had rather put up a barrier to higher things.

Men who had been once below him and had stayed behind had passed him on the ladder of success, and there was no gainsaying but that his absence from Australia had detracted not a little from the prospect of further promotion.

Thus it was with him at the time of the McIver murder.

The case had fallen to him at first because of the absence of a higher official from the city, and then upon that officer's return, because, as was generally believed, it was not a case that seemed likely to bring much kudos to its unfortunate possessor.

The inspector was very worried and he was frowning hard. He must be careful, very careful, he knew. If he once arrested the tenant of the white house and found it to be only a ghastly mistake, the consequences might indeed be serious for him, for there was nothing that so detracted from reputation as ridicule.

His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of a constable. The man saluted. "Letter for you, sir," he said, as he placed a bulky-looking envelope on the table. "Just this moment come."

The inspector was not pleased to be interrupted and for some minutes allowed the letter to remain where it was whilst he endeavoured to pick up his broken train of thoughts.

"Well, well," he sighed at last, "we can only wait and see." He picked up the letter and at once noticed the Sydney postmark. "Who the devil's writing to me from Sydney," he muttered, "and marking the envelope 'private' too?"

Opening the letter he found its contents to consist of four pages of closely written matter. It was simply headed Sydney and was dated three days previously. The writing was quite unknown to him and curiously he turned to the end of the letter for the signature. It was signed "Shell-shock."

Very puzzled he turned back to the first page and read as follows:

Sydney.
Monday afternoon.

To Inspector Romilly of the City of Adelaide Police,
Dear Sir,

Although this letter is not signed, please, for your own sake, read it very carefully through. I see by the newspapers that you have charge of the murder case at Glenelg and what I am going to tell you may, or may not, be of great help to you. When you have read all I write you will understand why I do not sign my name. But I tell you frankly now, at the very beginning, that I am not supposed to be quite right in my mind.

I fought with the Australians in France in the Great War and was blown up by a shell when in a trench before Amiens in August, 1918. I was seven months in hospital in England suffering from shock and then three months later arrived back here in Sydney, where I was born. I have never wholly recovered from the injury I received in France and sometimes my memory completely goes.

Just a year ago this month I was in your city on a holiday and met with a dreadful accident there. Very late one night, a Saturday I think, I was picked up unconscious in the street, somewhere near the railway station on North Terrace. It was never found out how it happened, but they told me I must have been knocked down by a motor-car in the dark. I always believed there was something more than that in it, for all my pockets were found empty when I was picked up. However, I had got concussion of the brain, and fever, and they took me to the Adelaide Hospital. It was weeks before I remembered who I was; then when I got better my friends came for me, and took me away. I had a dreadful time in the hospital and was always having dreams. At least I am told now they were dreams. My friends always say they were dreams, and I am forbidden to talk about them at home. People think I am not strong in my mind because of the result of the accident in Adelaide, following upon my injury in France. I overheard the doctor telling my mother one day that I must always be kept very, very quiet for my mind was on the borderland. He said I should always be subject to hallucinations and very little would drive me altogether out of my mind. But I am not such a fool as they imagine, and I often think that what I am supposed only to have dreamt—is actually all true and did happen in reality. I particularly thought so this morning when I was reading in the newspaper about that poor old man being strangled at Glenelg. There was a photograph of his house in the paper and the sandhills near it reminded me of the sandhills of my dream. I hate the very look of sand now. Well, this is what they tell me was only all a dream.

When I was in Adelaide just a year ago, one evening I remember being on road between some sandhills and it had just got dark. I saw two men coming and for some reason, why, I can't think now, I hid in a bush. They were looking for me, it seemed, but in a little while they walked away. I followed them and they went into a very lonely house, deep in the hollow of two sandhills, just by the sea. I tried to find out what they were doing, but they caught me looking through the shutters and dragged me into the house. There were four of them there in a very long room. They asked me a lot of questions, and I thought they were judging me. I believe they condemned me to death, because they thought I had discovered something. At any rate they shut me up in a little out-house until they decided what they should do. I got frightened (I hadn't been a bit

frightened before) and broke down the door with an axe that I found on a heap of wood in the shed. Then I tried to run away. I don't remember well anything that happened after that. I heard a lot of shouting and bangs and I quite thought someone had shot me.

At any rate they threw my body in the sea for I remember coming to when the water touched me. I believe I floated a long way, for hours I think, for I remember very late at night coming to a pier. I got out of the water there but couldn't find anyone to help me, for all the houses were dark and every place was shut. I know I started to walk back to the city but my clothes felt heavy and there—my dream ends.

If it were a dream it's very strange to me how clear some things are. I remember so very distinctly the house. It was a long low bungalow affair with a good piece of lawn between it and the sea. There was a fence at the end of the lawn. I remember, too, the room where they talked to me. It was a very long room with two windows to it, and all the men sat at a long table. I can't think what any of the men were like except one. This one, however, I remember very distinctly and his face even now often breaks into my dreams. He was the leader I think and he wanted me to die. He had a cruel white face. His lips shut very close together and he never moved his eyes from me the whole time. He was fat, I think, and reminded me all the time of someone I used to know. I couldn't think of who it was for a long time, but I remembered suddenly one night when I was lying awake in the hospital in Adelaide. He was exactly like Lord Dulling's butler in England. When I was getting well there, I was sent to his great country house that he had turned into a convalescent home for soldiers and this butler used to bring our letters to us on a silver tray in the mornings. He was the living image of the man in the bungalow. He spoke very quietly in a soft low voice. I sometimes remember his name. It was a very peculiar one. I think they called him 'the Shooter,' or something like that. Of the other men one was called Phil. Before they caught me I heard them speaking of one of their friends. He was in prison, I think, for seven years and someone spoke of him as 'poor old Rook.' The man they called 'the Shooter' asked me some funny questions, and one in particular I remember well. He asked me the names of the arteries of the neck. He was such a horrible man, the white-faced one. Calm and collected and as polite as if he were answering the door, but his face was cruel as Death and I felt there was no evil he would not do.

I told them all about it at the hospital but they only smoothed my forehead and gave me something to drink. No one here will let me speak about it now; my mother cries if I ever mention it. But I often brood over it and wonder if I am going mad. Sometimes when I am quite alone and there is no one in the house I creep into the library and take down a map of Australia. My eyes turn always to that little corner of St. Vincent Gulf just where the Outer Harbour of South Australia lies. My finger traces shakily to where about I know the bungalow must lie and I close my eyes to think. All comes up plain to me again. I see the long dark sands, the lonely building in the hollow of those hills, the winding path that leads to the verandah door. I see the long low room, the table where the wretches sat, and the evil face of him who was my judge. I see them whispering together when I am in the shed, I hear a sound of crashing wood. They start with

eyes that glare out angrily in their surprise—they rush to the door—there is a sound of shooting and someone falls. Mercy—oh mercy, they have thrown my body to the sea.

Oh, do you wonder that they think I'm growing mad? That horrible white face is always there to haunt me still. My hand is shaking even now as I write.

There is only one way of peace for me, I shall never rest securely until I know the wretch is hanged. I shall read the papers every day to see if you have caught him, for instinct tells me that your murderer is also mine. Could it be possible that one little strip of coast near Adelaide could hide two such wicked men? But I can't write any more.

If you ever pray—pray for me, for I believe my mind is breaking.

"SHELL-SHOCK."

The inspector's face was white and clammy when he had finished. It seemed he could hardly get his breath.

"Good Lord, good Lord," he ejaculated hoarsely, "but what a find! Looked like a butler did he? Oh, what a fool I've been. This almost clinches everything if it's only true—and it reads like truth in every line. But we'll soon see."

He rang his bell sharply.

"Hutchinson," he said to the constable who at once appeared, "look in the record book for a Saturday evening, about this time last year, when a man was picked up unconscious near North Terrace Station and taken direct to the hospital.

"Now be quick, please, and bring the book here when you've found it."

In three minutes the man was back in the room. He handed a book to the inspector. "Here it is, sir, 2.15 a.m., Sunday, January 13th. Report of P.C. Lodge. Unknown man found unconscious in road near Newmarket Hotel. Passing lorry requisitioned and man taken to Adelaide Hospital, Received there 2.29."

"Good," said the inspector briskly. "Now get me an ordnance map, please, and a table of the tides for last year. Find one of the men too who knows the district of Port Adelaide. I shall want three plain-clothes men at once."

In a few minutes he was poring intently over a large scale map of the whole coast-line from Glenelg to the Outer Harbour.

"Now, Lambert," he said to a young policeman who was standing beside him. "Pull your wits together and try to help me. I'm told you're a Semaphore man and know all the coast. Well, I want to find a particular bungalow somewhere between two sandhills and just on the sea. It's by itself in a lonely position and, I think, not far off the Military Road. It's a long low bungalow, and has a stretch of lawn running between it and the sands."

"Is it inhabited, sir?" asked the policeman.

"Don't be an ass now," retorted the inspector irritably. "What does it matter if the bungalow's inhabited or not, if you know where it is."

"Well, sir," replied the young policeman meekly, "I know of several bungalows that answer to the description you mention, but I thought it might save time if you could tell me anything more."

"I know no more than what I have already told you. A man was assaulted there some time ago and thrown in the sea, about high tide. He drifted away, he says, for a long time to some pier and then he walked into the city. From the

direction of the tide then flowing he must have been drifting south, and therefore I take it he was thrown in this side of Semaphore."

The policeman thought for a moment.

"I think I know the place you want, sir," he said slowly. "At any rate, there are several lonely bungalows there."

Less than an hour later a little party of four men might have been observed stolidly tramping along the sands about two miles distant from the town of Semaphore.

The inspector had lost no time, but had promptly motored down. He had, however, deemed it best to leave the car upon a quiet road behind the sandhills and begin his search by the margin of the sea itself. In that way he argued that he could not possibly miss any bungalow with a stretch of lawn running down before it to the sea.

For a long while their search was crowned with no success, and then suddenly they came upon the very bungalow they wanted.

They were just passing two large sandhills much higher than the rest when deep in the hollow between them, they espied a long but narrow strip of well-kept lawn. At the shore end of the lawn was a low bungalow, painted a dark red.

The inspector felt his heart beats quicken.

"Here we are," he exclaimed exultingly; "the very bungalow and someone's living in it too." Then he muttered to himself: "The poor chap, I thought his letter rang true. But what a place to be in at night. I don't wonder the memory of it haunts him now."

Cautiously they made towards the bungalow, but the inspector felt his hopes chill suddenly by the appearance of three small children upon the verandah. They were carrying little buckets and spades and were evidently going down upon the sands to play.

Seeing the strangers, however, they stopped at once and the eldest of them called out to someone inside the house. A pleasant-looking, rosy-faced woman came out. "Good morning," said the inspector, choking back his disappointment with an effort. "May I ask if you live here?"

"Oh yes," smiled the woman in answer, "this is our house. Can I do anything for you?"

"Well," went on the inspector glibly, "I was looking for a friend of mine. A Mr. Chambers—I thought he lived here."

The woman shook her head. "No, you've come to the wrong house." Then she added thoughtfully, "And I don't know any Mr. Chambers at all about here. Is it a long time since you saw him?"

"Yes, about a year."

"Oh well, I'm afraid I can't help you then. We've not been here a year ourselves yet. We came here ourselves only last March. It must have been before we arrived."

The inspector's spirits rose again. "I expect that was it," he replied. "I suppose you don't happen to know who was here before, do you?"

"A Mr. Powell, I think, but I never saw him. We moved in the day after he left—on the fifth of last March."

"You don't know where he went to?"

"No, we never heard about him after he left."

"Did he live here long?"

"No, he had only taken the place for six months."

"You never heard where he came from, I expect?"

The woman smiled amiably at so many questions.

"Well, we never heard," she replied, "but I think he must have come from Sydney. He left such heaps of newspapers behind and they all came from Sydney. The cupboards were full of them."

The inspector at once thought it best to speak openly.

"Look here," he said with the nicest smile that he could muster. "I think you can help me. I'll be frank with you. I'm a police officer and we're making inquiries about the people who lived here a year ago. Is there anything you think you can tell me?"

The woman's eyes opened in surprise. "I'd tell you anything I could," she answered, "but I really know nothing at all about them. They say there were three or four men living here, but no one seems to have seen much of them. Mortlake and Brown are the agents at Semaphore and perhaps they could tell you."

The inspector thanked her. "Well, if you don't mind, before I go I'd like to have a look in that shed there. I want to see what it's been used for."

The woman gave her permission at once and the men walked over to the shed. The door was open, but the inspector noticed immediately there was a good stout lock on it.

"Now for critical moment number two," he thought to himself; "my esteemed correspondent distinctly mentioned that he broke down the door with an axe."

The shed had evidently been recently painted and outside at any rate there was no sign of any damage or repair.

Anxiously he pulled the door open to the light, and his face relaxed instantly into a smile. Yes, undoubtedly the door had been repaired. Two panels on one side were of quite different wood from the rest, and the lock itself was not the first one that had been fixed; he could tell that by the position of the screws. He looked round the shed. It was quite a fair sized one and evidently had originally been intended for a car. Now, however, it was only being used for wood and there were chips all about the place.

A thrill of satisfaction ran through him. There could be no doubt now, he thought, but that the letter from Sydney was genuine and in some respects at all events the happenings mentioned in it were not imagined. It was, at any rate, a promising trail for him to proceed along.

He looked at his watch and then turned to his companions. "I'm sorry there's going to be no scrap for you," he said laughingly, "but you may get one later. We're on the track right enough. Now back to the car the quickest way we can and we'll interview the agents."

But the agents unhappily knew nothing. The Mr. Powell, the former tenant of the bungalow, had given no references. He had paid his six months' money in advance. They knew nothing about him, and had no recollection either of what he was like.

Returning to the city. Inspector Romilly proceeded at once to send off an urgent telegram to Sydney. He had a personal friend there in the Head Detective Office, the great Gilbert Larose, and knew that by wiring to him personally he would get all possible information at the earliest moment. The wire he sent read:

"LAROSE—POLICE—SYDNEY.
URGENT—REQUIRE—INFORMATION—IF—ANYONE—CALLED—ROOK—NOW—DOING—SEVEN—YEARS—INTERESTED—ALSO—CONVICT'S—FORMER—ASSOCIATES—CAN—YOU—TELL—ME.
ROMILLY, Adelaide."

He handed in the telegram himself, and, leaving the post office, turned down King William Street to buy some cigarettes. A short distance upon his way a small boy, evidently noticing his uniform, stopped him timidly to ask about an address. The little chap held up a very grubby piece of paper for his inspection.

Inspector Romilly at once gave the boy the information he was requiring and always fond of children, gave it very nicely with a pleasant smile. Most people, if they had happened to notice them talking, would have remarked to themselves how very gentle the stern face of the inspector could be.

At any rate Miss Maude McIver did so.

She was walking slowly up the street and saw the inspector with the boy. She recognised him instantly and her first thought again was that he was certainly very good-looking. She liked too the kindly way in which he was regarding his little interrogator.

Just as she drew level the little boy moved off and, the inspector looking up, Miss McIver caught his eye. The smile instantly left his face and gravely saluting her he made to pass on.

For some reason the girl felt piqued, and turning she smiled and asked him if he had any news.

"But perhaps I oughtn't to ask you," she added a trifle archly. "You may be afraid I shall talk."

He quite ignored her suggestion.

"Well," he replied slowly, "I certainly have some news but I hardly know yet exactly where we are. But anyhow I'm glad I met you because I want to speak to you again. I was going to ring you up to know when I could call."

"Oh, almost any time," said the girl, again as cold and indifferent as ever. "I'm in almost any afternoon."

"Well, I'll come to-day at half past four if I may." The girl just inclined her head and with a little bow moved away.

Inspector Romilly walked on to get his cigarettes.

"Beautiful face," he said to himself musingly, "and very pretty mouth too. I'd never give a bean for a girl without pretty lips. She's a little bit aloof though and pretends she's cold. Bah! she'll be as sweet as they make 'em when she falls in love. I know her kind, bless her heart."

He bought his cigarettes and started to walk back to Victoria Square. No doubt he should have been thinking hard of all the happenings of that morning, but, strange to say, it was still Maude McIver who occupied his thoughts.

Punctually at half past four that afternoon he appeared at Clyde House and, as before, was shown into the drawing-room. This time, however, Maude McIver was there alone.

She asked the inspector to sit down.

"Now, Miss McIver," said the latter briskly, but smiling a little, "when I feel sure of a person, I believe in coming at once straight to the point, so here goes." His smile faded away and he looked very stern. He went on. "You asked me when I was here a few days ago if I suspected anyone and I told you, no. Well,

things have moved since then and I do suspect someone now." He paused for a second and looked the girl straight in the face to mark the effect of what he was going to say. Then he spoke slowly and deliberately with a grim challenge in his tone. "I suspect Mr. Eadie over there," he said; "I believe he's a criminal. I believe he came into this house that night and strangled your poor uncle."

His voice sounded harsh and brutal, but he had made it so on purpose, in order to prevent the girl, knowing nothing as she did, from at once insisting blindly upon the innocence of her uncle's friend. He wished to break down her incredulity at the beginning. The girl's face went ghastly white, but she took the blow pluckily as indeed he had thought she would.

"It's too awful for me to believe;" she said faintly, "but you've found out something?"

"Yes," he answered gravely, "I've found out a lot, but in telling you it as I am now I am placing my whole reputation in your hands. No one knows of it yet but you and me, not even my superior officers in Adelaide. If you let me down," and here he shrugged his shoulders and his pleasant smile came back again, "you will be blighting a promising career."

But the girl could not smile back; she was too numbed yet to have any feeling but one of horror in her mind.

The inspector became business-like again.

"Now, Miss McIver, I'm perhaps going to startle you again. You can easily tell me, can't you, the exact date when Mr. Eadie became a tenant at the White House, last year?"

"Yes, I have it in my uncle's diary in the desk here." She moved across the room to get it and began shakily to turn over the leaves, but the inspector interrupted.

"One moment, please. Before you say anything—if there's any truth in what I have just told you about Mr. Eadie—he arrived here on March the 4th."

There was a minute's silence until she found the page. "Yes," she said quietly, "it was March the 4th, on a Thursday."

"Exactly," snapped Inspector Romilly in triumph. "On March the 4th he moved here from a bungalow near Semaphore. He was 'Mr. Powell' there and by all my life's experience he'd had a dozen names before that." Again his voice became very grave. "Miss McIver, that man Eadie is no ordinary man. He's an adept in crime. By what unhappy chance he came to this neighbourhood I don't know yet, but long before he came here he was a breaker of the law. When we learn everything, and we shall know all soon now, I tell you we shall surely find a dreadful record of evil behind his name."

For the first time the girl looked almost as if she were going to cry, and the inspector, touched by her distress, dropped his voice to the gentlest tones he could.

"I'm so sorry to put you through all this," he said, "but you're the only one who can give me exactly the help I want. I'll tell you what we also believe we've found out. You'll be interested now without any further shocks." He paused for a moment and then went on quietly. "Do you know, Miss McIver, that there are no such people as Mr. Eadie and his servant in that white house over there."

The girl forced back her tears in her surprise. "What do you mean?" she asked wonderingly; "you spring such dreadful things on me that I don't profess to understand."

"Well, it's quite simple this time at any rate. There's only one person living there and he takes it in turn to be the master and the man. Accordingly, as he wishes it—the servant Martin disguises himself as Mr. Eadie, or Mr. Eadie becomes the servant man." He smiled at the girl's look of sheer amazement and went on. "Come now, think. All the months they have been living here, Mr. Eadie and his man, have you ever yet seen the two of them together? Have you ever seen them both side by side? Please, don't you say you have," he continued laughing, "or you will spoil one of the prettiest little plots I could ever have imagined."

The girl looked very puzzled and for a long time bit hard on her lip in her surprise. Then her face broke into a pretty smile, the colour came back into her cheeks, and she laughed in a frankly pleasant sort of way.

"Really, you seem quite a wizard, Mr. Inspector," she said smilingly at length, "for I do believe you're right. No, I don't think I have seen them both together, and, what's more, now you mention it, I can remember several little things that help to bear out what you say. Oh, how very funny. I can't help being amused. After all the horrible things you first told me I'm sure I never thought I should be able to smile so soon again."

"Well, what are these little things you noticed?" asked the inspector, greatly admiring the sweet, animated face before him, but still intent on the matter in hand.

"Well, the man-servant's been up here several times with messages. He always comes up here with the rent on the first of the month, and both Mrs. Carter and myself have more than once remarked that both master and man must both smoke the same kind of tobacco. They were heavy smokers we knew, but when either of them came into the hall there was always the same kind of tobacco smell. As I say, we often noticed it and thought it strange, because Mr. Eadie always smoked cigars and his man never anything but a pipe. I don't think I have ever seen the servant without a pipe in his mouth when I have been passing their garden and he was working there."

"Excellent, and what else have you noticed?"

"They both have the same trick of inclining their heads ever so little when you ask them to do anything. We thought Martin must have caught the habit from his master. Only on Sunday I saw Mr. Eadie passing the gate and asked him to post a letter for me. I noticed then that he moved his head exactly as Martin had done last week when I gave him the receipt for the rent, and asked him to give it to his master. But, oh, Inspector Romilly, what a difference in their teeth. They can't really be the same."

"False," sniffed the inspector, "the easiest thing in the world to see through, when you're looking for it."

"But tell me, please, what first put the idea in your mind?"

The inspector took some papers from his pocket and drawing his chair a little nearer to the girl, handed over one of them to her to read.

"You shall know all we have found out," he said gravely, "and you will have no doubt then as to what is really true."

For more than an hour they remained talking, and when the inspector finally got up to go the girl thanked him prettily for his confidence in her.

"I quite appreciate your trust," she said, "and I'm sure it's very nice of you to be so open with me."

"Well," he replied smiling, "I had to tell you everything or nothing. I daren't just tell you a little or you wouldn't have understood the graveness of things and by a chance word you might have put the villain on his guard. A criminal of his type generally calculates for everything, and if he gets the faintest inkling that we're watching him he'll disappear at once. I've no doubt he's got some other hiding-place already in his mind."

The inspector left Clyde House in quite a happy frame of mind, and as he made his way towards the railway station of Glenelg, his thoughts were undeniably pleasant ones, for again they lingered on the pretty girl he had just left.

Suddenly, however, his meditations were cut short. A bluff, hearty voice broke in from behind.

"Hi, you there, Romilly," someone shouted, "pull in the reins a bit, will you. I want you."

He looked up sharply. He was just passing Major Poole's pretentious residence in the High Road, and the owner of the house himself was hurrying down the lawn to catch him.

"Cheerio, Inspector. Your luck's in, old man," exclaimed the jolly-looking major when he got up close. "Now, do you know what's going to happen to you—yes, straight-away?"

The inspector looked at his watch. "I'm going to catch the 6.15 to the city," he replied, "but before that I believe some wicked old wine-bibber is going to ask me to have a drink."

"Better than that," laughed the major, "better than that, my boy. You're going to have the nicest little bit of dinner that you've had for years. Look here, old man. I've got a little feed on to-night, something special. There should have been seven of us, all men, but one of them's put off, a chap you don't know. Now I can't have a vacant chair and it'll be the kindest thing in the world if you come in. Now, don't say no for I won't have it. Be a sport; you needn't stay late for one of the men has got to leave sharp at nine and I'm motoring him myself into the city; you shall go with him. So there you are, everything's all cut and dried."

Inspector Romilly looked down at his uniform. "But I can't come in like this," he smiled. "It would frighten them all to have a policeman in full kit, besides——"

But the major interrupted. "Oh, chuck it, old man. It won't matter a bit. They all know you personally or by reputation, and they'll be awfully pleased to have you with them. Come on; I won't take no. We're just going to sit down."

The inspector hesitated. He liked company and he liked a good dinner. Major Poole and he were old friends and had been brother officers together in France. He was not shy of meeting anyone, although now he was again only a policeman. He had mixed with some of the best people in his campaigning days, and was quite aware he could hold his own with anyone. Why shouldn't he enjoy himself, he thought? Besides, he was hungry. He followed the major in.

In a few minutes he was being introduced to the company. Three of them he already knew.

"Major Romilly," said his host to the other two. "Major Romilly, Distinguished Service Order, late of the Second Division, now the best-looking Inspector of Police in the State of South Australia."

Everyone laughed, and the major went on in a loud stage whisper.

"Almost had to put the dinner off. My parlour-maid skedaddled in a temper this morning, and there was no one to wait on us. Didn't know what to do, but Eadie very decently lent me his butler and everything will be O.K. now. Nice man, Eadie, real good sort."

The inspector nearly had a fit.

Chapter VI

Playing with Fire.

Inspector Romilly thoroughly enjoyed himself that evening and later on, when he was much better off and in a position to give dinner parties himself, he often tried to reproduce something of the spirit that so pervaded things there.

All things harmonised so beautifully together. He was tired and he was hungry, and he sank thankfully into the happiness of it all.

Ease and wealth were so apparent everywhere.

There was the comfortable long room; the deeply cushioned chairs and the softly shaded lights. There was the smell of daintily cooked foods and the delicate aroma of fine old wines.

There was the hum of happy voices, the laughter of contented men at peace with all the world, and a gentle languorous feeling that life was very pleasant after all.

Then there was Martin too. Martin, the ubiquitous, soft-soled butler of the "nice chap, Mr. Eadie." Martin, who was always there when he was wanted, but who was never in the way, who moved phantom-like over the rich thick carpet without a sound, who seemed just to glide in with the dishes and who was always handy when the wine glass was getting low, who was never behind-hand with anything and yet who was never hasty to insinuate a fresh delicacy before the old one was completely gone.

Yes, he was a prince of waiters was Martin, and a very king in kindly thought and in knowing exactly what to do.

The inspector felt quite happy and even crime, he thought, had its amusing side.

Here was he, he told himself, dining with five just men and being waited upon by a sixth whom he believed to be amongst the vilest of his kind. The man was serving him with food and drink with the self-same hands that only a few days previously had encompassed a black and dreadful crime. The man seemed quite innocent and unconcerned about it, too, never dreaming of the damning papers concerning him that lay snug within a few inches of his fingers every time he poured the wine.

The inspector almost thought it was a dream.

"Well, Romilly," presently called out his genial host, "and how are you getting on? Got everything you want?"

"Everything, thank you, Major, I'm feeling grand."

"Well, it was lucky we saw you going by," went on the major; "I was just going to tell Martin to re-lay the table when Spooner called out—'There goes that damned policeman, Romilly,' and I at once ran and fetched you in."

"Oh, come now, Major," indignantly expostulated a stout red-faced individual at the far end of the table. "I'm sure I never said anything of the kind. What I did say, and I call everyone here to bear witness to it, was 'Hullo, there goes our good-looking Police Inspector D.S.O.'"

The major winked an eye to the company generally. "Tut—tut, Spooner, what's the good of quibbling about the exact form of words you used. You meant what I said anyhow, even if you expressed it differently. I could see at once you intended to be deliberately disrespectful to the force."

"Yes, it's a true bill, Spooner," broke in Dr. Taylor, another of the guests. "Even if you didn't say it, I could see then by the very expression of your eye that you had an animus against the inspector here, and I beg humbly to call his attention to the number of your car. Six hundred and six it is, and you're always exceeding the speed limit, and never carry lights under any circumstances whatsoever. Inspector Romilly, kindly note it down."

"Certainly, sir," agreed the latter joining in the fun. "Ill see he loses a fiver the next time he drives out. We must uphold the majesty of the law somehow."

"Oh, curse your majesty of the law," spluttered the rubicond Spooner, with his mouth full of turkey and tongue; "a fig for all the policemen in the State. I've given up the police long ago and got a couple of boy scouts to guard our bank instead. We've had no trouble since then."

"Good gracious, man," broke in Major Poole again. "You don't surely say your bank is still carrying on? I heard it had to suspend payment when your cook withdrew her account."

Everybody laughed, and Banker Spooner embarking upon a second adventure in the turkey and tongue line, the conversation again became general.

Presently, however, Major Poole, catching the inspector's eye, asked him casually how the McIver case was getting on. "Not for a moment that I want to pump you," he added quickly; "I was only inquiring in just a general sort of way."

"It's quite all right," readily replied the inspector, without any hesitation. "We're always pleased to supply information up to a certain point. It often helps us a great deal."

Everyone stopped talking and the inspector could feel the interest they were all taking. Martin, he noted, was going round again with the champagne.

"Well," went on the major cheerfully, "have you any hopes at all of catching him, do you think?"

"Certainly," replied the inspector stoutly, "we shall catch him one day right enough. It's only a question of time."

"But shall you catch him to-night, to-morrow or next week, I mean?"

"Oh, I don't say we shall catch him as soon as that. I don't even say now we shall ever catch him for this particular crime, but the law will have him one day for some other crime, and then all about this one will come to light."

The major looked disappointed and pretended to sniff a little.

"Yes, but Romilly old man," he replied half banteringly, "that's not much good to us now, is it? It seems like admitting failure on your part." He went on—"You see, the way I look at it is this. Here was a pal and neighbour of ours killed in a most ghastly manner, almost so to speak at our very door. You men of the force were hot-foot on the scent and the public, I am sure you will agree, helped you in every possible way. Now, after all this time, however, all you can say to us

is—'Oh, yes—no—we haven't exactly caught him yet, but just wait till the beggar strangles someone else again and then we'll have him sure.'"

"Gentlemen," continued the major in mock judicial tones, "I don't think our friend the D.S.O. comes out very well in this. The force wants gingering up a bit."

"Hear, hear," said Banker Spooner; "they're a poor lot."

"It's all very well for you fellows to laugh," pleaded the inspector, half in fun and half in earnest, "but when a man commits a crime he doesn't go and just write his name and address everywhere so that we can look him up and give him a call. He clears off and is not particularly anxious to be found. The major here says we were hot-foot on the scent, but where in the world had we any scent to follow? We had nothing at all to go on except that the murderer jolly well knew the place. There were no other clues whatever and we couldn't make them even to please Major Poole here."

Martin was just putting on the dessert and was busy at the sideboard with the nuts.

"Well, well," said Major Poole, as if forgivingly after a short pause, "I suppose we'll have to overlook it this time and trust to better luck." Then he added slyly, as an afterthought: "But I don't think you're quite such duffers as you make out. You've not given up hope yet, I know. A little bird whispered to me that you've got someone still on the look-out in Clyde House."

The inspector felt himself go cold in horror. What on earth was coming out now, and what in Heaven's name did Major Poole know? The blundering idiot would ruin all his plans before things were ready. What dreadful luck, too, that Martin was here. The slightest thing and Martin might suspect a watch was being kept. Then it would be all up and hardly an hour could pass before he would trail away. Everything stood on a razor's edge now.

Martin himself broke through his thoughts. He was standing at his elbow.

"Will you take port, sir?" and the hand that held the decanter was steady as a rock. Mechanically he nodded, "Yes."

All these fears had come chasing through him in a second and in a second also he had determined what he would do. Quick always on the up-take, he knew that safety far oftenest lay in boldness and that upon occasion even open frankness itself could hide secrets when everything else had failed. He was indignant at once.

"Please don't for one moment imagine," he expostulated warmly, "that it's Miss McIver who's frightened, for it is not. Mrs. Carter's a lady deep in novelette lore and she's been trained to believe that murderers always return to gloat over their crimes. That's why I've set a guard. It's not Miss McIver at all."

"Who said it was?" replied the major, rather taken aback with the vehemence of the outburst. "I never mentioned her name, did I?"

The inspector seemed embarrassed, but he stuck to his guns. "I tell you Miss McIver has nothing to do with it. Nothing."

"Dear me, Romilly," broke in Spooner coarsely, "but I believe you're in love. Maude's a devilish fine girl anyhow, and man, I, for one, admire your taste."

The inspector was really angry this time and he glanced fiercely at the interruptor, but their host came tactfully to the rescue before any further remarks could pass.

"Now no names, please, Spooner, although I confess I'm sweet in that direction myself," and he sighed deeply and audibly.

There was silence for a moment and then everyone burst into laughter together. The very idea of the fat, even corpulent-looking major being in love with anybody at all seemed irresistibly funny, and the laughter was loud and prolonged.

Martin alone was silent and unperturbed. He was just impressively serving the coffee as if it were part of some great and solemn ritual.

When the laughter had in part subsided it was the inspector who spoke again.

"Look here, you fellows," he said confidingly, "I tell you it's no good at all to blame the police. We've done all we can and I don't mind admitting that in a way we're stumped. I'm not telling you a secret either, for it's all public property by now. You see the whole business was so peculiar. We had nothing to help us except the certain knowledge that the murderer knew all about the house. We are sure of that. The night after it happened we reconstructed everything and, exactly at the same hour, I went over the whole ground exactly as we knew the murderer must have done. It proved conclusively that whoever came into the house that night just walked into it as if it were his own, and that is all we could find out about him." He shrugged his shoulders despondently and went on. "But I don't say for one moment that we have given up hopes of catching him. We have done, and are doing still, lots of things that the public never find out. The major here has just given you an instance of what was of course not supposed to be generally known."

"Yes, and I only found it out quite accidentally, too," exclaimed the gratified major, now beaming delightedly all round. "I happened to see McIver's chauffeur, young Iredale, upon two consecutive days buying packets of cigarettes, and in joke I warned him of the dangers of smoking too much. He said the cigarettes were not for him and then, when I asked him if he were buying them for his young lady, he looked very knowing and said they might be for a visitor who was staying with them on the quiet. Then I twigged it at once."

Martin was handing round the liqueurs. He was a little world to himself, and he moved impersonally in his orbit round these well-fed men. He had no thought but for their comfort and content. He was of different blood from them.

The inspector was meeting his misfortunes bravely. His thoughts came like lightning flashes and he prepared to mine the fields of battle that he already saw ahead.

"Oh, by-the-bye," he remarked carelessly, directly the major had finished speaking, "talking of that chauffeur, I hear he's had an accident this evening. Knocked down by a taxi and hurt his leg. Nothing much I understand, but he's had to go to hospital all the same."

There was mild interest in this and then to the inspector's great relief the conversation drifted to safer and less dangerous themes.

At twenty minutes to nine exactly their host looked at his watch.

"Time's up for two of you," he said, "for Romilly and Spooner here. As I promised, I'm going to motor you into the city." He turned to the other guests. "No, don't you other chaps go. I'll be back in half an hour at latest and we'll have a rubber then. Martin will look after you while I am away. Be good boys now and don't let the doctor tell you any naughty tales. If he's got anything good, he's to keep it until I return."

He went round to the garage to get the car out and for quite a minute the inspector was left alone with Martin in the hall.

"Nice little dinner that, Martin," he remarked pleasantly, as the latter brought him his hat and gloves. "Good cook here at any rate," he went on, "and you're quite an artist yourself too in your way."

Martin smiled a faint inscrutable smile and the inspector slipped a half-crown into his hand. Did the man's hand shake, he thought, and were his eyes lowered suddenly to mask some sinister amusement that he felt? At any rate the inspector himself wanted to laugh.

The major's car was a fast one and three minutes after leaving the house they were passing through the main street of Glenelg. Suddenly inspector Romilly who was sitting next to the major called on him to stop. Very puzzled the latter jammed on the brakes and pulled up the big car with a jerk.

"What is it, man, have you lost your hat?" he inquired with just that touch of irritability that all good drivers feel when an expensive and high-powered car is asked to stop abruptly on its course.

"No, I've not lost anything," replied the inspector gravely, "but I want you to do me a great favour now." He laid his hand solemnly on the major's arm. "Look here, Major," he continued, "when you and I were in France, we often had to do things for which we didn't know why. Didn't we?"

"Certainly we did and damned unpleasant things they sometimes were too, old man."

"And we hadn't to ask questions about them either, had we?"

"Great Scott no, but what the devil are you driving at now?"

"I'll speak quite plainly. I want you and Spooner to get out right here at once and I want you to lend me the car for ten minutes to myself. For ten minutes, not a minute more, and I'll be back to you here again."

The major looked incredulously at his companion.

"What the devil——" he began again, almost explosively, but the inspector stopped him.

"Hush, hush, don't let Spooner hear. He's half asleep, there. I tell you, Major, the matter's urgent and yet I can't explain. Come, be a good pal now and don't ask me any questions. You'll know some day and you'll be delighted then that you've been helping in a real little romance."

The major's expression changed instantly and, all smiles now, he dug the inspector in the ribs.

"Oh, you gay dog," he whispered slily, "a woman! why didn't you say so at once? Of course you can have the car, old man, and I'll never breathe it to a soul, but help me out with Spooner first," and greatly to the somnolent and well-fed Spooner's disgust he was disinterred from the tonneau of the car and bundled unceremoniously out on to the road.

In half a minute the car had turned down a side street and was out of sight.

Giving wide berth to the hospitable mansion wherein he had so happily dined, the inspector doubled quickly back in the direction of Clyde House.

He knew quite well how the ground lay, and did not for one moment miscalculate the chances of his hand now being forced before he was quite ready.

The major in his blundering way had let everyone know that the police were still interested in the surroundings of Clyde House, and there was no exactly gauging how the Eadie-Martin combination would take it. The inspector had parried the blow as best he could, but here again he was quite in the dark as to whether he had been successful or not.

Martin might take affright or he might complacently swallow the explanation that had been suggested rather than actually given. At any rate he would be certain to make some inquiries, and the chauffeur, the inspector knew, was the weak spot.

The chauffeur must be got right out of the way then for a time. He was a fool, and once in touch with the crafty tenant of the White House there could be no doubt whatever as to the result. Once questioned he would be incapable of hiding anything and would be just turned inside out. Then the game would be all up, for the instant Martin-Eadie or Eadie-Martin became aware that the room over the garage was the place of watch—he would guess rightly of course that the White House itself was the centre of interest and observation.

It was with these thoughts racing through his mind that the inspector had spoken at dinner, when upon the spur of the moment he had given out that the chauffeur had met with an accident and had been taken to hospital. It was in his mind then forthwith to spirit young Iredale away.

The big car drew up before the gates of Clyde House and the inspector jumping out was comforted not a little to find the chauffeur standing just inside.

"Quick," he called out impatiently, "tell Mr. Jackson I want him at once and you also have got to come. It's a very urgent matter and you mustn't wait a minute."

Almost before the minute was up the car had turned round and was off again but this time with the detective Jackson and the chauffeur in the back seat.

The two police officers had hardly exchanged a word.

"All right, Jackson," the inspector had said curtly, "I'll have a word with you in a minute, but get in now quick."

Less than a mile on their journey the inspector pulled the car up. "You get out here, please," he said to his passengers, "and I want you both to go straight to headquarters, but a word with you first, Jackson."

The chauffeur took the hint and moved out of earshot a few yards away from the car.

Well, Jackson," said the inspector quickly, "he's away. House empty, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, Major Poole fetched him at half past four in his car this afternoon. Five minutes later I was up at the house. No one apparently in it, quiet as the grave. There was a light, however, in the kitchen and it's burning there still, to make out, I suppose, that there's someone inside."

"Good," whispered the inspector quietly. "Now bring that chauffeur up to headquarters quickly. You'll catch the 9.15 if you're sharp. He's been blabbing, the fool, and I want him out of the way. I'll see you later. I shall be up there when you come."

Off went the car again, but only a very little way this time and it turned into the main road and pulled up where the major and Spooner were standing.

The former was holding his watch out in his hand. "Only just in time, Romilly," he said sternly, "one kiss more and you'd have been late. Now you'll please drive us up for a punishment and Spooner and I will have a nap behind."

The first thing that the inspector saw when he went into his room at headquarters was a telegram waiting for him on the desk. Eagerly he tore it open.

"ROMILLY POLICE ADELAIDE.
NOT EXACTLY BUT THINK KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN IF CORRECT ASSOCIATES WANTED BADLY INTERNATIONAL CROOKS BEWARE SMITER LETTER FOLLOWS IMMEDIATELY. LAROSE."

Much puzzled the inspector read over the telegram several times.

"Now, what in the name of fortune does he mean?", he muttered. "'Beware smiter.' Why on earth can't some people be more explicit? For a few pence of economy, I've got to worry and puzzle for two days over what he means."

But he had at any rate to put it out of his mind then, for there were pressing matters awaiting his attention.

He rang up Clyde House and without giving his name asked to speak to Miss McIver. When the girl came to the 'phone he instantly enjoined her on no account to let anyone in the house know who was speaking to her.

"Look here, Miss McIver," he went on hurriedly, "I've taken young Iredale away for a couple of days. I'm very sorry but for reasons I can't explain now, I want him away from Clyde House. No, no, it's nothing at all to do with that. He's quite harmless. It's only because he is such a fool, and can't hold his tongue. No one must know, however, that I've got anything at all to do with his disappearance. You understand—it would spoil everything. Now listen, in five minutes the 'phone will ring again. Don't answer it yourself. One of my men here will be ringing up to say the chauffeur has been knocked down and has hurt his leg. Stunned a bit, too. Nothing serious, but been obliged to go to hospital. Please do without the car for two days. Good night. I won't keep you any longer. Oh—by-the-bye, it might interest you to know that I've been dining unexpectedly to-night at Major Poole's. We had a charming little dinner and were waited upon by Mr. Eadie's butler, Martin. He had been lent specially for the occasion. I thought you would like to know, but good night again," and he rang off.

Jackson and the chauffeur appeared just when he had finished with the telephone.

The inspector eyed young Iredale very grimly.

"Well, young man," he said brusquely, "I told you you were an ass once and I take this opportunity of telling you so again." His voice became angry and menacing. "You've been talking, you young fool. Talking, and you swore solemnly you'd say nothing to a living soul."

The chauffeur looked very white.

"No, sir," he muttered uneasily, "I've never said anything. I've spoken to no one at all."

"What about Major Poole," sneered the inspector, "when he saw you at the tobacconist's buying those cigarettes?"

"Major Poole?" stammered the young man. "Oh I just said something in fun, about having visitors in the house."

"Yes, and your damned fun, let me tell you, has just about spoilt everything. Oh, you young fool. Well, you're going to suffer for it now. You're either going to prison in the cells right away, or you're going to consent to hide quietly where I'll send you—until I think it safe to let you out again. Now do you understand?"

"I'll do anything you wish," replied the now thoroughly frightened chauffeur. "I'm sure I never meant any harm."

"Of course you didn't; fools never do. But come now, have you spoken to anybody else? Have you seen Mr. Eadie or Martin for instance?"

Jack Iredale seemed to hesitate and the inspector pressed him sharply. "Come, out with it," he said, "don't be afraid. I want to know the worst you've done."

"I've done nothing worse," answered the chauffeur, beginning to think himself misjudged. "I just saw Mr. Eadie in Glenelg on Tuesday and he said a few words."

"Well, what did he say?" snapped the inspector; "speak out—quick, I want to know."

"He didn't say anything particular," grumbled Jack Iredale; "he just asked if you had finished coming up to the house, and when I said 'no' he said you were a fusser, that's all."

"Oh, I'm a fusser am I? Well, now I'm going to fuss over you. But you're quite sure, are you, that you told nothing to this Mr. Eadie; you said nothing more?"

"Nothing at all, I'm sure. We only spoke for a few seconds as I was standing by the car. Miss McIver was in the post office and I was waiting."

"Well, Mr. Jackson's going to take you to his house and you're not to move from there until I give the word. I've explained everything to your mistress. Now do you understand?"

The chauffeur nodded rather sullenly and went out in the care of the detective.

The inspector took up the telegram again and his face puckered to the frown that seemed almost to be habitual now.

"Looks hopeful," he thought, "at any rate I'm not on a blind trail. I know I should be justified in arresting him straight away now. This servant-master business is as ugly as anyone could wish, but it clinches nothing by itself. It proves no absolute connection with the Clyde House affair. If we jail him at once on suspicion and search his place, we may find nothing there. There are only poor old McIver's notes at best to connect anyone with the murder and he may easily have sent those away. Besides, if I arrest him now, I'm arresting an unknown man and even if he turns out afterwards to be a gentleman very much wanted in another State, most of the credit of his capture will be lost to me then. The other johnnies here will see to that, sure. No, I must wait until I get Larose's letter. I ought to get it in two days at latest. Then I may find there's a big fish in the net and Mark Romilly will be a made man." He smiled hopefully to himself, but almost immediately his frown descended again. "But what if he escapes?", he went on; "am I forgetting that? I can't shadow him as I should like and I daren't ask for another single man. If I ask, I must explain everything and then—bang goes all my little plan. I shall be riding again 'to orders' then instead of winning a good race in my own way. No, I must shoulder the risks myself. I've always longed for a chance like this and now I've got it I should be a coward to play for safety and chuck the whole thing all away. Mark Romilly," he smiled here to himself, "I'm afraid you're a gambler, my boy. You've won well enough already but you're going double or quits now, and no one knows better than you do that the luck doesn't hold for ever."

Jackson came back in half an hour. "He's alright, sir," he said, "that chauffeur chap. He'll be quite happy at my house and you've so frightened him that he won't put his nose outside the door; I'm sure of that."

"Thank you, Jackson," replied the inspector pleasantly; "I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you over this little affair, and if it pans out as I believe it's going to you shall have a good share of all the sugar in your tea. Sit down now and listen to what I've got to say. My mind's quite made up about everything. I'm quite convinced that this Eadie chap's a crook, and I believe, too, he's the man of the McIver affair. But I don't want to nail him until I know for certain who he is. I've not told you half of what I know, but when we clap the darbies on him it won't be just any ordinary criminal we are handcuffing, but a very master of crime. In thirty-six hours now I ought to get a letter from Sydney and we'll arrest him that same afternoon." The inspector paused for a moment and then went on very quietly. "You understand, Jackson, why I'm not making a fuss. If we pull in the net now we shan't be knowing what kind of fish it is we're catching, but if we wait awhile—if we wait only these few hours the water will be much clearer then and we shall have all the credit of the catch to ourselves. We're running some risk I know, but I depend on you to see that the man doesn't get away. If anyone leaves the White House—either as Eadie or the man—he must be followed the whole time he is away and at night you must close in and picket the house. I'm coming out to help you myself. In the meantime we must try and take some photographs of him somehow. You're handy with the camera and we'll have to see about that to-morrow. We're chancing a lot as I say in one way, but in another—we'll leave as little to chance as possible. We'll be careful gamblers, Jackson—you and I."

Chapter VII

An International Criminal.

It would express little to say that the inspector was anxious during the next day. As he had told himself plainly, he was a gambler and he was risking everything on a single throw. Chance, that wayward goddess, alike of the timid and the brave, had done her kindest to him, and like a wise man he was exploiting her favours to the full. Adventure was appealing at its boldest to him for he was quite aware that in not arresting the tenant of the White House at once he was risking all that might make or mar him in the end.

He knew enough now to justify that individual's arrest any time, and if by so long withholding his hand he allowed the wretch to escape from the meshes of the law, he would be blamed, and rightly blamed, for sacrificing everything to his own personal ends.

But the inspector had been brought up in a hard school, and all his life long he had so plainly seen that success goes only to him who is prepared to take risks. Courage, he believed, was the quality that always counted for most in the end.

As he had said he would, he shared the vigil round the White House that night, and with the three detectives by him made sure that in the dark hours neither of Messrs. Eadie and Martin broke away.

All night long, everything was quiet as the grave, but in spite of its lack of incident the watch, to him, was not uninteresting. It recalled so vividly those mighty days in France, and yet—with such a difference.

In all the world over there can be nothing more beautiful than an Adelaide summer night. All things so lend themselves to the perfect harmony of paradise on earth. The warm soft air, the scent of ripening fruits, the incense of the sleeping flowers, the gentle moonlight on the sea, the rest, the quietness, and the sweetness of it all.

He rang up Miss McIver the next afternoon and received one little interesting item of news. Martin had very nicely, she said, been over to inquire about the chauffeur's injury. He had come over just after breakfast in the morning. Mrs. Carter had happened to meet him in the garden and had told all that she knew with perhaps just a little bit more besides. Her aunt, she was quite aware, added Miss McIver, never wilfully exaggerated, but she was one of those ladies who always liked to embellish everything a little, and who also always liked to appear well in the know.

So, Mr. Martin had gone away that morning with quite a full and circumstantial account of all the injuries the unfortunate chauffeur of Clyde House had received, Mrs. Carter making it no secret either that, in her opinion, things were much worse than had officially been given out.

The girl gave a gentle little silvery laugh as she was explaining everything and for the moment the much-worried inspector had forgotten all his troubles in the music of her pretty voice.

The same evening he was again taking his share in the watch, but it must be confessed at once that his thoughts that night were far more often with the mistress of Clyde House than with the probable murderer of her uncle.

What a lovely girl she was, he told himself a hundred times over, and how ridiculous were the barriers that prejudice and custom had placed between them. She was just the girl that he could love, and he felt that he could make her happy too. He was strong and self-reliant and protecting, and she was of the new type of woman that would come glad and clinging to his arms when once the cold reserve of pride had given way. She was just the woman made for him, he thought, for he would understand her. He could see the soul within her eyes. And just because he was a policeman and he was poor—neither of which things made him any the less a man—he must look askance at her as if they were both of them quite different beings, born in quite different worlds, and not man and woman still together. It was a rotten thing.

The morning following was an extremely anxious one. The mail from Sydney was due to arrive just before eleven o'clock, and it was in high concern that he awaited it. He was building so much on that letter—on the possibility that when it did come it would contain some certain information to link up with the man they were shadowing. But at the same time he made up his mind that, whether it came or not, it would not do for him to withhold his hand any longer. That afternoon he would have to make an official report to his superior and once he had disclosed all he had already discovered he was quite aware that the whole business would be taken out of his hands.

The Melbourne express was, of course, very late that morning, and he was doing his best to reconcile himself philosophically to a disappointment when suddenly the much-longed-for letter arrived.

He breathed a deep sigh of relief as it was brought to him. Yes, the Sydney postmark right enough, and in the well-remembered handwriting of his old friend Larose, too.

He opened the envelope quickly and for a moment felt irritated that the letter was so long. It comprised six large pages.

Recovering his composure he sat himself back in his chair and commenced to read.

HEADQUARTERS, DETECTIVE OFFICE,
SYDNEY.
Tuesday afternoon.

MY DEAR MARK,

Good luck to you, old man, and may the devil take you. Funny, but I was not at all surprised to get your wire an hour back. I was thinking of you this morning and you'll soon see why. Now I've got an hour and five minutes before the mail leaves and for old friendship's sake I'll spread myself out a bit and give you a good old yarn.

No—there's no one here named Rook doing seven years, but—there's a gentleman named Bird, Charles Henry Bird, to be precise, doing that exact term of years; and to his associates before touching quod he was, I believe, always referred to as Rook. I have no doubt but that he is the party you mean. Myself, I am particularly interested in this individual because it was almost wholly through the activities of yours truly that he is at present a tenant in the jug. Do you know, Mark, my boy, that any mention of this self-same Bird recalls at once one of the happiest and at the same time one of the very saddest memories of my life. Happiest because I nabbed him under circumstances of almost unparalleled difficulty and saddest because I missed only by a hair's breadth potting all the members of the gang. He was associated with the Goudie Street Bank crowd, just eighteen months ago. If you remember they shot the bank manager and raided the bank. All in broad daylight too. There were five of them in it. Friend Rook, Burke the Forger, Phillip Masterton, the lithographic crook, Andrew, the garrotter, and, last but not least, Cloud the Smiter, of international fame. As nice a little lot of first-class beauties as you could ever wish to see hang. Every man-jack of them had well earned the rope.

Well, one dark August night I had shadowed them all to a certain house, and was just beautifully closing the trap when five minutes before—no, not three minutes before—the Smiter sensed danger in that ghastly way of his and everyone flew off. I tell you, Mark, I nearly died of disappointment. I got Bird two days later, but that didn't make up for it anyway. We have never yet learnt what made them all suddenly fly. Just sheer intuition on the Smiter's part I shall always believe. As I expect you know, we got all the forging plant they left. They were by far the smartest and most artistic utterers of false stuff that the Commonwealth has ever known. Unhappily they got away with a whole heap of the falsies they had already printed and, as no doubt you also know, there's been trouble in the Commonwealth ever since. The banks here have had the wind up terribly, although happily things have been quite quiet lately in that line.

As I say, Bird we did catch, but, bad as he was, he was quite the gentleman of the lot. Of the other four devils we have never heard a thing since that night when they escaped. Never a sign nor a sound has come out of the darkness that seemed to completely swallow them up. How they

got out of the State goodness only knows, and where they are now it'd be worth almost a king's ransom to find out.

I am telling you all this so that you may understand the importance of what follows.

Well, you want to know something of these men, these pals of Rook, now doing seven years hard. I have met all of them separately at different times and if I had not foolishly held my hand too long to nab them all together I should have at least had three of them if not all the lot.

Burke.—Nathaniel Burke. Is an old lag, and has done three years for burglary. Convicted Brisbane, January, 1913. He is about 35 now. Tall, very dark, slight build, stoops a little. Drinks. Race-course cheat. Wanted on several counts. Attempted murder Bathurst one.

Phillip Masterton. 30 or 31. On the small side. Fair—pale complexion. Light blue eyes. Very clever lithographer. At one time bank clerk. Specialises in bank work. Bill forger. Badly wanted Brisbane. 300 reward offered Queensland Bank.

Andrew. Christian name not known, but believed to be Alfred—age under 30. Medium stature. Wiry physique. Good looking. Olive complexion, big dark eyes. Believed to have been born Singapore. Robbery with violence, speciality. Garrotter. Wanted Queensland. Two verdicts wilful murder out against him. Desperate character. Teetotaler and vegetarian. Believed to be a drug taker. Marvel at disguising. A most capable lieutenant of the gang.

Joseph Arthur Cloud, known to his associates as the Smiter. The gem of all the lot. An international criminal, wanted in three continents. A great artist in crime. Born in City of New York. Highly educated man. Bachelor of Science and Doctor of Medicine. Harvard University. Age 42. Just above medium height. Inclined to stoutness. Believed to be getting fat. Rather heavy features. Pale complexion. Square face with massive jaw. Broad forehead, prominent brows. Large eyes, greyish blue, rather expressionless. Very quiet voice. Has scar from bullet wound in fleshy part of right arm just below the elbow. Looks like priest, butler, consulting physician, or lawyer. Speciality, all kinds of crime. Murderer, forger, bank operator, robber with violence, counterfeiter. Wanted particularly United States (New York), British India (Lahore) and Sydney, New South Wales. Rewards offered, United States 10,000 dollars, Lahore 15,000 rupees. Bankers' Association, New South Wales, 2,000.

But, Mark, my boy, do you really want me to tell you anything more about this remarkable man? As a budding criminologist yourself, his history ought to be fairly familiar to you. Perhaps, however, your war duties were engrossing you at the time he was becoming famous. His life has been so crowded with events that with all the interest that even I took in him I have forgotten quite a lot. A first-class Yankee crook, he escaped from Sing Sing prison about seven years ago, and worried the authorities in the United States quite a lot until he suddenly transferred his attentions to British India. He operated there in one way and another for about four years, until the place got too hot for him, and then he landed in this benighted Commonwealth to give us a turn. His career here has been much the same as in India and the United States, except that here he has

specialised particularly in bank work and forged treasury notes. We would give anything to get hold of him, for not only is he fearless and capable himself, but also he is a great organiser of crime. The almost complete success of the long series of bank robberies that he and his associates carried out over here about two years ago was a stunning blow to the banking world as witness the reward of 2,000 on offer for his arrest. We know a good bit about him for from time to time we have scooped in not a few of the men who have been helping him, although I must say we have never found any of them particularly anxious to give him away. Curiously enough, they have a great respect for him and are devilishly afraid of him too. They say he instantly punishes anyone who disobeys; and certainly there were several mysterious happenings to certain of his band two years ago, when he was operating over here. He never hesitates in the use of the pistol himself, and is twice wanted here on the capital charge.

Well, friend Romilly, you know now if you didn't know before exactly what the Smiter is like. He is capable of any crime that for its success requires to be boldly and fearlessly carried out. That's why I was thinking of you this morning long before your telegram came. I was reading about the McIver case and you being in charge. Just such a job as the Smiter would love, I said to myself, if he were acting on his own.

So here's luck to you and if you see anyone at all like Mr. Joseph Arthur Cloud in your neighbourhood, just you nab him at once. But be careful, my boy, be very, very careful. In a tight corner, he's a man who shoots on sight. He shoots from the hip too. They say he carries poison about with him and has boasted no one'll ever take him alive. So he's a nice beauty for anyone to have anything to do with. One thing—as I've told you before—he's a holy terror to get near to at any time if your intentions are not friendly. He's got a sense, an extra sense that seems always to warn him of danger. He's had escapes without number and escapes by so narrow a margin that it's quite incredible how he's managed so many times to get away. The very slightest thing is sufficient to warn him and he vanishes at once. Mind you—he's always got another hiding place ready prepared.

Really, you will think I am dotty to have written you all this, but I have special reasons for being so discursive. I feel sure you would not have worried me about Rook's associates if you had not happened to have one of them in your mind's eye in connection with this present case of yours—and if you have got one of them, it can only be the Smiter. The strangling of that poor old man at Glenelg has all the special features of the Smiter's daring when he is acting solely on his own.

Well, good-bye, old chap; think of me when you next crack a small bottle.

Your old pal.

GILBERT LAROSE.

P.S. The Smiter was professor of Ju-Jitsu once, and if you lift your fist to strike him when he's ready for you, in nine cases out of ten he'll just reach out and break your arm. He's got muscles of drawn steel. Andrew's a bad man to tackle too—so look out for either of them.

There was a long silence and the inspector sat quiet and motionless in his chair. "Fate, fate," he muttered at last; "how inscrutable are so many of the ways of this bad old world of ours. Escape and immunity for so long and then"—he shrugged his shoulders as if giving up the problem—"just one chance word and the whole castle of good fortune crashes to the ground; the Law gets busy and the hempen rope begins to swing." He whistled softly to himself. "Cloud the Smiter, but what a find!"

He rose briskly to his feet. "Now for the chief," he muttered with a grim smile. "His Mightiness will be delighted with the little present I am going to give him; let's hope he'll only be grateful too. J. A. Cloud is a big fish for any net to draw in." The inspector paused suddenly and looked troubled. "But it's a pity," he added to himself, "a great pity we couldn't have landed the whole gang." For some moments he stared meditatively out of the window and then, turning, his eyes fell thoughtfully upon a large map of Australia that hung upon the wall. "It's a big country," he remarked slowly, "but I wonder, I wonder now why Adelaide specially was chosen for the headquarters of the gang. Headquarters, headquarters, great Scott, that gives me an idea." He screwed his eyes up in perplexity. "Now was the Smiter intending always to live alone? Where are the others, and what have they been doing all this time? Friend Burke, the honest burglar man—Masterton, the banker's pet, and jolly Andrew, with his bit of rope. Have they been all resting, too?" Again the inspector paused, and this time it was plain from the expression of his face that he was thinking rapidly.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated suddenly in great excitement, "but haven't I finished yet; must it be double or quits again? I'll see, I'll see."

He almost ran to a cupboard at the far end of the room and reaching down a thick pile of newspapers began feverishly to turn over their contents.

Chapter VIII

The Chief Commissioner of the Police.

It had been half past eleven when the inspector had finished the perusal of the letter from Sydney, but it was fully two o'clock before he actually presented himself before the Chief Commissioner of the Adelaide Police.

Inwardly, he was seething with excitement, but outwardly there was no sign of any emotion upon his face. He was just the cold and formal inspector making a report to his superior and he was calm and official after the manner of his kind.

"Well, what is it, Inspector?" asked the Chief rather irritably. "Have you anything about the McIver case yet?"

"I have found out, sir," replied the inspector quietly, "that J. A. Cloud is living in Glenelg; the J. A. Cloud wanted in Sydney. He is living close to the house where Mr. McIver was murdered. He has been there for nearly ten months and there is every probability that he is the man we want."

The Chief Commissioner sat bolt upright in his chair.

"What," he exclaimed incredulously, "Cloud, the Sydney man!—the one wanted over the Goudie Street Bank affair, down here?"

"Yes, sir. Cloud, the Smiter, the leader of the gang. He's living at present as a gentleman of means in a house he actually rented from the man who was killed. The two were on friendly terms together."

The Commissioner stared hard at his subordinate.

"You've got him here then?" he asked quickly. "You've taken him up?"

"No, sir, I've only just learnt who he is; but he's under close surveillance and won't be able to get away. He's J. A. Cloud, right enough."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the Commissioner, "you certainly have got something this time." Then he added anxiously—"But you're quite sure, Inspector, quite sure, that he's the man?"

"Quite sure, sir," replied the inspector quietly, "but it'll take some minutes to tell you all. The story's rather involved."

The Commissioner took off his glasses and proceeded to polish them carefully upon his handkerchief.

"No hurry, Romilly," he said kindly. "Sit down and take your time. If you're only right, it'll be a great day for us here."

The inspector placed upon the table the bundle of papers he had been holding, and drawing up his chair, sat down. He moistened his lips with his tongue and then, fixing his eyes upon his superior, began his report in quiet and even tones.

"Last year, sir, according to our records, at twenty minutes past two upon the morning of Tuesday, the eighth of January, a man was picked up in an unconscious condition by Constable Lodge, in the roadway just opposite North Terrace Station. He was taken to the Adelaide Hospital and was found to be suffering from concussion. It was supposed he had been knocked down by a motor-car. There was nothing at all in his pockets, and for the time being there were no means of identifying him in any way. For a week he was unable to give any account of himself and even then he had apparently no clear recollection of what had occurred. But inquiries soon came in about him from outside and he was claimed by his relations from Sydney, and when able to travel was taken back by them there,"—the inspector here looked down upon the papers before him on the table—"and this apparently, from the discharge book of the hospital, took place on the ensuing February 6th. Well, sir, for the moment I have not thought it necessary to go further into the identity of this man, but last week on Thursday I received a letter from him—despatched three days previously from Sydney. I have the letter here and it is an extraordinary one. He says he is induced to write to me personally because of an illustration he happened to see in one of the Sydney newspapers. It appears he came across a photograph of the house in which Mr. McIver was murdered and he writes that the sandhills about the place reminded him of a dreadful adventure he had—or dreamt he had—over here, a little more than a year ago. He warns me frankly, however, that he is supposed not to be quite right in his mind and that no one will give credit to what he says.

"His story is this: He believes he was bicycling one evening along the Military Road between Semaphore and Grange when he overheard two men talking about a friend of theirs who had been sentenced to seven years penal servitude. Curious, and suspecting they themselves were evil doers too, he followed them to a lonely bungalow among the sandhills and tried to spy upon them through the shutters. He was discovered, however, and dragged inside. Four men questioned him and then he was locked up in a wood-shed in the yard. Terrified

at the thought of what they might be going to do to him he broke down the door and tried to escape. They fired at him with a pistol and believing him to be dead they then threw him into the sea. He drifted as far as some pier, probably Henley Beach pier, and then dragged himself ashore, and started to walk back to the city." The inspector paused for a moment and shrugged his shoulders—"That, sir, is all he remembers."

The Chief Commissioner looked puzzled. "An extraordinary story, Romilly," he remarked drily, "and it strikes me as an improbable one too."

"Last Tuesday, sir," replied the inspector quietly and ignoring the comment, "we found the bungalow exactly as he described it, about two miles from Semaphore, and in the yard there was a shed the door of which had at one time been undoubtedly violently broken down."

"Great Scott," exclaimed the Commissioner in some excitement, "then it was true then?"

"Perfectly true, sir, at any rate in every particular that we have been able to follow up."

"And who is living there now?" asked the Commissioner quickly, "any of the four men?"

The inspector shook his head. "New tenants, sir, a man and a woman and three children. They have been there since March 5th last. Their predecessors, I learnt moved away on the previous day, March 4th."

"Go on," said the Commissioner, "and come to the point."

The inspector resumed his narrative. "Well now, sir, I come directly to the McIver case. From the first moment there I was of opinion that the murder had been done by someone intimately acquainted with the house—by someone who knew all the ways of the inmates and who was quite aware of there being a large sum of money in the house on that particular night. Everything about the crime pointed to a careful and methodical preparation and yet I knew the preparation could have only been, at most, a matter of a little over twenty-four hours. It was on the Friday that Mr. McIver received an unexpected cheque of 300 and announced to his friends his intention of giving the money a run at the races, and it was on the Saturday that the watch dog of the house was drugged. It was in the short interval, then, of these intervening hours that someone had prepared and completed his plans. I at once made searching inquiries as to whom McIver had been brought in contact with on the Friday and was interested straight away, for several reasons, in his friend and neighbour Mr. Charles Eadie, the tenant of the White House.

"The White House is only distant about three hundred yards from the scene of the murder and Miss McIver told me it was occupied by this Mr. Eadie and his servant, a man called Martin. Eadie had been quite friendly with her uncle and had dined and lunched with them upon several occasions. He was, I was informed, a gentleman of independent means, an artist for his own amusement and had been residing there for about ten months. As far as I could gather he was quite a reputable person and was well respected by everyone in the neighbourhood.

"I interviewed him, however, and his man-servant, too, and the similarity of a chance remark they both made roused my suspicion that they had something to hide. I had the house watched therefore by two of our men—from the window of the McIver garage and they wrote down hour by hour everything exactly as it occurred." The inspector paused here for a moment and then, resuming his

narrative, dropped his voice to a very low tone. "Then we found—we found, sir, that although all the time we were supposed to be watching two persons—actually we were only watching one. The master and the servant were the same man."

"What do you mean?", asked the Commissioner sharply—"that there was only one man living in the house?"

"Yes, only one. The master and his servant are identical. It is one man and two disguises. There is no doubt about it. The proofs are quite conclusive."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the Commissioner; "that's suspicious anyhow."

"Yes, sir, and remember that for ten months the deception has been going on. Day upon day for the past ten months this man at the White House has been continually changing his clothes, just like a Jack-in-the-box. He has been altering his appearance at least a dozen times a day, even to his sets of false teeth."

"You are quite sure?" asked the Commissioner thoughtfully. "What is the nature of your proof?"

The inspector picked up a number of sheets of paper pinned together and handed them across the table. "Here, sir," he said, "is the record of several days' watching from the garage. One hundred and ninety-four entries of what took place in the garden and on the verandah of the house. One hundred and ninety-four entries to report and yet never once you will notice that the master and servant are seen together at the same time."

For a few moments the Commissioner scanned quickly over the papers and then his face broke into a broad smile.

"Remarkable, Romilly," he exclaimed, "and very clever of you I must admit." He tapped the papers. "Putting everything down like this in black and white was quite a master stroke on your part and it brings absolute conviction to my mind. When you were telling me just now, I confess I wasn't over-much impressed, but with these entries before my eyes the whole thing stands out as clear as day. Of course, the man is hiding right enough and the dual personality is a wonderful idea. It takes away all the gossip and the interest that would be centred round a man who lived alone."

"Yes, sir," said the inspector, "everyone would be curious, and suspicious about a man who lived by himself; they would be wondering about his occupation and his source of income, and what also made him come to live there at all, but"—the inspector shrugged his shoulders—"a gentleman and his man-servant! Well, what could be more harmless and respectable?"

"When was this watch kept?" asked the Commissioner suddenly with a frown, "I ought to have been informed what you were about before."

"I only put the men on four days ago, sir," said the inspector, speaking very rapidly and feeling rather like a man who was skating over thin ice—"and it was only two days ago that I became really suspicious. Then in the middle of it all I received that anonymous letter and there is one thing there I forgot to tell you. The writer described one of his captors that night in the bungalow, and apparently the one in authority there, as a man who looked like a butler. Well, the description is exactly that of the manservant in the White House."

The Commissioner nodded his head. "Go on," he said, "what comes next?"

"Well, sir, I come now to what indisputably links up everything together. You will remember that I told you the woman in the bungalow near Semaphore informed us she had moved in there on the 5th of March last, and that the

tenant before her had left only the previous day. Well, directly I got that letter I went up to Clyde House and saw Miss McIver. I asked the exact date when this Mr. Eadie had come to live in their neighbourhood and, looking into her late uncle's diary, she informed me at once that it had occurred as I expected on the 4th of March. He had given no references but had paid six months' rent in advance."

The Commissioner whistled. "Did you give Miss McIver any hint of your suspicions? Did you let her know in any way, I mean, that you were of opinion this man Eadie was a man of criminal character?"

The inspector got a little red. "I told her everything," he said firmly; "she is a woman you can trust."

"Go on," said the Commissioner, without any comment. "What did you do then?"

"Meanwhile," continued the inspector, "I had wired to Sydney, to my friend Larose. I know him very well."

"Ah! Larose," commented the Commissioner, "the great Larose—the wizard detective as they call him, but why did you wire particularly to him, to Sydney, I mean?"

"Because, sir, I learnt that the man in the Semaphore bungalow had left behind him a lot of old newspapers that were Sydney ones, and I gathered naturally therefore that some time or other his interests had lain there."

"Good—and you got an answer to your telegram?"

The inspector held out a letter to the Chief Commissioner.

"This came this morning by the Melbourne express and it is so vital, sir, that I will ask you to read it through yourself."

His superior took the letter at once and then for a long five minutes there was silence in the room. The inspector leant back in his chair, and appeared to be assiduously examining the patterns that the cracks had made in the ceiling. For the first time during the interview, however, it might now have been said he was nervous.

The Chief Commissioner took quite a long time to read the letter and several times he went through a passage twice. At length he looked up and there was no doubt at all as to the pleased expression on his face.

"Excellent," he exclaimed, "excellent; you've done splendidly. Everything is quite conclusive to my mind. It's a great find and we'll make the arrest at once."

The inspector rose suddenly to his feet. He was flushed and expectant and there was a look of intense eagerness upon his face.

"Sir," he said earnestly, "I have not done yet. J. A. Cloud is only one of the four and we must get the whole gang. We must wait."

"Wait?" asked the Commissioner with a frown, "what for?"

The inspector pulled his chair up close to the table and calmly resumed his seat. Strangely enough now, all appearance of excitement had died down and he was once again the cold and business-like officer of the South Australian police. He picked up a bundle of newspaper cuttings from among the little pile of papers before him.

"Sir," he said calmly, "will you listen to me for a few minutes? Something has come into my mind."

The Commissioner looked at him sharply. "Of course I'll listen to you," he said pleasantly, "your work here has been so thorough that I should be a fool now, or at any time, not to consider your advice. Now what do you mean?"

For just a moment the inspector hesitated.

"The White House at Glenelg, sir," he replied solemnly, "is about to become the headquarters of the Smiter's gang. J. A. Cloud is waiting there for his associates and there is every reason to believe that their coming is now only a matter of a few days."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Commissioner very coldly, "but have you any proof?"

Again the inspector hesitated. "No proof that is direct, sir, I admit, but hear what I have to say before you turn this possibility down." He glanced up at the clock above the Commissioner's desk.

"Sir," he said solemnly, "I received the letter from Sydney that you have just read a little over three hours ago and if I did not bring it to you at once, it was because I was following up the train of thought that it suggested to me." He leant over towards his superior and spoke very quietly. "If you look back, sir, you will notice that up to about six weeks ago this State has been singularly free from crime. For a long time from one end of South Australia to the other there have been no unusual happenings to record, and indeed the whole Commonwealth generally has seemed to be enjoying a period of law-abiding repose. The Goudie Street Bank case in Sydney eighteen months ago, where the perpetrators, if not all brought to justice, were at least scattered and forced to fly, is the last of the greater problems that the Commonwealth police have been called upon to solve, and since then the detective forces everywhere in Australia have been having an easy time. But it has not unhappily been the same in other countries not far away." The inspector picked up a newspaper cutting. "Six months back—in July last for instance—there was quite an epidemic of crime in the Malay States. Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore had all a dose of trouble and pretty severe trouble too. Robberies with violence on the open road, two banks broken into, a murder in The Bentham, Singapore's crack hotel, and the stabbing of the purser of the mail boat Riallo when that vessel was in port there. All very serious crimes and yet their perpetrators as far as I can gather went quite unpunished. Nothing discovered and no one brought to book. Then Java had a bad turn, more robberies and a jeweller strangled at the back of his shop. Again no discovery and no one brought to book. Then there was quiet again until that shooting case in Darwin last September." The inspector dropped his voice to a very significant tone. "You will notice now, sir, that the incidence of crime is coming nearer home."

"Oh! I see what you mean, Romilly," smiled the Commissioner, "and what you are trying to make out. You want to suggest to me that all these happenings are the work of the Smiter's gang, who for the time being has been giving the Commonwealth a rest."

"No, I don't want to suggest anything to you, sir," replied the inspector diplomatically. "I only want to recall these facts to you and leave you yourself to consider their significance in the light of what we know of J. A. Cloud and the methods of his associates in crime."

"Well, go on; but, of course, I remember that affair at Port Darwin."

"An hotel-keeper shot," prompted the inspector, "with the assassin getting away with about a hundred pounds. It was done in broad daylight, too, and the man escaped through a window at the back. It was a most daring piece of work because there were lots of people in the hotel at the time."

"No trace was found either of the robber," commented the Commissioner.

"No, sir," said the inspector drily, "and the only description I see from the cutting here that anyone could give of the robber was that he was dark and not a big man." He paused for a moment and then added quietly—"That, sir, is the exact description that Larose gives of Andrew, the garrotter."

"Well, go on," said the Commissioner, "what comes next?"

The inspector took another cutting off the table. "Perth comes next, sir, on October 24th. An unknown man murdered near the race-course on the Western Cup day. Stunned and then thrown into the creek. Nothing of value found upon him, but—a race-card and a Grand Stand pass-out check in his pockets suggested that he had been on the race-course." Again the inspector paused. "Nathaniel Burke, sir," he said drily, "specialises in racecourse crimes."

The Chief Commissioner made no remark. He was frowning and looking out of the window. The inspector went on.

"Next, sir, we have Oodnadatta in our own State, on November 8th last. Quite a trivial case here. A forged cheque cashed at the Consolidated Bank. Only for 75 it's true, but still it was almost all the customer had lying then to his credit in the bank. You will remember the manager's statement that the forged cheque was the finest piece of work he had ever seen." The inspector dropped his voice to almost purring tones. "Phillip Masterton, sir, is a great artist with his pen."

The Chief Commissioner shuffled uneasily in his chair. "You're persistent, Romilly," he said still frowning, "and I suppose you bring up Port Augusta next."

"Yes, sir," replied the relentless inspector, "and we're much nearer home now. Port Augusta, 212 miles from Adelaide and just a week ago. The Commonwealth Bank this time, and an attempt to break in that luckily failed. Another bank, you see, but the significance of everything does not lie all there." He fixed his eyes intently upon the Commissioner. "The Darwin, Perth and Oodnadatta crimes were all, as far as we can see, one-man affairs. Where any evidence is adduced as to who was carrying them out, it is only one individual in each particular case who is ever mentioned. There is no suggestion in any of the separate Press reports that I have here before me that any of these crimes were engineered by partners or a gang. You follow me, sir?" The Commissioner nodded. "Well, what happens at Port Augusta—the junction at which the Perth and Oodnadatta railway lines converge—what happens there?"

"Two men we know were on the business there," said the Commissioner—"that's what you want to drive in, isn't it? You think that the law-breaker from Perth joined forces at Port Augusta with the law-breaker from Oodnadatta."

"Exactly, sir," said the inspector, "that's my point."

"And to elaborate it," continued the Commissioner drily in his turn, "you think that the man of violence from Perth and the bank specialist from Oodnadatta, so to speak, pooled their abilities when they met, of course by pre-arrangement, at Port Augusta. The bank specialist said 'I know all about banks,' and the man of violence said 'and I can break in anywhere '—so, of course, it was a bank that they at once selected as the subject for their talents."

"Sir," said the inspector, speaking as if he were a little nettled. "Two hours ago I went carefully through the records of all the four men referred to in Larose's letter and the attempt at Port Augusta three weeks ago appears to me to be, as you say, exactly the sort of combination work that one expects when Burke and Masterton were working in co."

"But surely, man," said the Commissioner rather testily, "even if you have correctly dove-tailed together all these outrages that you have enumerated—you don't think you have yet given me anything tangible enough to make it worth the risk of letting this J. A. Cloud remain free even for another four and twenty hours? Remember what Larose says about him and how he vanishes at once. What gives you even the faintest encouragement to hope that we can get the others if we leave this Smiter free?"

"But I am going on what has always happened before, sir," the inspector replied earnestly; "you will remember we have an accurate crime record of J. A. Cloud for at least the last fifteen years and in Professor Summerfield's monograph on Crime there are eleven pages alone devoted to this remarkable man, and as far back as we have any record of him we see one thing that always stands out clearly. J. A. Cloud has been always an organiser rather than an individual in crime. He has worked in gangs always, and indeed before this McIver case there seems to be no history of his ever having worked alone. His line of activity has been invariably the same. He appears in a certain part of the world. He collects round him men of his own abnormal type. He starts operations and in a few months with his associates deals out to the community a series of stunning blows. For a time their activities are stupendous and then—when things are getting too hot for them and it seems almost certain they are about to be laid by the heels—the whole gang breaks up in a moment, and every one of them disappears. In J. A. Cloud's career this has happened over and over again. It happened in Detroit in 1909, it happened in Pennsylvania two years afterwards, it happened in Lahore four years ago and it happened in Sydney the year before last. Always the same tactics, a total disappearance for the time and then—resurrection and re-union somewhere else later on."

"Really, Inspector—you're quite eloquent," broke in the Commissioner smilingly, "and so you think all the portents are that the Smiter's gang are now converging on Adelaide and picking up so to speak individual little trifles on their way."

"I do, sir," said the inspector frowning. He did not quite like the bantering tone of his superior.

"Don't be annoyed, Romilly," said the Commissioner, at once becoming serious again, "for upon my soul in spite of myself you have half-convinced me. Let me think now. Four men left in the Smiter's gang and the Smiter himself now living alone in Glenelg. It will be a great thing for us anyhow to have got J. A. Cloud, but I agree with you it would be the coup of a generation if we could catch the whole gang. The violent decease of Andrew, the garrotter, especially is long overdue. Is it, however, in any way feasible to expect a re-union of the gang again here and, if so, are there any portents to suggest that it is going to take place shortly? You are of the opinion that the omens are all favourable and that from what has happened lately in other parts of this State, the other three much-wanted gentry are now converging upon Adelaide. In support of this idea you point out that one-man crimes in Perth and Oodnadatta have quite automatically been succeeded by a two-man crime at Port Augusta, when at the junction of the railway lines, the two ruffians have finally met."

"Yes, that is my point, sir," said the inspector.

"Well, Romilly, but so far we have at any rate only heard of two men and we want three. Now, if we hold our hand here, how long pray shall we have to wait

for this third gentleman to appear? He may be never coming for aught we know."

There was a sudden knock upon the door and a police sergeant entered and saluted. He was carrying a paper in his hand.

"'Phone message from Peterborough, sir," he said briskly. "Porter from the Consolidated Bank there knocked down and robbed in the street and his satchel taken away. Three men attacked him and they all got away."

The sergeant spread the paper open upon the desk before the Commissioner and then, saluting again, retired quickly from the room and closed the door behind him.

For a full minute neither the Commissioner nor the inspector spoke; then the former tilted himself back in his chair and laughed softly.

"Excellent, even the stars are fighting for you, Romilly. Peterborough now only 150 miles away and three men in it this time." His voice suddenly became grave again, "Yes, yes, for a little while at any rate, I'll risk it," then he glared almost angrily at the inspector—"But look you here, Romilly, it'll be disgrace for us both if we fail, you understand?"

The inspector smiled happily. "But we won't fail, sir."

Chapter IX

The Invisible Cordon.

Upon the evening of the following day Inspector Romilly was again closeted with the Chief Commissioner of the Adelaide police. Both men were looking anxious and the Commissioner was frowning over two large-sized photographs that he was holding in his hands.

"I don't like it, Romilly," he said nervously, "it seems devilish to me." He puckered his eyebrows close together. "Do you mean to assure me that these photographs are of one and the same man."

"Yes, sir," replied the inspector, "and both taken within a quarter of an hour of one another. Jackson snapped them this morning as I have told you from a laundry van going slowly before the front of the house. He got the Smiter full in view both times just by the garden hedge."

"Then think what we are up against. Here's a man who almost can work miracles and who will be able to get away from us any moment he wants to by just adopting another disguise. There are no points in common between these photographs here."

"Oh yes, sir," protested the inspector, "look at the hands. We were lucky in getting them there, for when out walking as Mr. Eadie, the Smiter invariably wears gloves. There's a strong similarity too in the poise of the head."

The Commissioner however still frowned. "But I don't like it, I tell you, Romilly, and looking at the face of the man Martin here, I doubt by a long way if we have all the trump cards in our hands. Look at that forehead and those eyes. He's not a man to be at any time caught unawares and he'll be thinking out every move of the game, every moment as it goes along. It's quite possible he's tumbled long ago to the fact that he's being watched and if so he'll break away in spite of you all."

"But he can't, sir," insisted the inspector, not however without a certain trace of misgiving in his own tones. "I've got such a cordon round him that he can't break through. There are ten of our men on watch within half a mile of the White House and we have managed in one way and another that every one of them knows him by sight; they have all had a good look at him, both as Mr. Eadie and the man, and are all well acquainted with his appearance now."

"Has he been shadowed everywhere whenever he has gone out?"

The inspector shook his head emphatically. "No, sir, nothing of that. We don't dare to, for one thing because the smoked glasses that he wears as Mr. Eadie have got mirror-rims to them at the side. I have caught the sun flashing on them several times. He can see behind him without turning round."

"Then where is the security," asked the Commissioner irritably, "that he can't just walk out of the house any moment that he pleases, and just disappear?"

The inspector took a paper out of his breast pocket. "Sir," he said quietly, "I'll explain what I have done and I believe you will approve," he hesitated for a moment and then went on confidently. "You see, sir, the instant I realised I was dealing with J. A. Cloud, I knew it would be fatal to shadow him in the ordinary way. As you have just said, he is no ordinary man and although I am no believer in the extra sense that Larose mentions in his letter, still, all Cloud's crime-story shows him to be extraordinarily sensitive whenever unfriendly influences are near him."

"Yes," nodded the Commissioner savagely, "he's a devil there. I've been reading up everything about him."

"Well, sir," went on the inspector, "in consequence I have had to go about things quite differently with him and I have disturbed nothing that surrounds him in his daily life. For instance I have not attempted to enlist against him one single person with whom he is habitually brought in contact. I have not dared either to ask one question of the postman, the newspaper man, the tradesmen who call for orders or the people who serve him in the shops. Even the policemen at Glenelg have not had a whisper of what is going on; I have been afraid he would notice something in their faces if he should happen to speak to them."

"Good," said the Commissioner, "quite good and well thought out too—but what about the shadowing then?"

The inspector handed him the paper he had been holding.

"This, sir, is a map of the surroundings of the White House and you will see at once why he cannot break away."

"H'm," muttered the Commissioner, "a circle with the White House in the centre?"

"Yes, sir, and it has every road marked in it, every paddock and every stretch of sand. Those red crosses show where our men are stationed and all, you see, are about the circumference of the circle. Except for two men over the McIver garage, there is no one watching within a quarter of a mile of the White House. My idea was that he should be free and untrammelled all about his home for it is there, if he has any suspicions at all, he will be most on the look out. As it is now there is no possibility of awakening any distrust and he can go free and unwatched until——"

"Until when?" asked the Commissioner quickly.

"Until," said the inspector grimly, "that moment when he crosses the circumference of the circle and then he will be followed instantly and at all costs and never be lost sight of."

"It's a risk," said the Commissioner gloomily, "a great risk. We're gambling, Romilly, you and I."

"No, sir," smiled the inspector, "not such a risk as would first appear, for as Mr. Eadie he wears a surgical boot on his right foot and cannot on that account walk very far."

The Commissioner was silent for a moment. "Well, what about his correspondence—he's in the habit of receiving letters you say."

"Yes, sir, but then again I haven't dared to tamper with them in case he should be setting traps for us to see if his letters were being milked. That he often received letters I have learnt right enough, but I rather fancy he occasionally writes them to himself. You see it might look strange if he never received any letters at all and in time it might ultimately get about and make people talk." The inspector grinned. "I had a quiet talk with the Glenelg postmaster last night and actually handled two letters that 'Charles Eadie Esq.' was to receive this morning. One bore the Adelaide postmark and from the printing on the envelope I saw it came from Hackett, the seed merchant, of Rundle Street. Quite unimportant to us I thought, and I let it go. The other however bore the local postmark and the handwriting on it was of an elaboration that suggested, at any rate to my mind, that it was disguised. I dared not steam the envelope open to make sure, in case he had sealed up a grain of permanganate of potash under the flap for then the whole envelope would have turned pink."

The Commissioner smiled. "Well, Romilly, you are certainly thoughtful and we'll hope for the best." His frown returned again. "But mind you—mind you, I only intend to wait three days and one of them has already gone."

It was a pleasant sunny afternoon and Mr. Eadie came out of the White House intent evidently upon a little stroll. He was smartly and tastefully dressed and he was carrying, as he always did, his heavy silver-handled walking stick. He paused thoughtfully for a moment as he closed the wire door and contemplatively regarded the exact way in which it shut. Then he walked slowly down the garden path and from the pleased expression on his face he was evidently noting with approval how spick and span everything was. He turned into the high road and in the same quiet and leisurely fashion walked towards the sea. He met the afternoon postman returning from his round and in passing gave him the time of day.

"No letters then for me, postman?" he said pleasantly. "You've left me out this time?"

"Yes, sir," replied the postman smiling; "a very light delivery for everyone this afternoon."

Mr. Eadie passed up a straight stretch of road about two hundred yards long and then turned sharply at right angles into a little side street. Once round the comer however he stopped abruptly and for quite a long while stood admiringly before a large bed of asters in the garden of the house before him. He was in no hurry to move on and indeed it almost seemed as if he were waiting for someone to come after him, although he never once turned round. He just stared at the asters as if he had never seen such beautiful flowers before. It was

strange, for they were quite ordinary asters and, besides that, the bed was not by any means too well kept.

At last, however, he resumed his walk and leisurely as before went on towards the sea. His lame foot was evidently troubling him, and for quite half an hour he rested behind a small sandhill before he started to return home. He did not then return by the way he came; instead he proceeded through the town.

When nearly home again he encountered one of the township policemen and the latter, evidently knowing him, saluted respectfully. Mr. Eadie stopped at once.

"Good afternoon, constable," he remarked, "lovely day, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," replied the policeman, "but a little bit too hot for me."

"Business slack?" asked Mr. Eadie, evidently noting that the policeman seemed in no particular hurry to move on.

"Yes, sir," smiled back the policeman, "nothing doing; everything quiet as a Sunday school picnic."

"But you haven't caught the wretch who killed my poor friend McIver yet?"

The policeman at once became grave. "No, sir, and we're not likely too," he replied; "in my opinion men like that are never caught at all, unless they are caught right away. A few days undiscovered and they always get clear."

"But I see that clever inspector of yours, Inspector Romilly I mean, still occasionally comes up here. I have sometimes noticed him about."

"Very keen officer, Inspector Romilly," said the policeman and then he grinned; "always keeps a good eye, too, for a pretty face."

"Ah," said Mr. Eadie nodding his head.

"Very handsome young lady Miss McIver," continued the policeman.

"Very," said Mr. Eadie and then he sighed deeply, "but what a pity it is some of us are getting too old; now isn't it, constable?"

"A great pity, sir," replied the constable and with a smile, he saluted again and walked on.

Mr. Eadie continued slowly on his way as if he were very deep in thought but at the wire door of the White House he paused to attentively regard it before he went in. Then to a secret observer there his movements would certainly have appeared very mysterious. One by one he went through the rooms of the house and for a long minute he stood staring hard at every object they contained. He scrutinised the fastenings of the windows too and the floors as well came under his observation. It seemed as if he wanted to make sure there had been no meddlers in the house during his absence. Presently he seemed satisfied that everything was exactly as he had left it and he turned back into the dining-room in the front of the house.

Going to the side-board he mixed himself a strong whisky and soda and sank back resignedly into a comfortable armchair. He yawned heavily.

"Really," he muttered to himself, "life is getting quite monotonous and I believe I'm getting fat."

He looked out through the window and then suddenly he frowned. He rose quickly from his chair and took out a small pair of binoculars from a drawer in the desk. He focussed them carefully upon some object outside. For nearly five minutes then he never moved. He just stood silently and patiently watching. At length he put down the glasses, but even then without them he still continued to stare.

"Now I wonder," he muttered, "I wonder why that window over the garage is always open. The chauffeur has been away for more than a week and the room must be untenanted. Now it must have been noticed that the window had been left open; then why has no one been up to close it?" He shook his head as if puzzled. "It's not like the McIver girl; she's very particular."

He picked up the binoculars and proceeded to stare hard again.

The telephone bell rang sharply in the Chief Commissioner's room. He was going through some papers with a subordinate. He picked up the receiver.

"Chief speaking," he said, "what is it?"

"Inspector Romilly to see you, sir, urgent he says," came the voice over the 'phone.

"All right; tell him to come up."

A minute later and Inspector Romilly was in the room. The Commissioner dismissed his attendant and waited until the latter had closed the door behind him before he spoke.

"Well," he asked, "any news?"

The inspector looked white and troubled.

"Sir," he said quickly, "it would be best I think now to arrest J. A. Cloud at once."

"Good," said the Commissioner. "I've been thinking that we've waited long enough."

"It should be done at once, too, sir, straight away."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Sir," said the inspector, "he took two loaves this morning instead of one."

"Ah," exclaimed the Commissioner brightening up, "he's expecting visitors, is he? Then we mayn't have been waiting for nothing, after all. But why this sudden change of plans, Romilly? It was your obsession, remember, to get them all together and a few hours more now won't add greatly to the risk."

The inspector shook his head. "He's restless, sir, and I believe that he's become suspicious."

The Commissioner whistled. "What's happened then?" he asked anxiously.

"Nothing very much, sir, but for one thing he's not left the house at all either yesterday or this morning, and, for another, he's taken to watching the window over the garage in a way that I don't like. He sits well back in his room and just stares through his binoculars, literally for hours at a time. Fortunately for us, the light's stronger on his place than ours and we have all along, too, been watching through some holes in a screen."

"But haven't you any idea what's made him suspicious? Do you think he can have possibly caught sight of any of you?"

"No, sir, I don't dream of that. The entrance to the garage is at the back and no one has either come in or gone out unless we have had J. A. Cloud in full view at the front at the time."

There was silence for a moment. "Well, what do you propose," sighed the Commissioner, "for my part I shan't be sorry when we have this gentleman safely under lock and key—whether we are lucky enough or not to get any of the others later on."

"If we get Cloud now, sir," replied the inspector confidently, "and we can manage to keep news of the arrest quiet for a few days, we may still get some of the others. If they are coming, it can't be long now and with Cloud doubling his supply of bread, it looks as if some of them at least were expected at once."

"All right," said the Commissioner after a pause, "but now tell me, how are you going to set about arresting him?"

Precisely at half past two that afternoon Inspector Mark Romilly of the Adelaide Police might have been observed briskly walking up the High Road of Glenelg in the direction of the domicile of a Mr. Charles Eadie who resided in that quarter. The inspector was looking, as he always looked, very spick and span, but to-day he had assuredly got his best uniform on. He was the last word in official splendour. His tunic fitted him like a glove and the crease of his trousers was exactly and mathematically in the middle. His white gloves were new and spotless and the polish of his boots, too, left nothing to be imagined.

He looked for all the world like a man about to take a prominent position in some great and important guard of honour.

He looked, too, so happy and content. He was smiling to himself and a chance observer might have thought he was a lover. His eyes were so bright and tender and the natural stern lines of his face were so toned and softened by some pleasant thoughts.

Suddenly an extremely pretty girl came tripping down a path into the main road, and she and the dreamer met.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Inspector," smiled Miss McIver, for the pretty girl was she, "are you coming up my way now?"

The inspector hesitated for perhaps the fraction of a second and the girl thought he looked embarrassed. Then he replied heartily enough. "Certainly I am if I may walk with you," and taking assent for granted he immediately accommodated his steps to hers.

"How do you like the heat, Miss McIver?" he went on with a side-long admiring glance at her pretty oval face. "You don't look as if it troubled you much."

"No, it always suits me," she replied. "I never feel so well as when the temperature is well over a hundred in the shade."

"You're lucky," he sighed back, "ninety's quite good enough for me. Our uniforms are not made for summer days."

For some minutes they chatted together and then, reaching the entrance of Clyde House, the inspector held open the gate for her to enter.

"But you're coming in?" she asked quickly, seeing that he appeared to be about to turn away. "I thought you wanted to speak to me. I can see you at once if you want to."

The inspector was undoubtedly embarrassed this time.

"I—I may want to see you later," he replied evasively, "but I have another call to make first."

The girl looked straight at him. "You're going to the White House," she said quietly. "I knew you were directly I saw you a few minutes ago." Then she smiled charmingly. "You men can never hide anything, can you? But come in, please, I want to speak to you."

The inspector pushed the gate to and resignedly followed her into the garden.

"Miss McIver," he said solemnly, "if you're going to talk to me, and I suppose I shall have to reply, will you please very kindly turn your face so that anybody in the White House can't see you? Our friend is always on the watch there with his binoculars."

With no surprise she did as she was directed, but instantly the pretty colour left her face and she looked white and ill at ease.

"You're going to arrest him," she said with just the faintest tremor in her voice. "You may as well be open with me. I shan't cry or faint."

The inspector made no pretence of hiding his surprise. "How in the name of fortune did you guess that?" he asked. "Great Scott, if other people are as sharp as you, they'll be playing the Dead March over me to-morrow for sure."

It was a foolish thing to say and he regretted it the moment he had said it. He made to retrieve his mistake instantly. "No, no," he added, "it won't, of course, be as bad as that, but what I mean is—he won't perhaps take it quietly." Then, to reassure her—"I've got an automatic with me anyhow."

But the girl was not to be so easily put off. She shook her head gently. "Have you found out anything more about him?", she asked. "Did he—did he—do you know for certain he came here that night?"

The inspector looked intently at her. "Miss McIver," he said very quietly, "that man over there was a murderer long ago, and although we can't say for certain yet that he killed your poor uncle, in all human certainty he did, for he has taken life before—perhaps many times. I have found out all about him now."

"And you are going to arrest him?"

"Yes, he'll be in the cells in less than an hour."

"But you're going alone?"

"I have to." He shrugged his shoulders. "You see it is like this. Our friend there has been wanted for many years, in the United States, in India, and here these last two years in Australia. Many people, lots of times, have tried to catch him, but they've failed because they all frightened him somehow before they came up. The man's supposed to have an extra sense that tells him when danger is coming, but that's all rubbish, of course. Well, I thought if I came up here by myself, alone, he would never dream of danger and I might catch him before he got his pistol ready. I tell you I was very hopeful about it, but I'm not nearly so cock-sure now since you found me out. What made you guess it?"

The girl smiled in spite of her paleness. She hesitated a little before replying. "You looked—you looked so particularly smart and spick and span that anyone would think you had come for some special occasion. It made me search for the reason at once."

The inspector frowned disgustedly. "Well, if I've overdone it, it serves me right, but really—really the only thing unusual about me is that I've got new white gloves." He smiled in an amused sort of way at the girl. "I'm very sorry, however, that I've let you in for it anyway. I'm afraid you'll be worried now until it's all over; anyhow, it won't be long. I'll just go and tap him on the shoulder now. You'll hear my whistle blow when it's all right."

He saluted and was just turning round when a sudden thought seemed to strike the girl. Her lips parted as if to speak, she hesitated, and then blushed deeply. The warm rich colour crimsoned over face and neck, and she looked the very picture of sweet and adorable embarrassment.

Deliberately she turned herself full-face towards the White House; then as deliberately, too, she plucked a small white rose from the trellis near and daintily handed it to the astonished inspector.

"There," she said, in a sweet low voice that trembled slightly, "if he's looking at us now at any rate, he'll see something to excuse your fine clothes. He'll think you came up to see me and then—then—of course he'll understand."

Without another word, she turned up quickly towards the house. Reaching the verandah door, she looked round for one brief second to wave her hand and then immediately disappeared within. Her face was still a flaming crimson.

The inspector, oblivious of the whole world watching, passed his lips across the petals of the rose, and then, wrapping it carefully in his handkerchief, placed it in his breast pocket.

Sighing deeply he passed out of the garden and crossed over the road.

The servant Martin was writing a letter. He sat at the table in the best room of the White House, puffing contentedly at a big cigar with a strong whisky and soda by his side. He wrote in an easy scholarly hand very different from the vile uneven scrawl with which he generally pencilled receipts when goods were brought up to the back door. The table was in front of the window and from where he sat he had a good view out on to the trim little garden and right across to the other houses facing the sea. On the table near him there was a pair of excellent binoculars and from time to time he swept them round casually to take in all there was to be seen outside. He was evidently interested in quite a methodical sort of way in all the happenings of his little world.

He wrote with ease and facility.

> The White House.
> Friday afternoon.
> MY DEAR MAJOR POOLE,
>
> I am very sorry I shall not be able to accept your kind invitation for to-morrow evening, but I have not been feeling very well lately and under the circumstances think it best to take things easy for a day or two. My confounded liver plays me up directly I depart from the very simplest fare and I know quite well what your 'little dinners' are. So I shall have to rest content with the barley water and milk puddings that my good Martin gives me and postpone the acceptance of your kind hospitality until later times. By-the-bye, I am very glad you were pleased with the manner in which Martin carried out his duties the other night. He is certainly, as you say, a most capable man but please, another time do not send him home with a bottle of your brown sherry; he had no kick at all in him the next day. Martin, like his master, is not as young as he used to be and the simple life is best I am afraid for both of us old fellows.
>
> Again thanking you for your kind thought of me, and with kindest regards.
>
> Believe me, my dear Major Poole.
> Very sincerely yours,
> CHARLES EADIE.
>
> P.S. I am sure——

But the post-script was never finished, for at that moment the writer happened to look up through the open window and his hand fell instantly upon the binoculars at his side.

"Well I'm damned, and what is it now?" he growled. "That nosey inspector up here again and yarning with the pretty Maude. Why, I wonder they allow him to waste his time so."

He put up the glasses and intently regarded the gossiping pair. "The great bull calf," he ejaculated. "Now I'd like to know what he's saying to her. He's got up in great style, too, to-day. I suppose the idiot thinks he's in love, but I can't understand the McIver girl encouraging him in the idea." He went on sneeringly. "I'm really disappointed in you, Mr. Inspector Romilly, D.S.O. Upon our first acquaintanceship I thought there was more in you, and I candidly confess I was a little bit afraid of you at the time. I didn't like the look of your eyes. I thought you were a thinker; but you're not. You're just an ordinary policeman, sir, and nothing else."

He watched for quite a long while. "Now, what are they talking about? I wish to goodness she'd turn her face and I could tell at once. When a woman thinks she's alone with a man, her face is an open book to a third party who's watching on the quiet. Ah! now she turns it and, by James, but what a blush! I'm astonished, Maude, and I'm damned if the policeman isn't too. He looks like a stuck calf. Great Jupiter—and she's plucking him a rose. Really, Joseph, I think you ought to shut your eyes. This courting's getting quite immodest. Oh! she's frightened now and runs away and I don't wonder, too. Really, I thought I was some judge of character, but I never dreamed the pretty Maude could flirt like that. One thing to my credit anyhow, whatever else I've done, I've brought two loving hearts together." He sneered unpleasantly. "What a pretty little tableau it made to be sure—so pretty that if I were a suspicious man now, I might almost think it had been got up specially for my benefit. Dear me—and now he's kissing the rose. Of course he would, and I suppose she's watching, too, from behind the door. He wraps it in his handkerchief—oh! how romantic—and now he sighs and turns away. Curtain, curtain, it's all over. Very pretty and I've quite enjoyed it. Hullo! hullo!—he's crossing the road and coming up here! What does that mean? Perhaps if I offer him a rose, he'll kiss that too now he's in the mood. But come, come now, Martin, you forget yourself. Pull yourself together, sir, and prepare to answer the door. Your master, Mr. Eadie, is out. He's lunching with the Governor, he's buying socks and shoes, or he's just gone to the Methodist Conference, whichever you think best to say. Be polite, Martin—be respectful and then perhaps if he's got it, he'll tip you another nice half-crown. Ha! ha! But still—'semper paratus' is my little motto all through life," and he took a pretty little automatic from a drawer in the desk and seeing that it was loaded thrust it in his trouser pocket. Then carefully extinguishing what remained of his excellent cigar, he tiptoed into the hall and stealthily regarded the approaching inspector through the obscurity of the wire door.

His whole attitude had suddenly and strangely altered, for with all his recent pleasantry he had now the exact pose and bearing of a beast of prey.

Chapter X

The Hempen Cord.

The inspector came up the pathway walking briskly. He looked solid and convincing as if it were his sole mission in life to be just the ordinary uninteresting member of the force. He appeared to be just a part of a machine,

a regulator of traffic, or at best a disturber of the peace of the very minor offenders of the law. Not the man anyone would think to be trusted with the handling of a great and important case. He looked too heavy, altogether too much the embodiment of stereotyped procedure and conventional ideas.

Martin, from the security of the fly-proof wire door, watched the inspector critically and analytically every foot of the way. He took in everything about him, but it was the expression of his face he searched out most.

"All right," he told himself as the inspector reached the door, "just the ordinary policeman here," and his right hand lost its contact with the automatic in his pocket.

The inspector pushed the bell and then turned round and stood waiting patiently with his back to the door. Apparently he was deeply absorbed in a contemplation of the garden of Clyde House, for Martin had to say "Yes, sir," twice before he seemed to become aware of the fact.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he exclaimed pleasantly, "but you really move so quietly that I didn't hear you come. Now, is Mr. Eadie at home by any chance?"

"No, sir," replied the respectful Martin, "I'm sorry he is not."

The inspector did not seem to be very disappointed.

"I hardly thought he would be," he went on, "but I looked in on the chance. I suppose he's in most mornings, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir, nearly always till about twelve, but if I tell him you're coming I'm sure he'll remain in any time."

The inspector seemed thoughtful.

"Well, it isn't quite as particular as that. I want to ask him something and I may call in and take my chance."

The conversation was taking place on the doorstep; at least, the inspector was on the doorstep, while Martin was standing well inside the door. The door was three parts open and both men were interested in the distance between them—Martin because as a matter of principle he never allowed a policeman at any time to get too close to him, and the inspector because he was calculating if he were near enough to rush in and take Martin by surprise. He knew it must be a case of making sure for he had a most wholesome respect for a one-time professor of ju-jitsu.

The inspector seemed in no hurry to go.

"You have a pretty lonely time here, Martin;" he suggested, "you must find it very quiet, don't you?"

"I prefer it quiet, sir," and the man's eyes narrowed suddenly and his hand slipped back into his trouser pocket.

"Have you been long with Mr. Eadie?" and the inspector now in his turn became aware of some subtle and undefinable sense of impending danger.

"Nearly twenty years, sir, come this next month."

"Well, it speaks jolly well for both of you," exclaimed the inspector heartily, and he suddenly turned half round and bent down to adjust a boot-lace that was apparently coming undone.

The man-servant's face relaxed to a half-smile.

Unthinking, of course, the inspector had placed himself in absolutely the most defenceless position he could have assumed. Martin thought instantly of quite a dozen unpleasant ways in which he could have been finished off quietly and without the slightest fuss or noise. The policeman was undoubtedly a fool.

There could be no danger here he told himself again, and the little automatic slipped back as before to the bottom of his pocket.

The inspector stood up and he was quite aware at once of the change in the man's face. It was all right again. He had seen danger a moment or two before and the quick falling back of the right hand to the trouser pocket. So he had purposely turned round and bent down to divert the man's suspicion, by his nakedly defenceless position.

He stood up and straightened himself with a yawn. Then he took a letter out of his pocket and appeared to be considering. Martin continued to eye him narrowly.

"Perhaps after all," he said thoughtfully, "I'd better leave this letter with you and your master can answer it by post. If it's not all right I'll call again next time I am up here."

He held out the letter to the servant and the latter moved just a little nearer to take it in his right hand. The door was wide open now. In an instant the inspector crashed out with his left hand and caught the man-servant square and full on the angle of the jaw. The man saw the blow coming and his face flashed lightning-like into an expression of bestial rage, but he was just the very smallest fraction of a second too late to prevent it and he went down like a stunned ox on to the floor.

The inspector leapt on to him to follow up the blow, but there was no necessity—Martin was down and out and for the moment oblivious to all that might be going on in the world.

"A foul blow, my friend," muttered the inspector grimly with his face wet and pale with excitement, "but you won't grumble much at that I'm sure. You're not one yourself to be over particular at any time about the niceties of conflict, are you? Now we'll just make sure and then for a little trussing up before you get dangerous again." With hands that trembled slightly he turned up the left-hand sleeve and exposed the unconscious man fore-arm. Yes—there was the scar right enough It was sufficient to clinch everything.

Producing some stout whipcord from his pocket he deftly and securely bound Martin's limbs; then going out on to the verandah he blew three shrill blasts upon his whistle.

Almost instantly three men appeared on the road and the hum of a motor in the distance came up pleasantly to the inspector's ears.

He looked at his watch. "Good, everything going to schedule. It's all right, Jackson," he called out as the three men came running up. "Our luck's still in; he's waiting for the handcuffs now, but I'm going to search him well."

Together they lifted up the still unconscious man on to the sofa and thoroughly went through every part of his clothes. In his right-hand pocket they at once came across the little automatic and Inspector Romilly nodded grimly to his assistants. "Yes, I nearly got a dose of that just now," he said; "it was touch and go for a moment, but he thought better of it. Search him thoroughly, for he's always boasted he'd never be taken alive. It's a hundred to one he's got poison on him somewhere. You know this chap's a medical man."

It was not long before they came across what they were looking for. In his hip-pocket amongst other things they found a little metal box and inside it, carefully packed in cotton-wool, two fair-sized glass capsules.

"Prussic acid probably," said Detective Jackson, holding one of them up to the light. "I was two years in a chemist's shop before I entered the force, and a lot of Yankee stuff came over from the States in capsules like this."

Leaving the now gradually recovering prisoner in charge of one of their number—the other three men proceeded to go over the house.

In the best bedroom was a large wardrobe and opening the door the first things they came across were the wig and eyebrows of Mr. Eadie. On the shelf above were the same gentleman's prominent false teeth. His tinted eyeglasses were also close at hand and indeed everything was so placed that it could be used at a moment's notice. "Artful chap," commented Detective Jackson again; "notice how beautifully creased all the trousers of Mr. Eadie are, and here poor old Martin's been going about in baggy clothes with no shape in them at all."

Presently the man left in charge called out that Martin had recovered consciousness again, and the inspector went in to have what he called a pleasant little talk.

The prisoner was leaning back in a big armchair. His wrists were now handcuffed together in front of him but his legs were still corded round at the ankles. He looked white and sickly, and scowled menacingly for a second at the inspector when the latter came and sat down just in front of him. But he made no remark and a moment later his features were relaxed once again to the expressionless composure of the servant Martin.

His captor made no attempt to gloat over him.

"Look here, my friend," he said quietly, "let's start clear. It's my duty first to warn you that anything you say now may be used in evidence against you." The detective looked almost sympathetically at him. "Now don't take it over hard," he went on, "that I got in first just now. You needn't kick yourself at all about that, for we'd got you anyhow. We know all about you, and you've been under observation for a great number of days. Your life's an open book to us too. You were Mr. Eadie here, Mr. Powell in Semaphore last year, you had perhaps a dozen aliases in Sydney and Lahore, and in New York City you were born Joseph Arthur Cloud."

"You've been jailed once, your finger prints are handy and you've got the scar there on your left fore-arm from the bullet in Lahore. So it's all cut and dried about you and you'll swing for sure."

The prisoner made no movement and no response; he just stared apathetically before him, as if of all present he were least interested in what was going on. The inspector shrugged his shoulders and continued.

"Not that the idea of swinging will, I think, worry you over much. To a man of your temperament one way out of the world is as good as another and I expect you must have always known it would come one day to this. Your luck couldn't hold for ever. But it's not to talk about your future that I'm here now. What I want is this. You could do me a bit of a favour, and if you're a sport you'll do it. No, don't pretend you're not curious to know what I mean, for you must be. You must be darned curious also about a great many other things, too, Dr. Cloud. That active brain of yours must have been churning itself over a lot already in this last ten minutes to guess out exactly how we got on your track here."

Still no sign nor response from the handcuffed man. Just the same dull, cold and expressionless stare into the empty spaces of the room.

The speaker went on. "Look here, Doctor, nothing can make any difference to you now and I want to do a deal. I'll send these fellows out of the room though

and then we can talk privately." He signed to the detectives and without questioning they at once left the room.

"Now it's a little bit less formal," said the inspector, when the door was closed. "There are no witnesses and we shall neither of us be giving ourselves away." He lowered his voice impressively. "What I want to do is this—let's swap information. I'll tell you everything how we came to find you out, and how just by chance we got upon your track. Just by chance mind you; no discredit to your cleverness there. It was blind chance that led us where we are."

He paused for a moment to let his words sink in. The man was watching him intently now and there was undeniably a glint of interest in his eyes. His lips were still shut tight, however, and no response came.

The inspector's voice became more persuasive. "You'll still go down to history as perhaps the deepest schemer crime has ever known. You weren't nabbed because of any false move you made yourself, but just because of one chance word, uttered once at night months ago in a lonely place. One word, uttered only once, but remembered long afterwards; and it was just sufficient to fire the train."

Again he paused and this time his silence was longer than before. He knew quite well what he was doing and was not mistaking his man. He had not been a student of crime for nothing. Great criminals, he was quite aware, are nearly always vain and in the world of crime their reputations are every whit as dear to them as are the reputations of great personages in other walks of life. Punishment too may have few terrors for them, but ridicule—ridicule always tells. Hardened to every hatred of the community upon which they prey, they are nevertheless peculiarly sensitive to what they believe their fellow criminals may think of them. It galls them to the quick if it should appear they have been bested fairly by their natural enemies, the despised and usually dull-witted police.

Now that the first shock of his arrest was over, the man known to his associates as the Smiter was recovering something of the contemptuous indifference that the habitual criminal has always for whatsoever may be in store for him. Like all his kind he was prepared to accept his defeat with tranquillity and just to regard it as an unkind throw of Fate that could not have been foreseen or prevented.

He was curious, too, and quite interested in what the inspector was saying, but at the same time he was in no sort of mood to oblige anyone in any way.

The inspector realised he had a difficult task before him. He was putting up a great bluff and with an already excellent hand to play, purposed discarding a few useless cards, hoping to draw some of good value in their stead.

Despite his good fortune in having discovered and arrested a malefactor of the importance of the Smiter, he was only too well aware that so far he had got no evidence whatever to connect him with the murder of Andy McIver. That he had done it was in every way a moral certainty, but proofs so far there were none and apart from an actual confession from the man himself—which he knew was highly improbable—the only way of bringing it home to him was by the actual discovery of the stolen bank-notes themselves somewhere on the premises. But a comparatively small number of bank-notes were of the easiest things to hide; even in a small house there were a hundred places where they could be secreted and, perhaps, never found. Besides, there was no knowing that they were in the house at all. They might easily have been hidden

somewhere outside; buried in the sand, perhaps, or tucked maybe in the hollow of some tree quite half a mile away. Altogether, therefore, unless the man in front of him were willing, it would be only by a miracle of chance that they could be brought to light to finally convict him.

The inspector went on with his conversation in quite a casual sort of way.

"But, of course, you couldn't possibly have known we were shadowing you, and yet—and yet," he lowered his voice here and bent forward confidentially, "if you had once suspected it, you would have easily found out immediately. You remember when you were lying on the bed there, watching on the verandah, those three nights. The first night before the races, the next night when you went over to kill that poor old man, and again the third night, the night after, when you saw us going over the ground to re-construct the crime. Well, did you never notice on any of the next mornings that the sand had been disturbed over there under the clump of trees? We knew you were in the habit of going there to get sticks for your fire. Did you never notice anything."

The Smiter broke silence at last. "I'm not blind," he sneered disdainfully, "but there happened to be sheep about as well as policemen, and I thought it was sheep. I didn't blunder there."

"But I suppose you think we blundered," broke in the inspector sharply, secretly however very much elated that he had at last got the man to speak, "because we didn't arrest you at once." He went on, shaking his head emphatically. "No, we didn't blunder, my friend, although if we had known you were going into Clyde House to murder as well as steal we should, of course, have taken you at once. We were waiting for you to communicate with some of your pals. We wanted Andrew and Burke and Masterton. We hoped at least one of them would turn up here."

"Well, you were disappointed," sneered the Smiter.

The inspector tried to look down in the mouth. "Yes—of course we were, but still," brightening up a bit, "at any rate we've got the best card in the pack, and I suppose we'll have to be content with that now. But see here, Doctor, I'll just tell you how it is we happened to get on your track. Now you listen carefully and you'll see what chance has done."

The Smiter looked scornfully at the speaker, but the latter was taking no rebuffs. He went on quite cheerfully, almost as if he were speaking to a friend.

"One Saturday evening in the summer of last year—to be exact on January 11th, a young fellow from Sydney strayed by chance to the bungalow you had then near Semaphore. There were the four of you there at the time, and one of you caught him looking through the shutters. You dragged him into that long room of yours, and you asked him a lot of questions. Then you had him shut up in the woodshed, but he got out and you all caught him again and threw him in the sea."

"I shot him first," calmly interrupted the Smiter.

"No, Doctor, you didn't—you may have thought you did."

"I shot him in the forehead," said the Smiter.

The inspector shrugged his shoulders incredulously.

"Well, it evidently didn't do him much harm," he replied, "for he was able to get out of the sea at Henley and walk all the way to Adelaide before he fell insensible in the road, just near the railway station on North Terrace. No, your bullet didn't touch him and his head was all bloody only because he cut it against the fence as he fell. Anyhow he wrote us a long letter about you a little

while back, remembering everything, even some of the extraordinary questions you in particular asked him. He says for example that you asked him the names of the arteries of the neck."

The Smiter looked thoughtful for a moment and then his face broke into a cold but rather amused smile.

"I suppose you must be right then," he said unconcernedly, "but I certainly believed at the time that he was dead." He shook his head frowningly. "Yes, it was a blunder that, but at any rate we all shared in it! I'm not completely surprised though, for several times I have thought vaguely that he seemed to fall almost before my bullet could have reached him. He was just jumping the fence."

"Yes, the fence at the bottom of the lawn," said the inspector. "We noticed that particularly and also the panels of the woodshed that he smashed in when he broke down the door."

"Dear me, dear me," smiled Joseph Arthur Cloud sarcastically, but now apparently in a much better humour, "you've gone over the ground well. For a policeman you appear to have been most thorough in your investigations, although you haven't told me yet where I came in. How you linked up all this with me, I mean."

Inspector Romilly smiled back at his handcuffed prisoner. "Well, you're pretty cool, aren't you?" he replied admiringly. "You take everything as if nothing worried you. I'll tell you how it happened that we knew it was you. This young fellow heard someone refer to one of your friends who was doing seven years. Rook they called him. We made inquiries at once to find out who this Rook doing seven years was, who his friends were and what they were like. In forty-eight hours we were upon your track. There was no Rook doing seven years, but there was a Charles Henry Bird in for that term. His pals called him Rook, and his pals were you, Andrew, Masterton, and Burke. Larose, the Sydney detective, sent us most exhaustive descriptions of you all and—there we were."

"A very capable officer, Larose," remarked the Smiter judicially. "A genius in his way. I dreaded him more than any of the others there. We had to keep him shadowed always to know what he was doing. But how did you trace me to here? You haven't told me that yet."

"Smiter," replied the inspector solemnly, "it's a bad error for a man of your sagacity if he wants to hide his tracks to move directly from one house into another on the self-same day—and such a little distance apart too. Say, less than a dozen miles as the crow flies. A man leaves one house on the 4th of March. He doesn't go far away for he does his own removal. [The inspector was guessing here, but he felt on sure ground]. Later on he's badly wanted. Well then—who's taken up a new tenancy in the neighbourhood on March the 4th? Quite easy you see—with any little bit of luck, which we had."

There was quite a long silence, and then the Smiter said very quietly, "I mistook you for an ass the other night at Major Poole's."

"And I was quite sincere when I told you then you were an artist, Martin."

"What the major said at dinner nearly made me quit that night, right off there and then. I got scared badly for the moment, and was on the point of giving you a dose of something in your coffee—one of those nice little capsules that you've just stolen from me now. But you half convinced me by your bluff about the McIver girl, and when you tipped me that half-crown—like an ass myself I felt quite safe again."

The inspector thought the propitious moment had a last arrived.

"What have you done with those notes, Doctor?" he said quietly; "the McIver notes I mean. You may as well tell me. It will save a deuce of a lot of trouble in looking for them if you do and it will be a great feather in my cap as well."

"Why, pray, should I save you any trouble?" asked the Smiter contemptuously—then he broke into a dry laugh. "You amuse me, though, for it's certainly the very first occasion upon which the police have ever invoked my aid."

"Well, I'm glad to have amused you anyhow," remarked the inspector, "but—it would be a decent thing to do."

The Smiter sighed for the first time. "I'm not particularly keen about those notes anyhow," he said sadly. "I don't suppose I shall ever spend any of them now, so you may just as well have them. But tell me first," and his eyes half shut and his voice hardened vengefully, "out there in the garden just now—were you and the girl both fooling me and putting up a show, or was it all real and you're just sweet on each other as some idiots are?"

Inspector Romilly drew back instantly almost as if he had received a blow. Anxious as he was to propitiate the prisoner, he frowned angrily. He knew quite what was running through the Smiter's brain. The man's self-love was wounded because he was doubtful whether or not he had been taken in. If he were once certain of it then it was good-bye for ever to his good offices in the recovery of the notes. But, on the other hand, how was it possible to admit to this wretch anything so sacred as being in love with Maude McIver—let alone pretend that she was in love too. He was in a quandary.

The spiteful voice of the Smiter broke through his thoughts.

"Give me that rose," he sneered very softly, "the white rose that you wrapped in the handkerchief in your pocket."

The inspector blazed into fury all at once. "No, I am damned if I will," he replied without the fraction of a second's hesitation at all. "I'll lose anything rather than that."

"Good man, good lover," laughed the Smiter, still, however, with a sneer. "I needn't press you further. Your face gives you away. You shall have the notes all right now. But you shouldn't have had them through me if you had given up the rose." He nodded his head complacently, but went on still sneering. "I thought I couldn't be mistaken there. Maude's face was just the very ordinary picture of a girl in love." He glanced towards his binoculars on the table and laughed sarcastically. "Very good glasses those. I could even see the blush going down below her neck. Well, you want those notes, eh?"

The inspector choked back his indignation. After all, he thought, it was all a game—a game of wits between them, and he need not grudge this poor devil opposite any small pleasure that he might derive from thinking himself more clever than he really was. So he just said smilingly, "Yes, where are they now?"

"I must have a drink first," replied the Smiter, "and one of the best of my cigars. The whisky from the tantalus, please. There're some glasses over there, too."

The inspector moved over to the sideboard to do as he was requested, but there was something in the man's voice that made him pause. Pretending to hold up a tumbler to the light to see if it were clean, he shot a lightning glance in the direction of the Smiter. The man looked strangely eager, with a strained expression on his face, as if he were fighting down some great and terrible

excitement. The inspector was worried all at once. "What the devil is he up to now?" he muttered to himself. "He's got something on for sure and it's more than the idea of just having a drink."

He took two glasses to put on the table and then noticed for the first time that there was a bottle of whisky on the sideboard as well as the whisky in the tantalus. The bottle was open, but nearly full and looked as if two drinks at most had been taken from it. "That's funny," he thought; "why was a new bottle opened when the tantalus was still a quarter full?" He became suspicious at once. The Smiter was a doctor of medicine he knew, and poison was always possible as an auxiliary in that strange life of his. What if the whisky in the tantalus had been doctored and left handy in case at any time there might come a tight corner like this?

It was quite possible and would account at once for the eagerness of the Smiter to get hold of it.

Convinced there was a mystery somewhere, he pushed the two glasses forward on to the table and then before any protest could be made he quickly seized the bottle of whisky and poured out the two drinks.

The Smiter sighed a long deep sigh, a sigh perhaps of disappointment, perhaps of simple resignation to the fate that he was sure must now be his. Who knows?

"What made you become a policeman?" he asked suddenly. The inspector laughed. He felt quite happy again, and judged from the dejected mien of his prisoner that whatever danger had just threatened it had at all events now passed away.

"Oh," he replied lightly, "I became a policeman for the same reason probably that you became a criminal—for the sake of adventure."

"Bah," sneered the Smiter contemptuously, "the adventure of chasing stray dogs and running in drunks. Fine life of adventure that."

"Oh!—but we get higher game sometimes. Doctors of medicine for instance, and great artists in crime. But, come now, where are those notes?"

The Smiter seemed quite surprised. "The notes," he exclaimed as if puzzled. "Well, where would you expect to find them? Where does a gentleman generally keep his notes? Where would Mr. Charles Eadie keep his? Where, but in his desk, of course."

The inspector looked incredulous. "What do you mean?" he asked with a frown.

"What I say. They're in the desk, second drawer, left hand side. You seem surprised. No, it isn't locked. You'll find them quite easily. As a matter of fact, I was counting them myself not half an hour ago. Yes—you've got them all there and I should help myself to a few if I were you. They don't pay you too well in the police, do they? But don't touch one of those five-fifties, whatever you do. They're quite new notes and the totalisator people evidently got them straight from the bank so their numbers are known of course."

He leant back and chuckled sarcastically.

"Really, I've quite enjoyed this little half-hour. It's been quite as good as a play. The clever inspector tactfully extracting information from the stupid man of crime."

He laughed immoderately. "But what a sell for you, Mr. Inspector. You would have found the notes in the first place in which you looked for them and here you've been wasting all this precious time confiding in me unnecessarily, and

paying me pretty compliments to get me in a good humour. I tell you, however, the compliments have quite pleased me all the same."

The inspector looked rather sheepish. He was busy going through the notes that he had found laid out in the drawer.

"But of course," went on the Smiter rather sadly, "I must say your luck was in all round this time. I wasn't expecting any visitors to-day, and I don't mind telling you the notes have never been in the house at all before this afternoon. They were hidden before where you would have never found them. But come on, let's have that cigar you promised."

The inspector smiled good-humouredly in spite of the little annoyance that he felt.

"All right, Doctor, just one moment and you shall have your cigar. Then we must be going."

"One thing more," said the Smiter, "there's that diamond ring I took too. I'm afraid I can't give you the ring because I've thrown it away, but there's the diamond inside the piece of putty in the tool box. I shouldn't give that up if I were you. Keep it for yourself, man." He chuckled amusedly. "You may be glad of it some day; it would look very fine for instance in an engagement ring."

The inspector scowled.

Five minutes later and the Smiter was being escorted between two detectives to the waiting car. He stopped suddenly on the garden path and stood sniffing at the air.

"Don't hurry me," he said sharply. "I'm taking my last smell of the sea. Good old sea," he exclaimed sadly, "how full of peace you look to-day. There are not many things I shall be sorry to leave, but at any rate you're one. I shan't be seeing you again. Good-bye. Goodbye." He ended with a choke in his voice, but he recovered himself quickly. "Oh, by-the-bye, you men," he said pleasantly, "don't be too thirsty with that whisky in the tantalus there." He nodded his head meaningly. "Cyanide of potassium's not good for the health, you know."

Very quickly the car moved away.

Truly an eventful day for all concerned. A day of strange happenings, and, surely, one not the least strange—Maude McIver knew at last she was in love.

Chapter XI

Sons of the Jail.

THE following evening, just towards dusk, three men alighted from the train at Glenelg. They walked out of the station together and then stood quietly chatting for a moment in the road.

"Well, so long," said one of them at length. "I'll follow you in ten minutes." He took out his watch. "Yes, in ten minutes to the tick," and he walked abruptly away up the street.

One of the other men grinned. "Andy's a devil for system," he remarked. "I'll bet he's not ten seconds out," and they turned off at once in the opposite direction.

"First on the right," went on the man who had just spoken, "second on the left and then straight on for about half a mile. Small white house with willow

tree in front garden. Right opposite large mansion surrounded by red brick wall. Walk straight in." He spoke in a monotone as if he were reciting some instructions that he had learnt by heart.

For some minutes then there was silence. It seemed as if they were both oppressed by the importance of something that was about to happen. Then one of them spoke; he was the smaller and much more smartly attired of the two.

"Really, I shall be glad to see his old phiz again; it seems ages, instead of little more than a year, since we last saw him."

"Oh! he's all right," growled the other, "if he'd only cut out his bad temper, his rages——"

"Do you smell those sandhills, Burke?" suddenly interrupted the first speaker in great excitement; he dropped his voice to a whisper. "What do they remind you of now—don't you remember?"

His companion swore angrily. "Damn you, Phil, you're always on the jump about something. What the devil is it this time?"

"The smell of this sand here—doesn't it call up anything to you?"

The other looked round irritably. "No," he replied curtly, "it's just ordinary sand to me, that's all."

But the man he had called Phil, had stopped walking in his excitement.

"Lord," he exclaimed, "and the whole place is exactly like it, too. Why, Burke, these sandhills are the very like of those round that bungalow the Smiter had at Semaphore, and by cripes as we walk here it's just as we were walking that very night when we were spied on by that fellow. You know, the young chap we shot and threw into the sea," he stared nervously round. "I tell you, man, this road calls up everything to me—the night just coming on, the smell of the hot sands, and you and I just going to meet the Smiter." The speaker's voice began to quaver. "By hell, Burke, I don't like it; it's an evil omen, we must turn back."

But his companion gripped him by the arm.

"Come on, you fool. You're like a baby with your ideas. What does it matter if that night was like this? It was the same time of year, wasn't it, and the coasts are all the same about here."

"But I don't like it, Burke," reiterated the other, and he shook his head. "I'm sure it means danger to us again."

The big man's eyes began to glint angrily. "Come on, Phil," he said menacingly, "and come on quickly too. If you don't I'll break your arm."

The threat was evidently effective for their walking was at once resumed, and in a few moments it seemed that the smaller man had recovered from his nervousness, for he suddenly commenced to laugh softly to himself.

"Yes, I am a fool, Burke," he said, "but still I'm sensitive to things that you're not, and I notice a good deal more than you ever do." He stretched out and pointed with his finger. "Look, there is the little white house and opposite to it is the red-brick wall." He drew in his breath suddenly with a sharp intake. "Lord, look at that big house now," he exclaimed excitedly, "the one surrounded by the big wall."

"Well, what of it?" snarled his companion. "You're like a shickered fool to-night."

"But don't you recognise it—haven't you seen it before—the picture of it, I mean, in the newspapers?"—his voice dropped to an awe-struck whisper. "It's Clyde House where that old man was strangled in Glenelg about a month ago."

"Damnation," said the tall man, his interest precipitated at last, "and the Smiter living just opposite." He spat on the ground. "What a nerve!"

"He did it, of course," added the other. "We said at the time it looked like his work."

"Yes, he did it sure, but why——" the tall man was thinking hard, "why the hell did he start working so near home?"

They had stopped walking and were standing both quite still. Darkness was falling quickly and they stared with something like consternation on their faces into the shadows up the road. The tall man was the first to recover.

"Well anyhow," he said brusquely, "it doesn't matter to us at all. The Smiter was all right a couple of days ago and if he survived up to then—I guess he's all right now. Come on, we'll soon see, but we'll walk by first, to make sure."

They drew level quickly with the White House. A light was burning somewhere within and there was a light also on the outside verandah. They reached the garden gate and were making to pass by when suddenly the tall man whispered exultingly.

"It's all right, Phil. I told you so. Look, there's his binoculars on the table there and a box of his cigars. I know that damned blue label well. The old boy's been having visitors, too, by the look of it. Trust the Smiter to do himself well."

The light shone squarely on the verandah table and there was certainly every appearance that several people had been enjoying themselves that afternoon. There were three or four empty glasses, a bottle of whisky, two syphons of soda water and a plate of biscuits. Also several chairs were bunched close round the table.

But the small man shook his head and wanted to hang back.

"Oh, I don't like it, Burke," he whispered, "it looks a plant to me. The Smiter's much too tidy to go in and leave things about like that; besides he wouldn't have left the light on. It's not his way to waste anything—ever."

"Oh, you fool!" was the quick rejoinder. "You'll drive me crazy with your idiotic ideas." The voice turned into a jeer. "I'm going in anyhow and I'll tell the Smiter you were afraid," and without more ado the tall man noisily pushed open the gate and proceeded to walk briskly up the garden path. A moment's hesitation and, with a shrug of resignation, his companion followed.

"Walk straight in," jocularly remarked the tall man and he pulled open the wire door. "Good luck to it," he went on with gusto, "I smell cooking."

"Oh, Burke," almost wailed the little man, "I smell policemen—the smell of their clothes, I'm sure."

The lounge hall was in darkness but at the far end there was light from an open door. A sound of rattling plates and dishes came from the back of the house.

"Supper," remarked the tall man gleefully, "and a bottle of nice cool beer,"—he walked boldly forward.

A sudden click, the hall was flooded with bright light and big burly men sprang out from every doorway. There was an oath from Nathaniel Burke, a shrill cry from Phillip Masterton and immediately they were overwhelmed and the handcuffs were clapped on.

There was no struggling on the part of either of them—everything was too sudden. They were blinded by the light and blinked owlishly at their captors.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said Inspector Romilly who had appeared briskly from somewhere near the kitchen door. "You don't know us, but we've been

expecting you." He eyed the prisoners with delighted interest. "Ah! Mr. Burke, I believe, and Mr. Masterton, too. Nathaniel and Philip your Christian names. We're members of the South Australian Police."

"Blast you," was the only comment of Nathaniel Burke.

"No doubt," said the inspector drily and he turned to two men who had just come off the verandah into the hall.

"All right," he asked, "they came quite alone?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply, "we picked them up at the end of the road and there was no one else with them. We watched them all along."

Burke looked at the clock in the hall. It wanted seventeen minutes to eight.

"Search them," said the inspector, "and do it thoroughly now. Mind, they are not ordinary men."

But the search revealed nothing of much interest except that Burke was carrying an automatic in his hip pocket and they each had a return half of a ticket to the city.

"Where have you been putting up?" asked the inspector sharply; "it's no good attempting now to hide anything; it'll all come out."

Burke flashed a covert glance at his companion and his lips curled into a sneer.

"You've got the wrong end of the stick this time, Mr. Policeman," he said coolly; "we don't know what you mean. We're respectable people and we've got nothing to hide."

"Nothing to hide?" said the inspector drily; "what about this automatic for instance?"

"What does that prove?" said Burke, beginning to bluster, "because a man's got a pistol, does that prove he's anybody you try to make out?"

The inspector eyed him sardonically. "You're a fool, man, to try to bluff us now," he said, "and it's only wasting time. You're Burke right enough, and you've been wanted for years."

The prisoner again looked up at the clock; it was fourteen minutes to eight. He smiled almost amiably at the inspector.

"Who is it you say I am?"

But the inspector did not deign to reply; and he turned to the other man.

"You're Masterton," he said sternly, "and your sense will tell you that the game's up. You've nothing to gain by lying for you'll both be identified from Sydney within forty-eight hours." His voice took on quite a friendly tone, "Now tell us where you've been stopping in the city."

The tall man interrupted violently. "Don't say a word, Marmaduke," he cried, "let them find out for themselves. You can explain to them of course that you're in training for the ministry and are a most refined and good young man; that's quite all right."

The inspector turned sharply on the speaker. He sensed suddenly that the man was fooling for some reason and he wanted to fathom what was going on.

Burke glared at him defiantly. "Look away, Mr. Nosey policeman. Stare at me as long as you like. Where d'you think you've seen me before? Was it at the chapel the other night?"

The inspector eyed him contemptuously. "Pick him up," he said sternly; "we won't waste any more time."

But Burke appeared suddenly to have become faint. "Give us a drink of water, please," he said hoarsely; "you hurt me when you pushed me down."

The inspector made a sign to one of the detectives and a glass of water was brought to the prisoner.

"Steady on," said Burke, "I can't drink too fast; let me hold it myself."

There was a minute's silence and he sipped the water slowly as if it were some delicious wine; then covertly, he looked again at the clock. It wanted exactly seven minutes to eight.

"Damn," he swore explosively and his voice rose instantly to a loud shout; "the police are you? Damn all the police, I say.—The police, the police, you'll jail us will you, you damned police, you'll——"

The inspector darted forward suddenly; he understood everything now.

"Stop him," he cried, "stop him; he's shouting to put someone wise. Quick, quick, there'll be another of them outside."

Three of the detectives sprang simultaneously to the door but quick as they were there was one quicker. Burke literally leapt from the chair where he had been placed and flung himself hand-cuffed as he was upon the floor before the door. He clung viciously to the post, kicking and yelling the whole time, and, outnumbered though he was, it was a full minute before he could be pulled away. Then it was found that the door had become jammed in the struggling and another minute slipped by before it could be finally wrenched open.

The detectives tore down the garden path. A woman and two little boys were standing open-mouthed by the gate. They had stopped in passing, interested to know what all the shouting was about.

"Seen anyone about here," cried one of the detectives, "just before we came out?"

"There was a man in front of us," said the woman; "he was just inside the gate but he came out again when he heard the shouting and he didn't wait."

"Which way did he go?", asked the inspector who had followed his men down to the gate; "we're police officers and we want him, quick."

"I don't know," said the woman hesitatingly; "I was watching the house."

The detectives looked round up and down the road and in every direction but to their chagrin the whole place was quite deserted and there was no one anywhere in sight. They had no idea which way to run.

"Never mind," quickly said the inspector, "we may get him yet. He should be Andrew, the garrotter, the last of the gang. He's of medium size, good-looking and with dark eyes, and now he's scared he'll almost certainly double back the same way he came. He has no reason to believe we know anything about him, but it's an even chance he came out with these other two from the city and, if so, they of course all took their tickets at the same time. We've got the return halves of those men inside, and the number of his ticket therefore will be either one after or one before theirs."

They raced back into the house and the inspector hurriedly sorted out the two railway tickets from the prisoner's belongings.

"Second class to Adelaide," he said; "numbers 7423 and 7424, therefore the man we want will have either 7422 or 7425. Get on the telephone quick for everyone to be examined at the barriers. It looks a good thing to me."

Two of the detectives instantly went off and the inspector turned his attention again to the prisoners. Burke had got a nasty cut on his forehead in the scrimmage and a policeman was now rendering him first aid.

"So, so, my friend," said the inspector not unkindly; "you certainly scored one against us there, but I'm afraid it's the last trick you'll ever take." His face broke

into a pleasant smile. "But you're a brave man, Burke, and you stick by your pals;" he turned to one of the detectives; "give him a whisky and soda, and make it a stiff one too."

Burke took down the spirit with evident relish and the inspector went on talking.

"Well, I suppose you'll admit you're Burke now; you're Burke, that's Masterton and the gentleman who's just given us the slip is another wanted friend Mr. Andrew."

Burke smiled amiably; the whisky had not been without its effect. "You'll never catch Andrew," he remarked, "now he's once got away."

"Don't be too certain," said the inspector, "you heard about those tickets just now."

"Pooh!", laughed Burke contemptuously, "Andy's a thinker and he's not a mug like that. He'll tot up every chance you've got against him and our tickets will come into his mind first. Ah! you don't know Andy, he's got a brain like——" he stopped himself suddenly, "like someone else I know."

"Like the Smiter's for instance," suggested the inspector gently. "I noticed you looked round so I expect he's in your mind."

"What have you to do with the Smiter?" asked Burke roughly.

"Oh nothing much," replied the inspector, "except that I interviewed him in this very hall yesterday."

Burke stared hard at the inspector.

"How did you come to get on this job here?"

The inspector smiled most affably. "Well, if I explain that to you," he said lightly, "you'll have to explain some things to me too."

"Hold your tongue, Burke," suddenly interrupted Phillip Masterton; "can't you see he's trying to pump you dry?"

Burke scowled at his companion. "No fear," he growled, "I wasn't going to give anything away." He turned back to the inspector and for a few moments eyed him intently as if he were considering carefully what he was going to say. "Look here, Mr. Policeman," he burst out at length. "I'll answer no questions, understand,"—the inspector shrugged his shoulders indifferently—"but I tell you what I'll do; give me another drop of whisky and I'll be a sport and put you wise to something; it'll be a good thing for you to know. Come on now, it'll be well worth your while."

The inspector smiled. "Pass over another spot, Jackson, but not quite such a big one this time. Now, what is it you've got to tell me?"

Burke drank up the whisky before he spoke.

"It's about Andrew," he said grinning. "You've knocked up against something hot there and I tell you flat I'll be sorry for anyone who stands out too conspicuous in this business." His voice dropped to a warning tone. "If it comes out now that we've got to thank anyone in particular for getting lagged here, then let that blighter keep an eye out for Master Andrew. Oh! you needn't laugh any of you—it's dead truth I'm speaking now." His voice rose again in its earnestness. "Andy's not an ordinary man by a long chalk, I tell you. He takes things that most folks leave alone and when he's got the dope in him there's nothing on earth he won't do. He's like a weasel on a trail then." Burke gritted his teeth together; "and he's as bloody and revengeful as a stoat. Andrew, the garrotter, you call him—well—he's well named, that's all."

"Thank you," said the inspector thoughtfully, "I'll bear in mind what you say."

Burke proved a true prophet when he said that Andrew would get away. He had vanished as if he had never existed and although the authorities were certain that within twenty-four hours of his supposed escape they had combed all possible parts of South Australia, not a trail or a trace of him could be found anywhere. Indeed so negative were the results of all investigations that many shrewd and responsible people were not wanting who were of opinion that he had never been in the State at all. They put down everything to the natural suspicion of the official police mind and considered all broadcasting of the absentee's description as pure waste of time.

Three days later the prisoners were all brought into Court together and an application was heard from New South Wales for their extradition to that State. The application was granted in the cases of Burke and Masterton, but refused in that of J. A. Cloud, the latter being committed instead to take his trial in Adelaide for the murder of McIver at Glenelg.

The three prisoners had nodded in a friendly manner to one another when they had appeared together in the dock and the Smiter had listened with a quiet inscrutable smile to the details of how his two companions had been trapped in the White House.

An intensely dramatic moment occurred, however towards the end of the proceedings, when the presiding magistrate referred specifically and in most laudatory terms to the parts played by Inspector Romilly and Detectives Jackson, Frognal and Hart in effecting the arrests. The prisoner Burke sprang suddenly to the edge of the dock and, refusing to be silenced, shouted that the four officers would now be marked men. He would not give a bean now, he thundered, for the security of their lives and he prophesied that within a few weeks, at most, they would all fall under the vengeance of the still-at-large garrotter, Andrew. A great stir was occasioned in the Court and some minutes elapsed before the interrupter could be silenced and dragged away. It was remarked afterwards that the prisoner-in-chief, J. A. Cloud, had nodded significantly as if he had quite approved of all that was being said.

Chapter XII

Maude McIver.

THE arrest of Joseph Arthur Cloud, in particular, created a tremendous amount of interest almost everywhere, and a great sigh of relief went up in many far-away cities of the world when the news was flashed along the cables under the sea.

In banking circles, especially, was the event received everywhere with the liveliest satisfaction. For so long indeed had he been a thorn in their sides, and for so long had he carried out his bold scheme against them successfully, that the very silence which for months had preceded his arrest had worried them not a little. They had been wondering amongst themselves in what new direction his activities were next going to break out, and in what unfortunate part of the world his offences against these organisations would be resumed.

The highest praise was lavished unstintingly upon the authorities of South Australia, and when the particular part that Inspector Romilly had played in the arrest began gradually to become realised, his achievements were in many ways lifted almost into the regions of romance.

About a fortnight after the day when the Smiter had been committed for trial, Mr. Thomas McIver and Major Poole met on the high road of Glenelg.

"Just come back from Northern Territory," said the former as they shook hands, "but what a time you've all been having since I went away."

"Exciting, very!" remarked the genial major, "but I suppose you've been seeing all the newspapers, haven't you?"

"Yes, I've read everything," replied McIver, "and I shudder every time when I think of that wretch Cloud. I can never get him out of my thoughts."

"But what a devil he was," said the major, "and how he took us all in!"

"All but Inspector Romilly," corrected McIver; "he got on his track almost at once."

"And how he stuck to him, too," said the major enthusiastically, "and just bided his time. Never hurried—but just waited until the tick of the right second and then—'click' and he jailed him right away."

"The arrest was splendid and the act of a clever and brave man."

"Pooh," said Major Poole, "but that's what one would expect of Romilly, courage and brains every time."

"How will he get on with the authorities," asked McIver; "will there be any promotion for him, do you think?"

The major pursed his lips dubiously and shook his head. "Too much jealousy, and not enough influence behind him, I'm afraid." His face brightened considerably; "but there'll be a good lump in rewards anyhow; he's sure of them."

"Yes, and I'm to give him 2,000," added McIver. "I offered that for the capture of the criminal. Now that reminds me, how can I give it him, Major—what's the best way?"

"What do you mean?" asked Major Poole.

"Why, should I send it him by post, should I call upon him, or should I suggest he comes up to the house to fetch it?"

"Ask him up to dinner," said the major promptly, "and let him sit next to the pretty Maude." He smiled knowingly. "I believe he's rather smitten in that quarter, in fact I'm sure of it."

Thomas McIver frowned. "He's a policeman. Major, isn't he?" he said.

The major bristled up. "Yes, and by Gad he's a gentleman too." He eyed the old man very sternly. "Do you know, sir, that for six months he was my superior officer in France? He was one of the finest men we had and was decorated for gallantry on the field. He's a D.S.O."

"Oh, I didn't know anything of that," said McIver, looking rather uncomfortable, "but I certainly admit he quite looks the part."

"Yes," went on Major Poole, "everybody thought a lot of Romilly then and if the war had lasted another six months, he'd have been a brigadier at least."

"Well, well," said McIver, anxious to mollify his friend, "I will certainly ask him up. I'm very glad I mentioned the matter to you."

"Yes, and you be careful about the money question," was the parting shot of Major Poole, "for now I come to think about it, I doubt if he'll take anything from you." He nodded his head vigorously. "You see if I'm not right."

Mr. McIver walked home very thoughtfully. He brought up the matter to his niece at once when he got in.

"Look here, Maude," he said, "about Inspector Romilly. I think we ought to invite him up one evening. I've got that reward to give him, you see, and I want to do it as delicately as possible."

The girl turned suddenly towards the window and busied herself with the arrangement of some flowers.

"He's quite a gentleman," went on the old man, "and Major Poole says he was a major in France and is a D.S.O. You don't mind, do you?"

"Mind?" laughed the girl, looking round. "Why, of course I don't mind, uncle. I like Mr. Romilly very much and think him a very interesting man. He's been very considerate to us too."

Mr. McIver shot a quick glance at his niece. It was unusual of her to express an opinion about any man. "Well," he said slowly, after a moment's pause, "we'll ask him up to dinner for Saturday. We shall be alone then."

In the meantime the inspector had been seeing nothing more of any of the occupants of Clyde House. They had apparently dropped completely out of his life. He had thought a lot about the girl, however, and indeed, in quiet moments, she had been seldom out of his thoughts. Time after time he had scorned himself for thinking of her and one night, very reverently, but very deliberately, he had burnt the white rose that she had given him. He wasn't going to be a fool, he had told himself, and whine for what he knew well could never be his. So he would just forget her or remember her only as a very pretty girl whom everyone would, of course, admire. He made his resolve with the strongest determination possible at the time, but even in the next few hours he had reluctantly to admit to himself that it had produced very little effect. Directly he was alone his thoughts harked back irresistibly to the garden at Glenelg, and in his dreams the proud sweet face of Maude McIver haunted and troubled him to the verge, almost, of despair.

One morning, however, he received a letter in an unknown hand marked 'Private.' Its arrival stirred no interest in him until he noticed suddenly that the postmark on it was Glenelg. It was opened instantly then.

It was from Mr. Thomas McIver, and was a very short little note just asking him to come up to dinner one evening informally, as a friend, and suggesting the following Saturday, if it were convenient. The writer added he should have asked him before, but he had been away in Northern Territory for some weeks and had only just returned to the city.

Inspector Romilly stared thoughtfully out of the window for a long while after he had read it. What on earth had he been invited up for, he asked himself curiously, and what good would it do if he accepted the invitation?

They couldn't want really to make a friend of him, he was sure, and if they wanted to patronise him—well, he wasn't having any. It was just politeness, he told himself, and nothing more. He wouldn't go up—it would be a nuisance and a bother. He would have to buy evening clothes, too, and he would much rather put the money on a horse and give it a run that way. Then he thought of Maude McIver, and his determination not to accept died away all at once. How divinely sweet she had been that last time he saw her. He remembered how she had looked at him that afternoon in the garden when she had given him the rose. Instinct told him that for one moment, then, the barrier between them had been miraculously broken down. Policeman and heiress they had not been then, but

man and woman calling to each other as sex had called to sex down all the ages. How heavenly it had been!

But there—he was a fool again. It was idiocy to indulge in those thoughts. She could never be anything to him. They were both in different worlds. He was a policeman—poor and with practically no prospects, and she was a rich heiress with all the Commonwealth to choose from for a lover.

Still, he would go, if only to show her that out of his policeman's uniform he could be just as were the other men she was accustomed to meet. It was chance only that had made and kept him a policeman. No one need be ever ashamed of him as a friend. Both in France and England as a major in the A.I.F. he had been on intimate terms with the best people in the old country and their bearing and conduct were his naturally. He could flaunt it with the best of them anywhere.

The following Saturday, therefore, at half past six precisely, he rang the bell of Clyde House and gave his hat and coat to the trim maid who answered it.

For a moment the girl did not recognise the immaculately dressed gentleman she was ushering in, and then with a start and a little gasp of surprise she said demurely:

"Oh, if you please, sir, Mr. McIver wants to see you in the library first. He told me to bring you straight in."

Mr. McIver was writing at his desk and there was another start and another gasp of surprise when he, too, realised that it was Inspector Romilly who had entered.

"Good man," he said heartily, at once coming forward to shake hands. "I'm very pleased to see you. Now sit down here for a moment," and he drew another chair up to the desk and resumed his own. "I wanted to see you before we go in to the others. I hoped we should have been alone, but two very old friends turned up unexpectedly to-day and I had to ask them to stay." The old man seemed to hesitate a bit and looked rather embarrassed. "I—I intended to write you some weeks back but then I thought it best to wait until I saw you personally." He smiled kindly. "I hadn't forgotten my promise about the 2,000 reward and I'm delighted to give it you now—you've deserved it, every penny of it." He took a sealed envelope off the desk and held it out to the inspector. "I've put no name on the cheque," he added slily, "but just made it payable to bearer. You can cash it over the counter and no one will be any the wiser."

But Inspector Romilly made no movement to take the cheque. He shook his head decidedly and drew back in his chair. "Thank you very much indeed, sir," he said smilingly, "but I'd rather not take it. I'm very grateful to you though, all the same."

Mr. Thomas McIver looked very puzzled.

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked with a frown,

"I can't take it," replied the inspector; "it's against our regulations to accept rewards from private people, you know."

"Damn your regulations," spluttered the old man. "Do you mean to tell me you're going to refuse 2,000."

Inspector Romilly shrugged his shoulders and sighed resignedly. "I must. It's very good of you, but I can't take it."

"But, man, it's a fortune I want to give you. It's yours by right. I promised it to you. I can afford it and you must take it."

"I can't, Mr. McIver, and I don't want to. Look here—I've been a soldier as well as a policeman, and although I'm no saint, I've got a certain code of honour. I'm sorry, but I have to refuse. Please don't say any more about it for of course it's a temptation to me."

"You're a fool, Inspector," exclaimed Mr. McIver angrily, "and deserve nothing good in your life. No, I don't mean that," went on the old man repentantly, "but I do mean that you're really stupid. I'm very disappointed with you."

The inspector smiled good-temperedly. "Please don't be cross about it," he replied; "a policeman is a machine, not a man, you know."

Mr. McIver shut down his desk with a snap. "Well, well," he grumbled discontentedly, "you'll be a worry to me, anyhow. I shall have to make it up to you in some way or other and it'll be a devil of a job to find out exactly how." Then his face broke into an amused smile. "You're a funny chap, Romilly, but come on now, we'll go into the drawing-room—we mustn't keep them waiting any longer."

The inspector drew himself up proudly, but not without some quickening of his heart, and followed the old man out into the hall.

There were four people in the drawing-room when they went in. Two men, who were unknown to him, and Mrs Carter and Maude McIver. The girl was talking to the two men, but hearing the door open she looked round and her eyes instantly caught his. Just the gentlest dropping of her eye-lids, just the faintest quiver of the pretty lips, and with a becoming little blush, she rose at once to greet him. If she was astonished at seeing him in evening dress, her face in no way expressed it, and long before he had reached her side, she was the cool self-possessed lady of the house again. She smiled nicely and shook hands. Then she introduced him to the two men.

"Sir Charles Andover, Mr. Hiram Pellew; my aunt, Mrs. Carter, I think you already know."

Mrs. Carter bowed stiffly and, almost to the verge of rudeness, stared Mark Romilly up and down. She had not forgotten how once he had ordered her peremptorily to come out and be questioned, and she had not forgiven him for it. She resented, too, that he had been asked up to dinner at all, and she was annoyed that he looked so presentable and well-dressed.

"Just as if he were a gentleman," she snorted to herself; "really, Maude ought to have had more sense, and Thomas, too, for suggesting it."

But the object of her annoyance was not worrying about her in the least. He was determined to enjoy himself that evening, and was chatting in the easiest way possible with the others in the room.

Maude McIver, too, was watching him, and for some reason she dare not even to herself explain, she was feeling quite proud that in appearance he looked such a perfect gentleman. Evening dress suited him so well, and of all the men present he was by far the handsomest and most distinguished.

They went in to dinner and the hum of happy voices soon pervaded softly through the room. Miss McIver occupied one end of the table and adjoining her, on either side, sat Sir Charles and the inspector. Mr. McIver sat at the other end.

"We don't go in for a butler, you see, Mr. Romilly," presently said Maude McIver quietly, when Sir Charles was for the moment replying to some remark of their host. "I'm afraid you'll find this dinner not nearly so exciting as that other one in Glenelg."

"Heaven forbid," he replied piously, looking straight into the lovely dark face now so close to him. "I never knew what was going to happen that night. It was really a very anxious time."

"Well, you must tell me about it some day. There are a lot of other things I want to ask you, too." Then she added with a sweet little half-bow of apology, "I'm afraid you must think us very ungrateful, my uncle and me. We've never written to thank you for everything you've done, but it wasn't because we weren't grateful, really. My uncle was away and I couldn't very well write to you on my own."

The inspector almost frowned. "Please don't say anything about that," he replied. "There's nothing at all for you to be grateful about; indeed, things are all the other way. You helped me perhaps more than you'll ever know."

The girl looked down quickly to her plate, but before she could say anything more the genial voice of her uncle came up from the other end of the table.

"Now then, Romilly," he said emphatically, "I want your corroboration here." He looked at the other two men. "Our friend was Major in the A.I.F.," he explained, "over in France and D.S.O. there, too. No, don't frown, Romilly, you're too modest by a long way. Poole was in here yesterday and telling us all about you, or we might never have known what an angel we were entertaining unawares. Poole told us all about what you did in France. Now, young man, you're getting red."

"Don't worry, Mr. Romilly," smilingly broke in Maude McIver, "Major Poole was very nice about you and only told us things that as Australians we're very proud of. But what is it you want corroborated, uncle?"

"Oh, yes, I was forgetting. Now, Romilly, do you think you could find a single Australian soldier who didn't appreciate and wasn't grateful for the kindness he received in England?"

"No, sir, I'm certain I couldn't find one. Next to the fighting, the happiest thing we can remember is the way we were received into the English homes. It humbled us a bit too, for those of us who went over-seas will never think again that a good Australian is better than a good Englishman. We've learnt our lesson thoroughly. There was too much of the village mind about us over here before."

"Well, Major Romilly," smiled Sir Charles, "I'm very glad you thought we did you well. I'm in the Home Office over there you see. Your boys were an eye-opener to us, I can tell you, and we might have been very jealous if we hadn't known you were all in the family. But you, yourself—you left the Army, I suppose?"

"Oh yes; I went back into the Police."

"You're Chief Commissioner here then?"

The inspector laughed. "I wish I were. I'm only inspector and not a senior one even at that."

There was an embarrassed silence for a moment and then the quiet-looking Mr. Pellew broke in, in an unmistakably nasal drawl.

"Wa-al, you're a mighty creditable-looking one, anyhow. I must say that. Sure, if they've men like you for inspectors over here—to qualify for Commissioners, they'll be wanting Field Marshals and archangels to properly look the part."

They all at once laughed merrily, except Mrs. Carter who took up the conversation next.

"Oh, but Inspector," she said, rather sourly, "you must have found it very dreadful to go back to police work. To see that the public-houses close at proper time and stop betting and all that."

The inspector showed his strong white teeth in an amused smile. "There are worse things than that by a long way, Mrs. Carter," he replied. "Point duty, for instance. Directing traffic is a horrible thing. You're always expecting to be run over, and in muddy weather you get just grimed up with mud. The motors splash you terribly."

"Oh, now please tell us who drive the more carelessly, Major Romilly," broke in Miss McIver sweetly, bending forward in the friendliest way possible, "men or women? Come now, be honest. I want to know. We're always arguing about it here, uncle and I."

"No, Maude, I won't have it," interrupted her uncle in mock displeasure; "you're corrupting the jury with your smiles." He appealed to the company generally. "How can the poor man speak truthfully when she's looking at him like that?"

"Quite right, sir," agreed Mr. Pellew. "If she looked at me like that I'd have to say anything. Major Romilly, if you speak, sir, I'll take back that pretty compliment I paid you a minute or two ago. You'll be as weak as I am always with a pretty girl."

The girl pretended to sigh in disappointment and the conversation drifted again to the other end of the table.

She glanced down at her plate and then, looking up suddenly, found the inspector's eyes upon her.

"Thank you," he said quietly, "for coming to the rescue, but I'm not ashamed anyhow."

"I didn't think for a moment you were," she rejoined equally quietly, and then she added, smiling back, "I knew aunt would never forgive you for making her come out that morning. She's always most good-hearted, but very prejudiced once she's fancied someone's offended her."

After dinner the girl played to them, and then later they sat on the verandah in the dark, listening to the distant strains of the band in Glenelg. The night was soft and warm, and the faint moon just broke through the shadows on the sea. A silence fell upon them all, and they sat each hushed in their own thoughts.

One there was who watched the girl just by him, with her face turned sideways, and every line of the lovely profile showing up clear against the sky. He noted the beautiful low forehead, the curving of the sweetly-parted lips, the chin that told of character, and the queenly poise of the shapely little head. His eyes followed longingly the lines of the slim proud neck and rapturously he took in the rise and fall of the exquisitely-moulded bosom. An angel almost he thought her, and of the very type of woman that in all ages had atoned for the pains and disappointments of life, and made love the great eternal recompense for the sorrows of the world.

And Maude—what of Maude?

All like a fierce and terrifying storm had love come into her life. She hardly herself knew exactly what had happened yet, but she realised there was something different in every way about her. Her very body seemed to have undergone some wonderful physical change, and all her senses throbbed with

some strange and new emotion trying to express itself in a thousand different ways.

There were thoughts and longings that she did not understand. Thoughts that frightened her, and longings that she dared not dwell on for their very wonder. She had known nothing of love before, and had been scornful that sentiment would ever touch her.

But now here, she herself was full of sighs and tremblings, and all because of this man by her side. She could not help admiring him, and oh! how she hoped that he would think that she was pleasing, too. But she must hide it all because she was a woman and not supposed, of course, to have the feelings that a man would have. She must be cold, or he would think her forward, and for all the world she must not let him see that she admired him and was already thinking of him as her lord.

She looked straight out before her to the sea, but all the while she knew that he was watching her.

Inspector Romilly came out of his delicious reverie with a sigh, and, looking guiltily round, saw that the grizzled old Hiram Pellew was observing him with what he thought was a faintly amused smile.

Throwing away his cigarette, he got up to make his good-byes. Just an ordinary leave-taking he told himself, and then back into the old world again to stifle all his longings and forget.

He was thanking and saying good-bye to Maude, when her uncle said they would both come down through the garden to see him out. They walked down the path talking of nothing in particular, and stopped just by the garden gate.

"Well, Mr. Romilly," said the old man genially, "now you've found your way up here unofficially, we hope you'll often give us a look up when you're disengaged and have got the time."

"I shall be very pleased to," replied the inspector. "I've enjoyed myself immensely. It's been such a perfect night, too. By Jove, how beautifully your flowers smell here."

"Water, my boy, water. That's the whole secret of it all. Maude, give him a flower for a buttonhole. I'm sure he deserves it."

The girl moved up to the trellis where the roses twined. It was the same trellis from where she had picked the white rose that day he so well remembered, but which now seemed so long ago. Mark Romilly felt his heart stand still. For a moment she seemed to hesitate as if she were looking for some particular bloom; then with the same pretty movement as once before, she handed him a flower. Again it was a rose, but this time the colour of it was red. She turned her eyes away as she gave it to him. A moment later and she was shaking hands in the cold and conventional way of slight acquaintanceship.

"Good night, Mr. Romilly, I'm so glad you came," but her eyes were still anywhere but on his. She seemed to be looking on the ground. Then suddenly, just as he was going to turn away, she looked up and flashed a glance straight at him that set every nerve within him tingling.

The lids were lowered, but he could just see her eyes, and there was the message in them that is old as the race is old. The undying challenge of the woman to be taken, and the bugle call to that uneven battle, where, in the end, the woman is invariably both the conqueror and the conquered.

Returning to the house the girl at once said good night, and sought the quietness of her own room, but her uncle rejoined his two other guests who were smoking on the verandah.

"Nice chap, that inspector," drawled Hiram Pellew, "and very good-looking, too. I suppose all the girls are in love with him. Is he married do you know?"

"I don't think so," replied Mr. McIver, "in fact, I am sure not. Major Poole here is his friend and he told us all about him the other day. They were together in France during the war."

"Well, if I'd got a daughter," went on the old American, "he's the very sort of chap I'd like for a son-in-law."

"What," asked the old man incredulously, "an Inspector of Police for a son-in-law? You don't mean it?"

"Sure, and indeed I do. But he wouldn't be an Inspector of Police long, if I were interested in him. I tell you, my friend, there are the makings of anything in that man. I've been a boss in New York State as you know for over thirty years, and I recognise grit at once when I see it. That man's never had a chance. He's a fine fellow, and damn proud, too."

"Oh yes, he's proud enough anyhow. He refused 2,000 before dinner this evening."

"Gosh, tell us about it, do. I'm quite interested in him."

Mr. McIver explained all that had happened, and there was a silence for a few moments when he had finished.

Mr. Hiram Pellew got up with a yawn. "Well. I'm off to bed, old man," he remarked. Then he went on appreciatively—"Fine climate this of yours, McIver, it quite takes the age out of one's bones. I feel romance in me to-night. Love's in the very air, and my thoughts go back to the old courting days." He looked keenly at his friend.

"Do you remember that girl in California, Thomas? We were only boys then. The little dark one, I mean. I forget her name. You used to take her roses, but her father wouldn't have you anyhow, because you weren't strong in the dollar line then. She married that fat Dutchman afterwards—nice little thing she was—it quite spoilt her life." He yawned again. "Lovely girl, your niece, Thomas. Some man's going to be happy there. But take care of her, my boy, and keep the bounders away. I shouldn't think she wants a rich man, but she wants a decent one, anyhow," and with a final "Good night," he went off to bed.

There were three people in the house that night who took a long while getting off to sleep. Maude, because she was in love, Hiram Pellew, because he had taken a particular fancy to Mark Romilly, and, guessing that the latter was in love with Maude, was worrying his very active brain to devise how best he might be able to help them, and old Thomas McIver himself, because he was troubling about all the parties concerned. To begin with, his old friend Pellew had ruthlessly started him on a train of thought that was always a very painful one to him. A confirmed old bachelor, he had nevertheless been once very much in love. As a young man he had ardently loved this little Californian girl to whom his friend had so tactlessly referred, and it had been the great sorrow of his life that he had allowed himself to be so weakly driven from her side. He ought to have stuck to her at any cost, he was always telling himself, and in the end, she would have certainly been his. His weakness had soured his life, and the memory of it was always painful even after all these years. Then, Pellew had spoken pointedly about some happy man who would be marrying Maude one

day, and it would be no good pretending that he was unaware of what was in Pellew's mind at the moment. It was not that he disliked the inspector or was in any way a snob. He did like the man, and admired him very much indeed.

That evening he had looked what he was—a perfect gentleman—and as Maude's husband he would be a credit to her beauty and her wealth. But a man who had been a policeman! What on earth would people say? Of course, he wouldn't be giving even the remote possibility of such a thing a moment's thought if Pellew's remark had had not set him thinking about a lot of little things that he had noticed lately about his niece. She was very interested in Romilly, as she had openly admitted, and only the previous day she had brazenly pumped Major Poole to find out all about him. He had joked with her about it afterwards, and he remembered now that she had blushed a good deal. Then she had fallen in so readily with the suggestion that the inspector should be asked up to dinner when he was given that cheque. His sister had been strongly against his coming, but Maude had quietly put her foot down, and as the house and everything about it was hers she had, of course, at once got her way. Then, too, he remembered she had been rather put out when Andover and Pellew had arrived suddenly from Melbourne, and as old and life-long friends of his, he had said he couldn't well do otherwise than ask them to stay at the house. She had been upset evidently because the inspector would not be dining with them alone. Then that night also she had been much more talkative than she generally was, and several times he had noticed her and Romilly carrying on a little conversation by themselves at dinner. It was so unlike Maude to be interested particularly in any man. Altogether he thought it was very annoying, for it was no good forgetting that the girl was a rich heiress and a splendid catch for any impecunious fortune-hunter who was on the look out.

It was long after midnight before he got to sleep.

Two days after the dinner Inspector Romilly was riding down the great Port Road. He was a fine horseman, and many an approving glance was thrown in his direction as he rode along. But he noticed no one on his way. He seemed preoccupied and thoughtful, and there was an air of melancholy on his face.

Presently a big touring car flashed up. It was being driven rapidly and held but a single occupant. The driver, when just level, glanced casually towards the inspector and then, evidently recognising him, pulled up sharply.

"Morning, Inspector," called out a hearty voice, "but, sure, you've not forgotten me already?"

"Certainly not," the inspector replied at once. "I should remember you anywhere, Mr. Pellew."

They chatted for a few minutes and then the American, looking at his watch, said he must go.

"Say, Mr. Inspector," he said questioningly, with his foot out on the clutch, "isn't this darned land of yours supposed to be a democratic country?"

"Yes, and it is too. Everyone's as good as everybody else here, or we're taught so at all events."

Mr. Hiram Pellew raised his eyebrows slightly as if surprised.

"Wa-al, some of you seem darned slow anyhow," he drawled quietly.

"What do you mean?" asked Inspector Romilly, puzzled at the drift of his remarks.

"Sure, in my country we don't expect the gals to do all the courting, that's all. See?" and before the astonished inspector could think of any reply, he slipped in the clutch and was off down the road.

Chapter XIII

The Help of Larose.

THE trial of Joseph Arthur Cloud for the murder at Glenelg was one of the very briefest on the capital charge ever recorded in the State of South Australia. The prisoner made no attempt at any defence, and listened with cynical indifference to the marshalling of all the evidence against him. Merciless himself he had been always in his dealings with the community, and now he, in his turn, expected no mercy from them. He sat in the dock between two warders, a cold and dominating personality, with his face the perfect study of untroubled repose. And his composure was in no way assumed either, but seemed rather the natural expression of a calm and even disposition.

Only once did he appear to evince any interest at all in the proceedings, and that was when Inspector Romilly went into the witness-box. His eyes gleamed then with anger, when the story was unfolded of the long and patient vigil over the garage of Clyde House.

"But I suspected it," he broke in scornfully, with the only comment that he made throughout the whole trial. "I thought many times that there was smoke coming out of the window and, if it were, I knew it could be only tobacco smoke from someone smoking inside."

The judge bade him, sternly, not to interrupt, and he at once subsided frowningly, as if he were annoyed that he had been betrayed into speech at all.

When the verdict of 'guilty' was announced, and the judge proceeded to don the black cap and sentence him to death, of all there in the Court he appeared perhaps the least disturbed, and he was ready even before his guards, to pass down the steps at the back of the dock.

It was noticed, however, and remarked upon afterwards, that as he turned away, his last look was directed towards Inspector Romilly and Detective Jackson who were standing together at the far side of the Court. His eyes had been seen to roam round as if he were seeking someone and then lighting upon the inspector, he had stared hard for a few seconds. A look of dreadful hatred had crossed into his face and his lips had parted as if he were about to speak. But for some reason he had apparently thought better of it; he had smiled a cold and sinister smile and then, in an instant again, his features had been masked to that complete indifference that had characterised them throughout the trial.

A learned professor of the University of Adelaide, a great student of the human mind, who had been a privileged spectator at the trial, remarked, when dining that evening with some friends, that never could he have conceived so callous an individual as the wretch whom he had seen sentenced to death that afternoon. The man, he told his hearers, had apparently had no interest at all in the dreadful fate that was awaiting him, he had seemingly considered himself as superior to all censure of the community, and he had left the Court exactly

as if he were still holding punishment in store for those who had offended him. In fact, concluded the professor, he seemed exactly like a man in the secret possession of a bomb.

The next morning, Detective Jackson was shot dead by an unknown person in broad daylight, as he was coming out of his house, and, within a few hours, Detective Hart was reported missing and his body discovered later, in the Torrens River, with a thin cord tied tightly round its neck.

The psychology of the crowd is not unlike that of the individual, and they are at all times slow to take in the horror of a calamity that does not directly affect them. They may be interested and indeed shocked but, so long as the trouble is distant far enough from them, only in an impersonal sort of way. But once let that calamity come nearer, let it show signs of spreading so that the well-being of any or every one of them is in danger, then the horror of everything is at once grasped in its proper perspective and a true appreciation arises of the evil that is within their midst.

And so it was now with the inhabitants of South Australia when the assassination of the two detectives became known. They were roused on the instant to a state of consternation and rage.

The murder of Mr. McIver at Glenelg had moved them to an interested and horrified speculation as to the identity of the murderer. The crime had thrilled and excited them, but the interest had been in the main an impersonal one, and did not come home to them particularly in their daily lives.

But the murder of the two detectives was quite a different matter. It had in every way a most direct bearing upon their individual well-being, for it was a defiance to the forces that were protecting them and it was a challenge to the authorities at the very source of their power.

For the significance of their new crimes was clear to everyone. Vengeance had been taken upon the two detectives because of their part in the unmasking of the condemned J. A. Cloud, and suspicion was directed immediately to the one remaining member of the gang who was still at large, namely Andrew, the notorious garrotter, of New South Wales. So they were stung to anger as well as fear, and they called, in a thousand voices, for the wretch to be run down. The more sanguine among them expected that an arrest would be made at once, and when no more than twenty-four hours had elapsed without anything happening they began in no uncertain way to blame the police.

What were the police doing? they asked, and how, with the description of the man so well known, was it possible for him to be still hiding in the State, or, worse still, that he had been able to get away across the border?

But it was all very well to decry the police. They could not make bricks without straw and they had nothing to go on to effect an arrest.

Detective Jackson had been fired at through his garden hedge, but no one had had even a glimpse of the assassin. He had been shot point blank, when only about five paces from the gate. His housekeeper had been on the outside verandah at the time, but although within a few yards of where the murderer must have stood, she had seen no one.

The detective, she said, had been starting for work at his usual time, at a quarter past eight. He had nodded good-bye to her, and proceeded down the garden path towards the gate. She had stopped to look at some plants, and then suddenly she had heard the sharp crack of a pistol. Looking up instantly, she had seen the detective stagger and then fall crashing to the ground. She

had rushed then to his side to find him badly wounded in the head. Terrified at his condition, and knowing there was no one in the house, she had rushed into the road for help.

The railway station of Goodwood was only about a hundred yards away and, seeing some officials there, she had shrieked for them to come at once. But a train was just then passing through the station and for a minute and more, no one had heard her cries. Then, when finally she had succeeded in attracting attention, the unfortunate detective was quite dead and no traces of the assassin were to be discovered anywhere around.

The second outrage was equally as mysterious as the first, and investigation proved equally as barren in results. Detective Hart had met with his death with no witnesses to see him die. He had been visiting the goods-yard of the railway station on North Terrace that morning. His mission there had been to investigate a case of petty pilfering that had taken place from one of the trucks. He had finished his inquiries, and had left the yard just before half past ten. He had been last seen talking to a porter near the entrance gates and, after that, nothing more was known of him until at a quarter past six that evening, when his body had been found in a clump of weeds just near the river bank. But that something had happened to him was suspected even before an hour had passed after he had been last seen, for he should have been up at the Police Court in Victoria Square as witness in an important case at eleven o'clock precisely and it was unlike him to be even a minute behind time. The post-mortem showed that he had been first stunned and then strangled and there were signs of his body having been dragged about a hundred yards before it had been consigned to its final resting place among the reeds.

It was concluded instantly that the two assassinations were the work of the same man, and the authorities, too, were of the same mind as the public as to the perpetrator being Andrew, of the Smiter's gang.

It was known that Andrew was a man of reckless character and that next to J. A. Cloud, he, of all the malefactors who had disturbed the peace of the Commonwealth, was most to be feared. He was a clever, daring criminal, and in desperate situations had many times shown himself to be a man of great resource. For a long time he had been a wanted man. His description had been broadcast throughout the Commonwealth over and over again, but the value of this was largely discounted by the fact that he was a great master of disguises and could so alter his appearance, it was said, that he was unrecognisable even to his own friends.

The police of South Australia needed no spurring on in their endeavours to catch him, and, in the days ensuing upon the deaths of the two detectives, the city and all likely townships were gone through with a fine comb. All the hotels, the lodging-houses, and apartment places were visited, and through the Press generally everyone was invited to make known the presence of any stranger within their midst. A reward of 500 was offered by the Government.

The Chief Commissioner of the Police himself was at first quite hopeful and candidly admitted that he was expecting any moment they might make the arrest. Quite openly he took the public into his confidence.

"You see," he said to a Press interviewer, "in all human probability the assassin is still somewhere in South Australia, for the hue-and-cry for him was raised so quickly that he can have had no opportunity to bolt unobserved into another State by a long distance train. He would have known, too, to a

certainty, that all arrivals anywhere that came from South Australia would be subjected to a most rigorous scrutiny, and he would not have risked it. Therefore he is hiding somewhere in this State, and if that be so it is almost certain that it is Adelaide itself that is giving him sanctuary.

"It is not likely he will have taken to the bush, for sooner or later then he would have to come out for food and, on any suspicions being aroused, he would know we should have the black trackers on him at once. The outlying townships, too, would be risky, for a stranger there, at the present time, would be at once remarked upon. No, he is probably in the city now, and that is why we ought to get him if every one of us keeps on the look-out. His description has been published everywhere and although he will undoubtedly have altered his appearance, still there are three things that should inevitably undo him in the end—he is a stranger to people here in the city, he is of medium height and he has dark eyes." The Chief Commissioner here smiled at the Press representative. "We must remind ourselves, too, that this Andrew, with all his cleverness, is no super-man, and he must somehow eat and drink and have somewhere to sleep too."

The remarks of the Chief Commissioner made a great impression in the city, and everyone was at once buoyed up with the hope that the desired arrest would eventuate, at least, within the course of a few days. But when a week went by and nothing had happened, people began rather to take the view that the Chief Commissioner had overstated his case and, when a fortnight had passed and still no one had been brought to book, there were few, if any, who were not of opinion that somehow the assassin had once again proved himself too good for the powers that were.

There was another aspect of the case too that was becoming now more and more insistent in the public mind. Had they heard the last of the garrotter they asked themselves, or were there more horrors yet to come? What about Inspector Romilly and Detective Frognal the two other officers who had been responsible for J. A. Cloud's arrest. Were they marked out for assassination, too, and was the wretch Andrew only just biding his time to wreak his vengeance on them when he could?

And it was not only the Man in the Street who regarded matters in this light. His apprehensions were prevalent in official quarters too.

One afternoon the Chief Commissioner himself sent for Inspector Romilly and he eyed him sternly when he appeared, handsome and debonair as usual, as if he, at least, had no care in all the world.

"I don't like it, Romilly," he said gruffly; "if we don't look out, you and Frognal will be the next ones to go. That fellow Burke knew what he was about when he said you would be all marked men."

"He told us something of the kind, too, sir," replied the inspector cheerfully, "when I got him that evening at the White House. He warned us then that Andrew would get busy if any of us should figure too largely in the arrest."

"Then why the devil didn't you act on it?" asked the Commissioner irritably. "With this type of man, precautions are never thrown away."

"Sir," said the inspector slowly, "we are always threatened." He shrugged his shoulders. "But until the other day, we have always lived."

"It was a mistake anyhow that your names were mentioned," went on the Commissioner; then he added grimly, "but I suppose it was only natural. It was a fine piece of work."

The inspector looked out of the window; apparently he had nothing to say.

"But what are you doing, man?" went on the Commissioner brusquely, "for unless we get Andrew soon, it seems to me that you and Frognal are both dead men."

The inspector spoke drily. "Detective Frognal is a brave man, sir, and he is carrying on his duties in the usual way"—he drew himself up proudly—"and I, too, sir, am not unaccustomed to being under fire."

The Commissioner scowled angrily. "You shall both have leave of absence until we have got the man. You can go away."

Inspector Romilly shook his head. "No good, sir. If the fellow means going for us, he'll only bide his time, besides—besides, it would look as if the force were afraid."

"But I don't like it, Romilly," reiterated the Commissioner in dismissing him; "we are fighting in the dark, and I tell you frankly, it will be no surprise to me to learn any day now that something has happened to one or both of you two."

And that the Commissioner was amply justified in his misgivings was soon proved, for less than a week later, and just three days before J. A. Cloud was to suffer the extreme penalty of the law, the dead body of Detective Frognal was discovered on the railway line between Woodville and Kilkenny, just after the passing of the mid-day train.

An engine-driver on a city-bound train was the first one to see it, lying just off the permanent way and he pulled up at the first signal box to report. The police were at once notified, and the body was picked up and brought in. Immediately then, it was recognised as that of Frognal, and from the nature of the injuries it was clear that the detective must have come from a passing train. His back was broken and there were terrible injuries about the head. The body was still warm when it was found, and it was at first thought that the tragedy was purely accidental, but an examination of the carriages of the particular train from which he must have fallen revealed unmistakable evidence of foul play. In a smoking compartment two carriages distant from the guard's van, there were signs that a deadly struggle had taken place, and one of the seats there was smeared over with blood. At the autopsy also, it was proved that he had been savagely man-handled, at the throat.

The authorities were stupefied at the daring nature of the outrage, for the crime had been accomplished in the middle of the day and with many people on the train at the time. Indeed, it was considered marvellous that no one had heard sounds of the struggle or seen the body being thrown out.

No trace of the perpetrator of the deed was discovered, and in the feverish investigations that ensued, no clue of any kind came to light. No suspicious person had been seen either before or after in the vicinity of the crime, and at no station farther down the line was there any recollection of any passenger having alighted from the train, who exhibited about him any signs whatever of having been in a struggle or a fight.

The assassin, as twice before, had vanished like a shadow in the night.

Upon the following Tuesday, at five minutes past eight, Joseph Arthur Cloud was duly 'hanged by the neck until he was dead.' He died cynical and indifferent to the last, and spectators at the execution said that the final expression of his face was that of a smile.

Later, the same morning. Inspector Romilly sat alone in his room. He looked worried and it was evident his thoughts were not pleasant ones. In fact, the

past three days he had not been having at all a happy time. People had been making a fuss about him, and he could not appear anywhere in public without being made at once the cynosure of all eyes. Everybody stared at him, and he knew quite well what was in their minds. They were regarding him in the light of a dying man. He had heard expressions of pity from them, and once a woman near him had crossed herself and burst into tears. He himself was quite aware he was in danger, but he was prepared to face that, and it annoyed him that everyone should interfere in his affairs and take it for granted that he had only a few more days to live.

The previous day he had been on duty at the races at Victoria Park, and the whole time he had seen people watching him. They had edged up to him and pointed him out to one another. Some of them, indeed, had almost seemed to expect that he was going to be shot publicly.

He leaned back in his chair and looked despondently out of the window. It was dreadful, he thought, the difficulty the police force of South Australia were now in. They could find out nothing; they could make no headway; they could not even protect themselves. Something must be very wrong somewhere, for they were like children in the hands of this man who assassinated where he pleased. What a tragedy it was that they had no great detective among them—no great detective, for instance, like Gilbert Larose. Ah, Larose! Larose would have soon discovered something, now, wouldn't he? He would have soon run the man to earth if he had been in South Australia. But Larose was one of a million; he was a man almost with a mind inspired; he was a prince of detectives—a very king among the trackers of crime. He——

His meditations were abruptly interrupted by a constable who came in with a visiting card and a letter.

"A clergyman to see you, sir; he says the matter is very urgent, but will you please read the letter first."

The inspector looked at the card.

"Rev. Thomas Bloggs, Sydney," he muttered. "Now, what the devil——" he began, and then his eye fell upon the letter. "Great Scott," he ejaculated, "from Larose—now that's wonderful."

He tore the envelope open quickly. It was a very short letter and dated Sydney, two days previously.

> MY DEAR MARK,
>
> re the trouble you are in.
>
> The bearer of this, the Reverend Thomas Bloggs, is a friend of mine and he thinks he can help you in the clearing up of these crimes. At any rate be patient with him, for he is a good fellow.
>
> Believe me always, my dear Mark,
> Your affectionate friend,
> GILBERT LAROSE.

The inspector read through the letter twice, but from the expression on his face the second perusal left him even more puzzled than the first.

"A clergyman," he muttered. "A clergyman to give us help."

"Show him in," he said at length tersely, "but if I touch the bell twice, come in and say I am wanted by the Chief. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied the policeman and his face broke into a smile; "he's a peculiar looking man."

A minute later and the Reverend Thomas Bloggs was ushered into the room. He was a man about thirty and he had an ordinary commonplace looking face. His complexion was pasty looking, he wore a pair of small pince-nez, and he had a weak tremulous mouth. He had straight black hair and he walked with a stooping gait.

"Good Lord," muttered the inspector, "and this comes from Gilbert Larose."

The clergyman advanced hesitatingly. "Mr. Romilly," he said in a gentle voice.

The inspector stood up and bowed. "The same," he replied smiling. "You come from my friend Larose, I understand. Take a seat, will you?"

The clergyman sat down on the chair in front of the desk. In spite of his generally limp appearance he was evidently a man of business, for with no further preliminaries, he at once proceeded to abstract a bulky envelope from his breast pocket.

"Mr. Romilly," he began quietly. "I have been reading about the tragic endings of those three officers of yours and it struck me I should be able to throw some light upon the matter. I consulted my friend, Mr. Larose, and he advised me to come to you at once."

"Very much obliged, I am sure," said the inspector, and he glanced down covertly at the letter of introduction that the speaker had brought.

"Oh yes, it is I, all right," said the Rev. Thomas Bloggs, instantly taking in the intent glance that the inspector had given to the letter, "and that is Mr. Larose's handwriting sure enough. We are great friends, he and I."

The inspector reddened uncomfortably, he did not like it that his thoughts should be so easily read.

"Oh, I know it's his handwriting," he said quickly and he smiled to cover his annoyance. "I should know it anywhere."

"Well, he thought I could help you," said the clergyman modestly. "I have read all the newspaper reports you see."

The inspector bit his lip to repress a smile. He did not really know whether to be amused or angry. Gilbert Larose, of all men, to send a creature to him like this.

The clergyman took some newspaper cuttings out of the envelope and laid them out before him on the desk.

"It seems to me," he began slowly, "that some very important points have been missed, points quite unimportant individually in themselves, but which, if taken altogether, link up the evidence in a surprising way and narrow down the field of inquiry to quite a manageable extent "—he shook his head reprovingly. "I cannot understand how these points have come to be overlooked."

The inspector reddened again, but it was with anger this time. He was in no mood to be trifled with and the fellow's remarks were savouring of impertinence now.

The clergyman picked up a cutting. "This is an extract from the report of the first inquest," he said; "the one on Detective Jackson, where his housekeeper runs out into the road directly after he has been shot. Hum!—let me see—ah, here it is—'She ran out of the garden to get help, there was no one in the road, but she saw some officials by the railway station.' Now, she doesn't say how many officials she saw; she may have seen three or four, she may have seen two, or perhaps she may have seen only one. At any rate she saw someone in

uniform there, but as to what the exact nature of the uniform was we are kept in the dark." He looked up inquiringly at the inspector. "Now was it a station master's uniform she saw or was it only a porter's? Probably the latter, for a train was leaving the station at the time and it is the custom at all small stations, I believe, for the station master to be on duty, on the platform, to superintend. So in all likelihood, it was just a porter she saw when she ran out into the road."

The inspector looked out of the window and repressed a yawn. He was bored. He had gone through them so many times, that he knew all the inquest reports, almost off by heart. Why had Larose sent this man to him, he asked himself again? It was beyond a joke.

The clergyman went on, and his voice lapsed into a drone.

"Now we come to the second inquest—that upon Detective Hart—and I think I may remark here that I take it for granted that the detective was at least an ordinarily astute man. The fact that he had been five years a detective at headquarters and that you, yourself, personally selected him to assist you in the shadowing of J. A. Cloud, both prove conclusively that he was experienced in his profession, and had all his wits about him. He must too have been deeply affected by the manner of the death of his colleague, Detective Jackson, and have realised perfectly well that his own life was in probable danger from the same hand. Therefore, we may take it that he would be very much on the look-out—that he would be on his guard."

The inspector had looked back from the window, and was now intently watching the speaker, with a look of curious perplexity upon his face.

"Well," continued the clergyman, "to return to this inquest on Detective Hart. He had been investigating some pilfering from a railway truck we are told. He had left the goods-yard and he was seen," the clergyman spoke very slowly here and his voice seemed suddenly to deepen and to lose its drone, "he was last seen—talking to a porter—a man in uniform again."

The inspector sat up with a jerk. He drew in a sharp breath and the hand that had lain idly on his chair clenched itself until the knuckles stood out white. His lips parted and his face looked almost as if he were in pain.

But the Reverend Thomas Bloggs apparently noticed nothing, for he bent, close-sighted, over a third cutting that he was holding in his hand.

"Now we come," he said, "to the case of Frognal and at once we have the railway again. Thrown out of a train this time. As before—a warned, suspicious man—doubly warned, however, and doubly suspicious this time, a man who must have been actually on the look-out for the very end that eventually overtook him. No mention certainly of any men in uniform here, no tale of porters or officials, but still—still——"—the clergyman's voice became low and stern—"as we have to fill in the blanks of those last few minutes for ourselves, is it difficult to imagine how safe a passport to his side a uniform would have been—how he would have been lulled into security by the proximity of a railway official of any kind, how a murderer in a porter's coat, for instance, would have been enabled to draw close, and how that dreadful neck hold would have been effected without the slightest chance of the victim breaking clear?"

The clergyman suddenly stopped speaking. It seemed the vision he had conjured up was affecting him and that he wanted time to calm himself down. And he was not by any means the only one whose emotions had been stirred. The face of Inspector Romilly was the very picture of distress. All on the instant

as it were, he had been stunned into enlightenment. Chagrin and anger were struggling in him, for he was mortified to the last degree that he and everyone else, too, should have missed the line of thought that had just been suggested to him.

And it was all so probable too! A man in a porter's uniform. Of course that would explain everything. The assassin would have been enabled to move freely about everywhere and, even with all eyes on the look-out for him, no one would have given a railway official even a passing thought. There would not have been the slightest suspicion at any time.

The inspector spoke after a long time, and he put as much carelessness into his voice as he possibly could assume. He had pulled himself together and his face was masked in calm.

"Quite an ingenious theory, Mr. Bloggs," he remarked carelessly; "the only flaw in it is, however, that strangers to this city do not get taken on as railway officials as easily as you think. It's a difficult matter to get employed on the railway at any time and it means a long waiting, generally, before your turn comes."

"Pooh! pooh!" said the clergyman; "whoever suggested, pray, that the man had got a job on the railway? All he did, probably, was to steal a porter's coat."

The inspector this time got even redder than before; he was being taught his business with a vengeance, he thought, and the mortification of it was, his teacher was this stupid-looking man.

"Send for the Report Book," continued the clergyman, insinuatingly, "and see if any thefts were reported from a railway station or from some porter's house about that time."

The inspector glared hard at the speaker, but the clergyman was now, in his turn, looking out of the window and was apparently oblivious of the ill-favour he was in. A long hesitation, and the inspector touched the push of his bell.

"Bring the Report Book, please," he said to the policeman who immediately appeared; "the reports of last month I want."

"The reports for about the 9th instant," supplemented the clergyman very softly, "for the first days of the second week."

The door closed and there was silence in the room. The clergyman continued to look out of the window, and the inspector was occupied in looking at him. Quite a different expression, however, had all at once come into the inspector's face. It seemed now that he was in a way of being only very puzzled and that his anger had at all events died away. Quietly, but intently, he looked the clergyman well up and down. He scrutinised his face, his hair, the clothes he wore and next his hand. Then he picked up the envelope in which the letter of introduction had come and thoughtfully—very thoughtfully—he stared at it as if it were a strange thing, the like of which he had never seen before.

All at once then—he smiled.

A tap on the door and the policeman brought in a large thick book—he placed it on the desk and at once retired.

The inspector took out a cigarette from somewhere in his desk and, having lit it, proceeded briskly to go through the book before him.

"Perhaps I might join you," suggested the clergyman meekly. "I find tobacco very soothing when I have to think."

"No, no," replied the inspector brusquely and without looking up, "clergymen shouldn't smoke; it's bad for their nerves."

The Reverend Mr. Bloggs took the reproof quite meekly. He just sighed and continued watching the inspector at his task.

"April the 7th—8th," muttered the latter with his finger running quickly down the pages, "no, nothing relevant there. April 9th: no, nothing there either; April 10th, ah! here we have it; this might be the very thing we want. 'Phone message from Ovingham railway station, received 6.40 a.m. Station office broken into during the night. Entrance effected through skylight. Unsuccessful attempt made to open the safe. Thief probably interrupted, for nothing taken except about ten shillings worth of postage stamps, and some porters' clothes."

The inspector leant suddenly across the desk and seized hold of one of the clergyman's hands.

"Gilbert, my boy," he exclaimed with enthusiasm, "you shall have your cigarette at once. It was the action of a real pal to come all the way to help us, and I believe you've scored a bull's eye, first time."

The clergyman betrayed no astonishment, but at once warmly returned the hand clasp and then almost in one moment, shed his hair, his eye-brows and his pince-nez. His face seemed to alter in outline and the tremulous mouth was replaced suddenly by one of decision and strength.

"But where did I go wrong, Mark," he asked plaintively; "don't spare me for I'm always learning, you know?"

The inspector seemed as pleased as a schoolboy.

"Ah, you young rogue, and don't you think I knew who you were all along? Didn't I recognise you at once as the great Gilbert Larose?"

"No, you didn't," said the other decisively. "You hadn't a suspicion in the world, until I called for that beastly Report Book."

"That made me think, I admit, Gilbert," laughed the inspector. "You knew too much for a parson I could see." He picked up the envelope on the table—"But it was this that finally gave you away."

"How?" asked Larose. "It's one I brought with me from Sydney and I wrote the letter there."

"But you overdid it, my boy. You have made the envelope look altogether too travel-stained for the short journey from Sydney. I recognised your handwriting, of course, but it struck me the letter had been purposely given a rough passage in your pocket to convince me that it had been written there; either that, I was sure, or else you had been slovenly in taking care of it on the journey. I didn't think the latter, for your other envelope there with the newspaper cuttings was quite clean and even unrumpled." The inspector laughed again and shrugged his shoulders. "A small thing, Gilbert, I admit, but it made me suspicious and then—I saw through your make-up at once."

Larose put back his wig and eye-brows and adjusted his pince-nez. He was smiling now, himself.

"Well, I give you one there, Mark," he said. "I ought to have remembered I was dealing with an intelligence like my own." He grinned in amusement for a moment and then his face dropped back and took on cold grave lines. "But look here, Romilly," he went on very seriously, "you're in great danger, old man, as great as you can possibly imagine." He lowered his voice impressively and outstretched his hand. "I know that fellow, Andrew, mind. He's been a thorn in my side and I've known all his ways and tricks for years. He's a doped wretch who'll stop at nothing. He'll have you, Romilly, as sure as you are sitting there, unless—we get in on him before."

"I'm sure of it, too, Gilbert," said the inspector quietly, "but up to now there's not been the ghost of a chance of getting in first." He reddened under his friend's intent glance. "I shall always kick myself that I didn't see what you've just pointed out."

"Tut, tut," said Larose modestly, "I only noticed it because I was a long way away. You were too close to things to get the real perspective that I had. But look here, Mark, with any luck now, we'll get the man. I came over in this rig because not a soul must learn I'm in the city. I'm not boasting, but Andrew is a bit afraid of me. He knows I understand his little ways. I've nearly had him several times and if he thinks I'm here specially on his account, then very probably, he'll lie doggo and give us a lot of trouble before we turn him out. But say, Mark, none of you caught a glimpse of him that evening when you nabbed Burke and Masterton at the White House, did you?"

The inspector shook his head. "Not one of us saw him; there was only a woman at the gate."

"Tell me exactly what happened, the little things as well as the big things, you know."

"There's really nothing to tell, Gilbert," said the inspector sadly. "Burke fooled me beautifully that evening. We had tied them both up and I was questioning him. He was quite quiet and was not disinclined to talk. I noticed subconsciously, however, that he kept looking at the clock. Then suddenly he began to shout loudly at the very top of his voice and shrieked out something about 'damned police.' He shouted several times and at last I tumbled to it that he was warning someone outside not to come in. We rushed to the door, but the wretch Burke was there first and it was quite a couple of minutes before we could drag him away and get it open. We ran down the garden to find only a woman and two children, standing in the road. They had heard the shouting and had stopped to see what was going on. There was no man to be seen anywhere but the woman said there had been one about a moment before. He had been just opening the gate she said, when the shouting had begun, and he had at once turned and walked away. She hadn't noticed in which direction he had gone." The inspector sighed. "That was the nearest we got to him, Gilbert, and there has been no trace of him since."

"What was the night like?" asked Larose.

"Bright moonlight," said the inspector, "and there were electric lamps both up and down the road. But there were so many turnings he might have taken and so many ways he might have gone over the sand that it was quite hopeless, with the few of us there, to attempt to follow. The only thing we could do was to try and block him from getting back to the city or unearth him if he did manage to get back there." The inspector shrugged his shoulders. "But we failed in every direction. He had vanished and left no trace."

"The city was the last place he would run to," said Larose meditatively; "more likely the sandhills or the empty spaces by the sea."

"We thought of that," said the inspector, "but on the other hand we argued he would try to get to his luggage before we could find where he had left it. Remember, he had nothing but what he stood up in, and no means of getting any materials for disguise."

Larose shook his head. "You don't know Andrew, my boy. He is a very fox in cunning and would have thought out every move you could possibly make."

"Well," went on the inspector, "we located within two hours where he had put up. He had got a room by himself at the Great Central, and was quite the grand gentleman to judge by his clothes. That's why we thought we should catch him; a well-dressed man would not be able to obliterate himself as easily as one in poor-looking clothes. We had got all his things for making-up, too, and we knew he would be hard put to it to alter his appearance in any way. They remembered him well at the office of the hotel, and we got an excellent description from the receiving clerk there."

"Let me see," said Larose, "that would be exactly six weeks ago; six weeks now from the night when he escaped from you,"—he looked thoughtfully at the inspector—"and from that day to this you have never had the slightest inkling of where he is hiding—no rumour or suspicion of any kind, no traces in any direction?"

"Gilbert," said the inspector impressively, "for six weeks the city has been put through a fine sieve; the whole time we have had our eyes on every place possible where a man could hide, we have watched every hotel, every lodging-house and every apartment house. We have had everywhere in our minds, and yet—never once have we had reason to think that we were near a trail"—he shrugged his shoulders—"the man is simply a ghost that's all. He eats nowhere, he drinks nowhere, and he sleeps nowhere. He only materialises when he commits a crime." The inspector smiled drily. "But my great hope now is on a porter's coat."

Larose looked at his watch and then stood up.

"Well, Mark," he said brightly, "we'll see now what we can do. You know my eccentricity, old man, don't you? I always start off from where the quarry was last seen. It gives me inspiration somehow; it always does. So if you don't mind we'll go down to Glenelg straight away." His voice dropped to an impressive tone, "I want to see that house where the Smiter lived. I'm curious about the environment of that evil man and I have it at the back of my mind that somehow the wretch Andrew would have been curious about it, too. Remember that there is sentiment even among the beasts of crime, and between the Smiter and his associates, vile as they were in our eyes, there was real affection and loyalty, as you know. One thing more, if ever you see Andrew—shoot on sight. No calling to surrender, no pity of any kind. Shoot on the instant, for he's always got his finger on the trigger himself. He's of that type of man who will deal out hell to everyone around, and keep the last barrel for himself. Like the recently departed J. A. Cloud, it's his obsession never to be taken alive. Now come on."

Chapter XIV

Andrew, the Garrotter.

Exactly at two o'clock that afternoon the inspector and Larose met on the path just in front of the White House. The detective was dressed now in ordinary clothes, but he had deemed it best they should each come to the rendezvous by a different way.

"Nice quiet little place this, Romilly," he remarked interestedly, "quite the ideal spot for the headquarters of the Smiter and his gang. Good thing you managed to break them up when you did." He walked up to the garden gate. "Now you tell me the place has been quite unoccupied since the departure of J. A. Cloud?"

"Quite," replied the inspector, "and no one has been in it except ourselves—myself and the Criminal Investigation lot, I mean. Yale locks on both doors. Miss McIver passed over the keys to me after the arrest and they have never been out of my custody since. The place is just as it was when Cloud was living here."

Larose thoughtfully took in the outside of the house. "H'm," he muttered, "one storey, with I suppose the usual four rooms; pretty but quite ordinary and no one would ever dream the dreadful history that it holds," he smiled grimly at the inspector. "They ought to let in a tablet in the wall there, Mark:

'HERE FOR ONE YEAR LIVED AN ENEMY OF THE HUMAN RACE.'"

"Very appropriate, I am sure," said the inspector drily, "and it would add greatly to the selling value of the house. I'll mention it to Miss McIver next time when I see her."

"So this is where the woman saw Andrew," went on Larose, "just where I am standing now."

The inspector nodded. "She said he was just inside the gate."

Larose looked up and down the road and then he shook his head. "No, he would have turned off at once round the sandhills somewhere," he remarked very quietly, as if he were speaking to himself; "it would be harder going than the road, of course, but he would be the sooner out of sight, and he didn't know at all how much start he was going to get. I don't suppose he went very far though, and as it was bright moonlight, he would probably hide somewhere and watch the house." The detective turned round sharply. "Well, come on, Romilly, let's go inside."

In a few moments they had unlocked the front door, and were standing in the hall. The blinds were all drawn and the place was in semi-darkness. The inspector closed the door behind them.

"Pshaw, what a smell of oranges," said Larose suddenly; "didn't you take away all the food?"

"Yes," replied the inspector frowning; "the men were supposed to have cleared it all out the next day."

They went into the front room, and the inspector pulled up a chair and sat down at the table.

"This is where the wretch sat and watched the garage, Gilbert," he said with a sort of shudder. "He'd sit here for hours at a time with his binoculars and in the end it began to get on our nerves. We thought any moment he might try a feeler on us with his automatic."

But the detective made no comment. He was intently taking in all the surroundings of the room and was picturing, in his mind, something of the mode of life that the former tenant must have lived.

"And here, no doubt, all his plans were made," he said meditatively, after a long silence; "here he sat like some venomous spider weaving his web, for instance, for that poor old man opposite." The detective slowly shook his head.

"Oh, if only these walls could speak, Mark, and echo back his thoughts, how we should shudder at the cruelty of the man! His was a dreadful mind and he was Crime incarnate in a way."

They went over the house together and an awed silence came upon them both. With all his sang-froid, the inspector wished himself out in the road again.

They came finally to the kitchen and Larose settled himself then into a well-padded and comfortable arm-chair. He smiled a grim smile. "And here Martin no doubt often sat, too," he said softly, "thinking perhaps of his own death as likely least of all, and yet"—the detective took out his watch—"he's been dead now exactly six hours."

The inspector frowned. He was not pleased at the reminder. Hangings with him were by no means the ordinary affairs of life and the ceremony that morning at the Stockade, in the early light of the dawn, had left an uncomfortable impression upon his mind.

The eyes of the detective roamed intently round the room.

"Hullo," he exclaimed suddenly, "who's been swatting flies?" He got up at once and walked over to the window. He prodded with his finger at some dead flies that lay—on the window-sill and then, after quite a long while, it seemed, he returned thoughtfully to his armchair and again renewed his scrutiny of the room. The inspector leant against the dresser and yawned. He was bored and he wanted to go.

Suddenly—there was the sound of rustling by the fireplace and a mouse came down the chimney. It ran out into the room but catching sight of the two men, instantly wheeled round and ran back up the chimney the way it came. It was down again, however, in another second and this time, braving the inspector's feet, it took refuge behind some cans in a corner of the kitchen. At the same moment, a tiny fleck of plaster dropped from the ceiling on to the floor.

A startled expression came instantly into Larose's face, one almost of incredulous surprise. He dropped his eyes upon the ground. For quite a minute then he remained motionless and then suddenly he looked up at the inspector and began to talk very quickly.

"You know, the Smiter was a most unusual man, Mark," he said speaking loudly, "and in any profession would have made a name for himself if he had gone straight. His intuition was really wonderful and he was one of the finest judges of character I have ever known. For instance, he went into a bank one day to cash a cheque. He had never been near the bank before; there was a whole row of clerks behind the counter at their desks and he just cast his eye down them as they worked. It came out afterwards that he was looking for a likely confederate inside the bank and unerringly, in that one moment, he picked upon the one man who was most likely to serve his ends. With no more ado, he made overtures to him within twenty-four hours, as if he were quite sure his advances would be accepted." The detective sighed. "Yes, he recognised off-hand all the possibilities of a promising criminal in that young fellow and yet for ten years the man had been a most trusted servant at the bank. I'll tell you another anecdote about old Cloud too, an amusing one this time."

Larose went on to recite another episode in the Smiter's career, and then in the middle of it, but without interrupting his speech, he stealthily took a pencil

and a piece of paper out of his pocket and quickly scribbled a few words. Very quietly he pushed the paper across the table and the amazed inspector read:

> THIS HOUSE IS INHABITED, THERE'S SOMEONE ABOVE US IN THE RAFTERS UNDER THE ROOF.

Larose went on talking, and then he motioned for the inspector to push the paper back.

"Where's the trap-door leading to the roof?" he wrote next, and he passed over the pencil as well this time.

"At the end of the hall," wrote the inspector, and the correspondence closed when Larose added underneath. "Now you talk—I want to think."

It was a queer comedy then that was enacted in the little kitchen of the White House. Inspector Romilly, leaning carelessly against the dresser, related laboriously all the happenings that led up to the Smiter's arrest. He took plenty of time in the narration, too, and it could hardly have been said that he omitted anything at all relevant to the affair. But for the greater part of the recital he had no audience, or no audience that was visible, at any rate, for Larose had taken off his boots and treading with the wariness of a cat had disappeared from the room. For three—five—ten minutes he was away and then just when the inspector was wondering how on earth the story could be dragged out any longer, he tiptoed back and very quietly resumed his foot gear.

"Thank you, Romilly," he said with a tired drawl, "you are an admirable raconteur I am sure, and I could listen to it over and over again, but I think we ought to be going now, there's a lot to do when we get back. I've seen all I want to here."

He winked his eye and held out another slip of paper.

"Leave me behind," the inspector read. "I'm sure I'll get him. I believe it's Andrew. Don't worry, but it may be a long wait; perhaps until to-morrow, before he comes down."

Then the detective spoke quite loudly and very impressively.

"But look here, Romilly, we must not be seen together, you and I, and don't tell the Chief even that I am in the city. We'll each go back by the same way we came and I'll meet you at headquarters exactly two hours from now."

They walked noisily towards the hall door, and then Larose plucked suddenly at the inspector's arm.

"Hand-cuffs," his lips framed rather than his voice whispered. There was a moment's hesitation and then the inspector, with a sceptical smile, abstracted a pair from his back pocket and handed them over.

"Too impossible to be true," he whispered softly; he shrugged his shoulders, "but then—you are Gilbert Larose."

The front door was pulled open—there was some shuffling of feet and the inspector, talking loudly to himself, went down the garden path—alone.

A silence then fell over the White House, and the flies descended from the ceiling, and the mouse came out from behind the cans. But it was not the silence of peace and rest, it was not the silence of soft, gentle sleep, it was the silence of men waiting—with Eternity behind the pressing of a trigger.

Up above the rooms of the house and upon a rough bed of sacks just under the roof, was stretched a man. From head to foot he was drenched in perspiration and the expression on his face was one of mingled fury and

dismay. His eyes were wide and staring, and with his head low down against the laths, his ears were strained to catch the slightest sound. With one hand he clutched tightly to an automatic pistol, and the fingers of the other were closed round a small tin box that he was carrying in his jacket pocket. He was so still that it seemed he hardly breathed. He was waiting, but—for what he was exactly waiting, even he himself, with all his intensity of pose, could not have told.

And in the hall below another man was waiting, but he was waiting confidently and with due regard to his convenience and comfort. He had made himself a bed with some cushions in an alcove just behind the front door, and he was stretched out, so that his head just protruded sufficiently round the corner of the alcove to allow of his eyes having full view of the trap-door in the ceiling above. This man had an eager and expectant look upon his face, but with all his eagerness, he was yet still, serene and calm. Like the other watcher, he grasped an automatic pistol with his right hand, but unlike him—from the expression of his face at all events—he seemed to know exactly what he was waiting for.

Half an hour—an hour—passed, and there was no appreciable change in the positions of either of these two men. One continued to lie with his ears strained, and the other continued to stare with a gaze that never faltered upon the trap door.

Slowly the afternoon passed, and the dusk of evening fell, but still—one listened and the other watched. It was a duel of two minds.

Andrew, known as the Garrotter, was very much of the type of man as described to the inspector by Gilbert Larose. A criminal to the very tips of his fingers, he was a man, as has been said, of great daring, and, in times of danger, of great resource. He was also a man of some imagination, and delighted to pit himself against the stereotyped procedure of the authorities with whom he was always at war.

Upon the night when Burke and Masterton were surprised at the White House, he was just about to walk up the garden path when the cries of the former arrested him. He sensed instantly then what had happened, but without losing his head, he turned at once and walked calmly back on to the road. There, without hurrying, he passed the woman and the two little boys. He saw they had been attracted by the shouting and had stopped to see what it was. He walked quite calmly by them, and then, confident that they were giving no attention to him, he broke into a quick run. But as Larose had afterwards surmised, he did not run very far. All places in the vicinity he knew were equally as dangerous to him and equally as safe, so in little more even than a hundred yards, he turned off from the road on to the sand. He found a patch of high grass nearby, and throwing himself down he proceeded coolly to watch the house.

In a few seconds he saw the detectives rush down the garden path and he heard them interrogate the woman as to which way he had gone. But it was plain from her attitude that the woman could tell them nothing; she looked round everywhere, and then he saw her shake her head. He watched the detectives return reluctantly to the house, and then, imbued with a sudden idea, he forsook his hiding-place and, making a wide detour, boldly approached the White House from the back. He crept over the fence into the yard and standing on the windowsill was able to see over the blind into the very room

where the prisoners had been brought. He got a close view of Inspector Romilly and the detectives, and as a matter of pure routine, took careful stock of their appearances for future guidance. He considered the number of them and lovingly fingered the little automatic that he was carrying in his pocket. He had half a mind to empty his pistol among them and then chance it and run.

Presently he saw the prisoners taken away, and then the departure of the detectives from the house. He waited until they had all been gone about a quarter of an hour and then leisurely forced one of the windows at the back and let himself into the kitchen. Believing himself at any rate then safe for the night, he lay down upon one of the beds and in a few minutes was fast asleep. He was up, however, again in the early moments of the dawn, and his first proceeding was to thoroughly explore the house. It was in his mind that he might hide in it somewhere until the hue and cry for him had at any rate partially died down. He judged that of all places in South Australia, the White House itself would be the very last one that the police would search for him. He climbed up through the trap-door into the roof, and making himself a bed between the rafters with some old sacks, for thirty-six hours he alternately dozed and brooded away the time. No one came near the house and no sign came to him from the outside world.

The second evening at dusk he boldly left the house and went in to Glenelg to buy some food. Then, having thought out his plans, about midnight he broke into a suburban railway station and stole, amongst other things some porters' clothes, returning again across country to the White House during the night.

After that everything was easy for him, and clothed as a porter in the regulation South Australian Railway uniform, from henceforward he moved about everywhere exactly as he pleased. Nobody questioned him, and nobody gave him a second look. He went about the city free as air, had his meals regularly at different eating-houses, and returned home every evening to the White House to sleep. He never had a moment of anxiety or misgiving. He took care however to keep as far away as possible from any railway officials whom he saw.

Later, he made no attempt to get out of the city or the State, indeed he was now staying on for a definite purpose. With the vanity always associated with his type of criminals, he had determined to show his contempt for the authorities generally by revenging himself upon the four police officers who had been primarily responsible for the arrest of his companions. He had interestedly perused the daily newspapers, and the threats of Burke during the extradition proceedings had appealed strongly to his imagination. He brooded over the matter, and in a few days the assassination of Inspector Romilly and the detectives became quite an obsession. He learnt all their names from the proceedings at the Police Court, and he easily got hold of their home addresses from a perusal of the voting lists in the Public Library. He killed the three detectives in the way already described, but to get Inspector Romilly, he found a much more difficult matter. Although, to all appearances, quite contemptuous of any danger he might be in, the inspector was nevertheless, however, leaving nothing to chance and three times, almost in as many days, he changed his sleeping quarters. Also, when he had to proceed out on business from the police headquarters in Victoria Square, never by any chance, so Andrew found, did he return by the same way. He always re-appeared from an entirely different

direction. Still Andrew had made up his mind to get him, and he was quite confident it was only a matter of time.

And this then was the position up to that afternoon when Andrew, awaking from an afternoon slumber among the rafters of the White House, heard to his annoyance the voices of Inspector Romilly and Larose down in the hall below him.

For the moment he was only annoyed as he had no idea who either of them were and he supposed without much interest that they were just house-agents, or some people who had come from the proprietor to look over the property. But, mixed up with unlawful proceedings as he had been all his adult life, he was by habit alert always to the possible proximity of any of his natural enemies, the police, and he very quickly took on a graver view of the situation, before even the interrupters had walked the whole length of the hall, for one of them, it struck him, had the unmistakable tread of a policeman.

Immediately then he crawled over the rafters and put his ear down to the crevice of the trap door that led up through the ceiling.

Almost at once he found his suspicions were justified. He heard one of the men below talking about the Smiter and then the other addressed the first speaker as 'Mark.'

"The inspector," he ejaculated to himself, his jaw dropped a little, "and who's the other one now?"

He had not long to wait.

"Gilbert, my boy," he heard the inspector say.

"Gilbert!" hissed Andrew to himself, "Gilbert;" his jaw dropped quite a lot this time, "not Gilbert Larose?"

An icy feeling ran down the garrotter's spine and his automatic was out of his pocket in a flash.

Sweat stood out on his forehead in big beads and his heart pumped like an engine at full speed.

"Gilbert Larose," he breathed hoarsely, "and he's come here!"

Then some sort of reaction set in and he wiped the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve. He smiled a sneering smile and slipped the automatic back into his pocket.

"Plenty of time," he muttered thickly, "plenty of time, and I'll get both of them before they get me."

He heard them go into the kitchen and he prepared to shift his position towards the chimney where there was he knew a loose brick that he could pull out. He must hear every word they said now.

"Who's been swatting flies?" presently he heard Larose say, and the sweat again came to his forehead.

"Yes, damn him," he swore savagely. "It's Larose; he's looking about. Yes, it's Gilbert Larose."

The ensuing half hour then was a terrible one for the listener under the roof—terrible because of the suspense and perplexity he was in. Rack his brains as he might, he could determine in no way whether it was by chance or design, that Larose was so near him now. From his former years in New South Wales, he had a lively knowledge of Larose and, of all the detectives in the Commonwealth, he had fear only for him. Callous and hardened as he was to all the risks of criminal life, the proximity of the Sydney detective now brought a cold shudder into his heart. Larose had nearly caught him so many times;

Larose knew so much about him and his associates, and Larose had so often fathomed the workings of their minds. And now this man was close upon his tracks and within a few feet actually of where he lay. He was certain too that Larose was devising something, for why was he so silent in the room below and why was the coarser-fibered inspector being left to do all the talking. Larose was quick and alert he knew, and it was not like him to listen uninterruptingly to a long story. He should be breaking in continually; he should be asking questions, he should be cutting the narrative short.

Yes, certainly, Larose was plotting something—he was sure.

Then he heard Larose suddenly re-enter the conversation but his suspicions were in no way allayed.

Andrew could be analytical as Larose himself, when he was in danger, and it came to him instinctively that what the detective was now saying did not ring quite true.

There was too much in his tones of the man who had just come to some conclusion and who was masking his intentions in some way.

In a few moments he heard them both apparently leave the house and then, continuing to attempt to analyse the position, his fears and perplexities increased four-fold.

What was going to happen now? he asked himself in a muck-sweat. Was he trapped? Had Larose any suspicion that anyone was hiding in the house? Had he seen any trace of anything in the room below?

Andrew swore viciously under his breath. Curse this shaking of his hands and the dry feeling that had come into his throat! But how, after all, he suddenly asked himself, did he know that it was Larose who had been there? Oh!—but it was Larose right enough, he could be sure of that. No one but Larose could have spoken of the Smiter as that man had done, and the fact alone that the inspector had called him 'Gilbert' clinched the matter there. Well, if it were Larose, that did not mean necessarily that he was aware someone was above him under the roof. What could there be now to have made him suspicious? Ah! but he had asked, "Who's been swatting flies?" That meant something, of course. To his cost, he knew something of Larose's mind.

Larose never asked idle questions, and there was purpose—deadly purpose, always in his mind. Well, if the dead flies had made him curious—what had happened after? Had anything happened at all? What had Larose done next?

At any rate he had gone away—but ah! had he gone away? There had been a lot of shuffling of feet by the front door—too much shuffling, now he came to think of it, and the inspector's voice, he remembered now, was the only one that he had heard as they both were supposed to be walking down the garden path.

Well, if Larose had not gone off with the inspector—he must be waiting somewhere down below in the house and what would he be waiting for then? Waiting for him to come down, of course, so that he could plug him, and then deliver him over to the police. The police! Ah! Perhaps the inspector had already gone off for help and in a few minutes the house would be surrounded and they would try to storm the place. Well—they would never take him alive, anyhow, and he would not be by any means the first to meet with death.

His thoughts ran on and his eyes blinked and blinked in the perplexity that he was in, but always his ears were straining towards the room below and always his hand was ready to the automatic in his pocket.

Slowly the hours of the afternoon passed and then softly dusk fell. Soon it grew quite dark under the roof and the blackness and the silence there were those of the tomb.

Hour succeeded hour and still there was no movement anywhere in the house. Towards midnight, however, Andrew changed on to his other side and the faintest sound of his movement reached to the ears of the watcher in the hall below. A smile then crossed over the latter's face and with infinite care he lifted the safety catch of the automatic that he was holding in his hand. Undoubtedly he was expecting something to happen, for when about a quarter of an hour had passed and everything had settled into stillness again, he sighed disappointedly and returned the catch of his pistol to the safety position.

The night crept on and the limbs of the detective became stiff and cramped with cold. He had to chafe them continually to keep some feeling in them, and it worried him a lot that it was only with the greatest effort that he could continue to stare in the direction where he knew the trap door in the ceiling was. He was expecting now to see a speck of light there soon—the flash of an electric torch.

In the meanwhile Andrew had become gradually affected by the pangs of thirst. He had drunk nothing since the previous morning and the sweats that had bathed him had dried him up like a sponge. He was not cold like Larose for a sort of fever had seized him. The worries of his mind, too, were goading on his body to uneasiness, and he wanted to twist and turn with every moment as he lay. But he dared not move ever so little for if the detective were below, he knew from the thin layer of plaster between them how easily every sound would reach him. So he kept himself immovable, and in time the very stillness began to torment almost as much as the thirst. He cursed Larose deeply.

Then, towards morning it began to come insistently to him that he was a fool, that his fears were all imaginary and that in the hall below there was no one there.

He put the idea away contemptuously at first—but it grew upon him and, encouraged by his thirst and his bodily discomfort, soon almost it had mastered his mind.

Yes, he was a fool, he swore; he had worked himself up into a fever and he had no cause to fear. Just because he had killed a few flies in the kitchen the previous morning, how could anyone, even Larose, guess from that that it was he, Andrew, and that he was then hiding under the roof.

Yes, the whole idea was preposterous and he had worried himself for nothing. He would go down—he would get a drink of water—he would—ah, but still he would give no chances of being taken alive.

A minute later and in the gathering light of dawn he was hitching a length of rope on to a short rail in the rafters, preparatory to taking off the cover of the trap door. He was still, however, holding a pistol in his right hand.

The detective felt sodden for want of sleep. For two nights upon his journey from Sydney, he had been travelling in the train, and now this third night he had never been able to so much as close an eye. Bodily he was exhausted to the last degree, and yet as a contrast—mentally, he was bright, confident and extremely on the alert. It was the certainty that he was right that was buoying him up.

Many times during that night he had figured it all up and there was no doubt whatever in his mind that someone—and it must be Andrew—was hiding above him in the roof.

To begin with, he told himself he had sensed the smell of oranges directly he had come into the hall, and then afterwards he had found no oranges or orange peel at all in the house. Now the smell of an orange, he was quite aware, was only a matter of at most a few hours. It was broadcast only whilst the orange was being eaten and very quickly disappeared afterwards. So it had come to him very early that someone had been visiting the house and yet—yet the inspector had told him positively that he alone had had the key. Then, he had noticed dead flies upon the window sill in the kitchen and fresh fly-blood stains upon the window itself. Also when he had touched the dead flies he had found their bodies were quite soft and not dried up as they would have been if they were even days old.

It was then he had begun to be really interested, for there should have been no flies, he knew, in a house that had been foodless and shut up for more than six weeks.

Next, when they had been talking the mouse had suddenly run down the chimney, to be followed immediately by the falling of a small fleck of plaster from the ceiling. The behaviour of the mouse itself had been most significant. Something had frightened it down from the chimney and when it had made to run back, the same something had frightened it down again. That, coupled with the falling fleck of plaster, had instantly suggested that someone was moving across the beams above the ceiling with the object probably of getting nearer to the chimney in order to catch more plainly what was being said. Everyone was aware how well the chimneys carried sound.

Then he had taken off his boots and, leaving the inspector talking, had gone out from the kitchen for an investigation on his own. He had soon found things that strengthened his suspicions and made him sure that someone was making use of the house. The pantry window had had the catch forced, and there was distinct evidence that the fly-proof screen outside had recently been many times taken in and out, for the edges were all rounded and polished and there was no dust anywhere against the sides.

Then he had noticed that the bath was not dry. There was water about it that would never have been there after six weeks, indeed it looked as if it had been made use of that very day and he was almost certain, too, that he could smell soap, although there was none to be seen anywhere about the place.

Then he had crept into the hall and stealthily inspected the trap-door that led up into the roof. There was nothing unusual about the trap-door itself, but there were distinct markings upon the linoleum just underneath. "A pair of steps," he had instantly ejaculated to himself, and he was of opinion from the impressions on the floor that it had been used many times recently. In the scullery, he had found the steps and approaching them for a close scrutiny, his nostrils had again been instantly assailed by the smell of oranges. There was no doubt about it; he had been certain someone had eaten oranges within the last few hours.

Then he had gone outside round the house and at the back, about a hundred yards away over the sand, he had seen a number of seagulls busy by a small gully. Walking quickly up, he had found they were raking over debris of food that had been buried just underneath; some pieces of bread, the remnant of a stale cake and orange peel galore. Some of the orange peel was quite fresh, and with a beating of his heart he saw that it had been conveyed there in a portion

of a newspaper that was only three days old. Lastly, he had unearthed a whole host of recently opened almond shells.

"Andrew," he had gasped, for Andrew he knew was a vegetarian, and it had been knocking subconsciously in his mind all along, ever indeed since his first suspicions had been aroused, that of all people it would best fit in with the cynical character of the garrotter to make use of the house.

It would be just like Andrew, he had told himself, just like the man's daring and resource and besides, besides—was not this the very place near where the man had been last seen.

He knew so well the type of criminals which both the Smiter and Andrew had always represented. They had never been weak, frightened individuals to be stampeded into aimless directions like bolting rabbits. They had shown themselves continually as men of strong and purposeful character, and it would delight Andrew, he knew, to be doing the very thing the authorities would least of all expect.

He had returned stealthily to the house and then in a few minutes, with the departure of the inspector, his long vigil had commenced.

He had certainly expected things to move more quickly than they had done, but when the night had finally settled down without anything happening, he had comforted himself with the reminder that the real psychological moment in one's thoughts was always at the dawn.

It was when day was breaking that the reaction in the mind set in. In darkness one could hold the easier to a fixed idea, but with the coming of the shadows there was the tendency always for everything to change, and, willingly or unwillingly, one had to survey an outlook entirely different from that of the night.

So Larose was not in the least degree surprised when, just as the lights were creeping grey and ghostly into the hall he heard faint sounds of movement above the trapdoor in the roof.

On the instant he had risen to his feet and was crouching by the wall. His stiffness disappeared as if by magic, his sense of coldness had all gone, and if his face was damp and pale as death, his eyes were, nevertheless, twinkling happily and his lips were wreathed into a confident bright smile.

Things moved very quickly.

The top of the trap door was jerked off abruptly and a white face was pushed down and turned sharply in every direction round the hall. Then an electric torch was flashed and in a lightning movement Larose was back in the alcove, with his ears, rather than his eyes, now telling him what was happening in the hall.

In about half a minute, however, the torch went out and Larose, looking up again at the ceiling, saw suddenly a length of rope drop down from the opening of the trap door and hang dangling into the hall. The rope reached nearly to the floor and was knotted at short intervals.

For a moment nothing happened and then a pair of legs were thrust through the hole and a man began to lower himself quickly down.

With a thrill Larose saw that the man was wearing trousers with a red braid down the sides, the uniform of the South Australian Railway.

The detective deliberately raised his automatic for, intending to take no risks, he was about to render Andrew helpless, by shooting him in the shoulder.

Suddenly, however, there was a rattle on the floor followed by a deep curse. Andrew had dropped the pistol he was carrying as he was coming down.

A second later, however, and the malediction was merged into a cry of terror, for the very instant he had reached the floor, his legs had been knocked under him and with a fierce blow he had been stretched upon his back.

Before he could recover or indeed in any way take in what was happening to him, his wrists were next jerked together, there was a sharp metallic click and he was lying handcuffed and helpless at Larose's feet.

The detective was breathing hard with his exertions but there was no particular expression of triumph upon his face as he looked down at the prostrate man.

"I'm Larose," he said quietly, "and I've come all the way over from Sydney to get you."

The prisoner, however, made no reply; he regarded him at first with a dull stare and then, as his senses gradually came back, with a look of hatred that was beast-like in its intensity.

"It's lucky for you," went on the detective pleasantly, "that you did drop your pistol, for I should have shot you myself before you reached the ground. I was taking no chances, and I know you, Andrew, my boy."

Andrew glared at him and then his face broke into a cunning smile.

"No, you don't," he said sneeringly, "you're a fool."

Larose shrugged his shoulders as if he knew he had the best of the argument, and then he smiled, in his turn, but the nature of his smile was different.

Suddenly, however, the expression on his face altered, for a strange feeling of uneasiness had come into his mind.

Andrew was seemingly amused at something and there was a grin almost of triumph now upon his face.

"What's he up to?" Larose asked himself; "goodness knows he's not got much to laugh at, at any rate."

The garrotter had half closed his eyes; he looked contemptuously at his captor and then suddenly he began to fiercely clamp his jaws.

I told you, you were a fool," he said hoarsely, "you've not got me after all," and he spat out a piece of broken glass.

The detective bent down in consternation for the man's lips, he saw, had suddenly become flecked with blood.

"Capsule—cyanide," grinned Andrew, "never—be—taken—alive," and on the instant his face became convulsed with pain. He grew ghastly white, his eyes started from his head and his hands clawed in agony upon the floor. His body writhed as if he were in torture and his chest heaved frantically for breath.

A moan, a long deep moan, a moment's pause, a sigh, and then with a shuddering jerk the head fell sideways and—the man was dead.

"But I couldn't help it, Mark," said the detective later, "I had no chance. Andrew suspected all along that someone was waiting for him there and he came down from the roof with the capsule of cyanide ready in his mouth, in case he should find himself in difficulties and unable to pull the trigger first." Larose sighed deeply. "Yes, he was always a far-seeing man was Andrew, but he wasn't a sport—he played with loaded dice."

Chapter XV

The Passion Years.

One morning about a month later at breakfast time at Clyde House, Mr. Thomas McIver was feeling distinctly annoyed; not that he showed it, however, for his niece was sitting opposite to him and there were particular reasons why she should not know he was disturbed.

The morning's letters had just arrived and there were two for him. The first was from his solicitors announcing that, in the interests of Miss Maude McIver, they had just negotiated for the sale of a portion of the late Mr. Andrew McIver's landed interests for the sum of 118,000. The second was from Mark Romilly and he wrote that he was shortly leaving South Australia for good and would like to come and see them to bid good-bye. He wondered if they were now at home at Glenelg.

He had resigned from the Police Force he said, and was joining a relative upon a sheep station in New South Wales. He asked to be very kindly remembered to Miss McIver.

Thomas McIver frowned angrily. Of course, he could see through it, he told himself; the man only wanted to come down and see Maude.

Thomas McIver was no fool, and ever since that evening when Inspector Romilly had dined with them along with Sir Charles Andover and Hiram Pellew, he had been anxious as to what his niece might do. He had had a great shock that evening, and a greater one, too, upon one of the days immediately following.

Before he left, his friend Pellew had been what he called frank with him, and quite outspoken as to what was passing in his mind. Indeed, much too outspoken, McIver had thought at the time.

The morning the American had been going away, he had taken McIver on to one side and had confided to him drily and with an amused twinkle in his eye, that not only was Inspector Romilly undoubtedly in love with his niece but also—and McIver here had nearly had a fit—he was quite sure, that in return she was in love with the inspector too.

McIver then, against his own instinct, for he had not been unmindful of several little changes in his niece lately, had at first been contemptuously incredulous, but his friend had snapped his teeth together viciously and told him bluntly not to be an old fool, but to just use his own eyes for himself; also, he had added with a grin, that if he, Hiram Pellew, were any judge of character, he was quite certain Maude would get her own way in the end, even if she had to propose to the inspector herself. In conclusion, he had given it as his deliberate opinion that it would be quite an excellent match, and he had warned McIver with some heat not to interfere and ruin his niece's whole life.

Pellew's words had worried the old man a good deal and, for the first few days after his departure, every day he had been expecting Romilly to be making some excuse to come up to the house, but as the days and, finally, the weeks had passed and they had heard nothing more of him, his fears had gradually begun to die down.

Finally the danger was passed he told himself, and his niece was safe. The man had gone out of her life and she might never perhaps see him again. Any

time, too, someone else might come along and then once really in love, she would soon forget the foolish fancy that she might have had. He had breathed in great relief, for, of course, it was quite unthinkable that a girl with all the money Maude was going to have, could marry a man with no money at all, however nice and desirable he might be in himself. And this 118,000 was only a part of what the estate would bring. The very idea was absurd!

Now, however, had come this letter, and it at once brought everything back into the danger zone again.

Of course, he would have to make some excuse and put him off, but then again, of course, he could not do so without mentioning it to his niece first. He must be very diplomatic and very tactful.

He glanced across the table at her. She was looking out of the window and her thoughts were evidently far away, for the movement he made in handing over one of the letters went unnoticed.

Critically he took in all the details of the beautiful face, and with something of a pang he thought suddenly that she looked ill.

She was certainly thinner than usual, and whiter, too, and there were darker lines than there should be under her eyes. Then the poise of her head was one of dejection, and there was sadness and melancholy even in the way she sat.

In an instant then everything struck at him like a blow, and the anger and annoyance that he had felt a moment before, melted almost in the passing of a second to sympathy and regret.

"Damn it all," he said suddenly to himself in a complete revulsion of feeling, "why after all shouldn't she have the man she loves if he's her deliberate choice. What has money to do with it? She has money enough for all they both can ever want. What good are more thousands to her if her life isn't going to be a happy one?" He thought of the little Californian girl, and remembered he was growing old. Oh, how short life was and how soon the grey days came! Dear, gentle Maud, and she was pining now because she was without the lover that it was only natural she should want to have. Hers was the very age for love. Not the wandering, curious love of just awakened girlhood, but the calm, reasoned love of a woman who would love with her head as well as her heart, and to whom passion was the expression of her love and not love itself. He was a fool to try and thwart her; instead he would help her to her choice. He would have the man here, and in closer intimacy she would be able to see it she were disappointed or strengthened in her love.

Why hadn't he thought so about that before? It was really the sensible thing to do. Maude was so refined and sensitive herself, that very little would put her off the man if there were anything rough or coarse about him.

That was why, he was sure, she had never taken to men before.

He coughed loudly and rustled the papers.

"Maude, dear," he said, without looking up, "I have two letters here, and both will interest you."

She turned languidly, with an almost audible sigh. "What is it, uncle, lawyers' letters, I suppose?"

"One's from Brown and Riley; they've sold the Kingston estate for 118,000."

"What a lot of money!" again with a sigh. "What on earth shall I do with it all?"

"Money's always useful, Maude," he replied; "you'll find some use for it right enough. Then there's this other letter," and he began very busily to stir his

coffee. "It's from Mr. Romilly, from Broken Hill. He wants to come down and see us to say good-bye. He says he has left the police and is going on a station in New South Wales."

There was a deadly silence for a moment and Maude got up to attend to the urn.

"Oh, Mr. Romilly!" she said quite steadily. "Yes, I heard he had resigned from his position."

"He's coming to Adelaide in any case," went on her uncle, "but here's his letter, read it. He asks to be kindly remembered to you."

The girl took the letter and there was a long silence in the room. Mr. McIver pretended to be busy with his newspaper but all the time he kept a covert eye upon his niece. In appearance she was quite cool and undisturbed.

She put down the letter presently and started interestedly upon her breakfast.

"Well, dear, what shall we say?" asked the old man at length.

The girl looked up quickly. "Why, ask him to come of course," she replied with a bright smile, "he was always very nice to us," and her uncle noticed with a glow of satisfaction that her sad and dejected mien had all gone. For the remainder of the meal she laughed and chatted in a manner very different from that of the usual Maude of late.

He was convinced he was doing the right thing.

After breakfast they went out on to the verandah and stood looking at the sea. A breeze was blowing down the gulf, but the air was soft and balmy and something of the sweetness of life came up to them both.

"I think, I think," said old McIver meditatively, at length, "we had better ask that young man for a weekend, if he can come. Say from next Friday to the Monday. It will be interesting to hear all his adventures with the great Gilbert Larose. Don't you think so, dear?"

The girl looked straight out to sea where the rippling waters were.

"Just as you like, uncle," she replied very quietly. "If you think it best."

Was there a tremor in her voice he thought, or was it just the hesitation natural to her considering?

Affectionately she took her uncle's arm and some impulse made him bend down and kiss her on the forehead. She smiled up brightly at him, and then suddenly without a word she threw both arms round his neck and buried her face in his shoulder.

"Dear little woman," he said fondly, pretending not to notice anything. "I often think your nerves are all unstrung. I must take you for a long sea-voyage some day. But just you go and write that invitation to Mr. Romilly now and I'll post it straight away when I am up in the city."

Mrs. Carter was very angry when she heard the invitation had been sent.

"Really, Thomas," she said sourly to her brother when they were alone. "Sometimes I think you're almost a fool. Fancy asking that man down here to stay. Can't you see what's in his mind? He's in love with Maude. I saw it the instant he came here to dinner that night. All his clothes were new: he'd bought them purposely for the occasion. Fancy a policeman with a dress suit! I don't care whether he was a major in the army or not. He was a policeman when he came here and that's enough. I shall snub him unmercifully when he comes,

and put him in his proper place at once; and I'm sure, if I know anything of Maude, she will do so, too."

Thomas McIver said nothing, but he smiled a slow, inscrutable smile. He wondered what exactly was going to be Mark Romilly's proper place.

A feeling of amazing happiness thrilled through Mark Romilly when he received the letter from Clyde House. He had certainly hoped they would ask him to call at the house, but he had never for one moment dreamed that he would be invited to stay there, and the significance of the invitation made him almost giddy in surprise. What did it mean? he asked himself. The McIvers, as far as their home life was concerned, were most particular people. Why were they asking him now to stay with them in this easy way, just as if he were a friend of the house? Really he was only an acquaintance at best. True, he had been to dinner with them once, but that had been more of an invitation of duty he felt sure. He had been simply asked up then as a small return for the part he had played in the Andy McIver case, and just to be quietly given the cheque. But this visit would be quite different and there was no question at all of duty or obligation about it. There was intimacy about it, as if they were willing to regard him as a friend. What could have happened since he last saw them? Was it—could it be—and his heart beat furiously and he crimsoned hotly at the thought—was it miraculously possible that some part of the feeling he himself had for Maude McIver, she on her side also had for him? Could it be she who had suggested that he should be asked to stay for the week-end? Surely it was hardly possible: the circumstances of her riches placed her so much above him. It was not that he had no opinion of himself, and had had no success in his life with the other sex. He had had several love affairs, and the other sex generally had not been particularly averse, when he had imagined, for the time, he was in love with them.

But with Maude McIver it was quite different. She was holy in his sight, and more an angel than a woman to be loved. It was worship almost that he felt for her. Still—and he was thoughtful for a long while—still ... .. Maude was a woman after all and pure and heaven-faced though she was, one day—one day—she would close those beautiful eyes of hers—tilt up that proud, reliant chin and give to the tingling fire of passion, the purity and sweetness of those lovely lips. Yes—she was only a woman after all.

But old Thomas McIver—why had Thomas McIver asked him? The old man least of anything was not a fool. He was a shrewd and level-headed man of the world. There could be no sentiment about him. He would understand the danger of any single man being thrown much in contact with his niece. She was beautiful undeniably—and rich, and anyone at any time might fall in love with her and try to engage her love in return.

Certainly then it would be his aim to keep all undesirables away, and if he admitted anyone into the charmed circle of their home—then, again, he would do so clearly with the idea that the intruder was not one of the black sheep to be purposely kept out.

For a long, long while before replying to the invitation the late inspector of the Adelaide Police pondered, and pondered again. Then the solution flashed on him suddenly. Something had happened, he told himself, to bring him forward into Mr. McIver's mind, and the old man had invited him to stay at the house to make sure what sort of man he was like. In other words, he was going to be put on his trial.

Mark Romilly whistled to himself and the next moment was very angry that he could really be so vain as to imagine that Mr. McIver could be particularly interested in him in any way at all.

The following Friday afternoon Mark Romilly arrived at the McIvers' just in time for the afternoon cup of tea. There were several callers in the drawing-room, and Maude McIver was presiding daintily over the tea. She gave him a friendly little greeting, with perhaps just a trace of heightened colour, and then waved him to a vacant chair that happened to be next to Mrs. Carter.

He smiled grimly to himself when the latter lady gave him a short and curt "Good-day," but at the same time he was certainly not displeased at the early and opportune encounter. Indeed, it was exactly what he wished.

He was still convinced that in some subtle sort of way he had been invited up to Clyde House on trial, and, if that were so, he argued there were going to be three people who would be his judges and whom he would have to win over—Maude, Mr. McIver, and Mrs. Carter.

Maude—well he hoped and prayed Maude was favourably disposed to him already. Mr. McIver he put down as neutral and prepared justly to judge him on his own merits. But Mrs. Carter was hostile—decidedly hostile, and so she must be won over without delay.

She was nursing a little parti-coloured Pomeranian, and he was able to tell her at once with strict truth that the animal was a beautiful little creature.

He leant over and stroked the dog, asked about his breeding, and pointed out the good points that he had inherited from his aristocratic ancestors.

He knew something about Poms fortunately, and Mrs. Carter was soon convinced that he was worth listening to. In spite of herself, she was attracted to him, and long before the callers had taken themselves away, her voice had lost some of its acerbity.

"But how do you come to know anything about Poms Mr. Romilly?" she asked curiously. "I thought you men were never interested in these little dogs."

"Oh, really that's quite a mistake! But I happen to be particularly interested in Poms because the man who lived next door to me at Prospect was the chief breeder in South Australia. He had Poms all over the place, and I was always returning stray ones to him over the garden fence. I got to know the good points of them that way."

Mr. McIver came into the room at that moment and raised his eyebrows just a little when he saw the two heads close together.

"Great Jupiter," he ejaculated whimsically to himself, "what if the aunt should cut the niece out. I never thought of that."

It was a cosy little dinner that night with only the four of them, and Romilly made further advance into the good graces of the elder lady. She was an inveterate gambler of the half-crown type at the racecourse tote, and if she was not going to the races herself, always, nevertheless, managed to get someone to put the money on for her instead. For the past few Saturdays it appeared she had been heavily supporting—her brother smiled and looked highly delighted here—a beast called Ragtime, and each time the wretched animal had let her down badly. They would only have just got about four to one, even if it had come in first, but not only had it not come in first, but it had run so extremely badly that at last in despair they and everyone else interested had left off backing it. Then, of course, the inevitable thing had happened. It had simply romped in first, and paid over twenty to one in dividend.

Romilly agreed with her that it was a scandal and a shame.

"But what are the Stipendiary Stewards doing?" asked Mr. McIver with a twinkle in his eye. "When my sister has heavily supported any animal, they ought, of course, to be specially vigilant to make sure it is run fairly."

"Oh, you needn't laugh Thomas," replied Mrs. Carter tartly. "Everybody knows we can't get the class of men we ought to for Stipendiary Stewards. They're a mistake altogether."

All this while Maude was serene and happy. Every time Mark Romilly was speaking to the others it gave her the opportunity to watch his face. What a fine strong face it was, she thought. He looked so handsome and such a gentleman, too.

She preferred not to join in any of the conversation but was quite content to listen and enjoy her own thoughts. Oh, how dreadful if anyone should guess what those thoughts were! She pondered, however, if someone in the room would one day know them. Somehow she thought he would. She could feel he was interested in her, although he did not glance much at her. But she saw him several times looking down at her hands out of the corner of his eye, and once for quite a long time his glance rested on her arm and shoulder.

Mr. McIver, too, was quietly analysing his guest. He had drawn him out on several subjects, and found him interesting and well-informed. Pressed for some details of his life on active service, the one-time major had given them a thrilling picture of some happenings in the war. Without in any way boasting or making a lot of things he had brought home to them the dreadful times they had been through. He made little of what he had done himself, but to all of them he gave the impression of the quiet, fine courage of the soldier.

They went into the garden for a few minutes after dinner, and quite naturally the two younger people wandered on alone. They were silent for a minute, but of the two the girl was by far the more self-possessed.

It was she who first broke the silence.

"I had no idea, Mr. Romilly," she said archly, "that you were really such an authority on dogs. I'm sure you've quite won over my aunt's heart by your admiration of Ko-Ko this evening."

Mark Romilly coughed moderately. "Knowledge is always useful," he replied guardedly, "and the young lady you now refer to as Ko-Ko certainly has some very good points about her."

The girl opened her eyes very wide. "But I thought you said," she went on laughing, "she would deserve a prize anywhere."

"Certainly, undoubtedly she would, but whether the hard-hearted judges would give her one is quite a different matter. You see I was only putting everything in the best light possible."

"Oh, Mr. Romilly, I believe you're a fraud. I shall really begin to be half afraid of you."

"Heaven forbid," he exclaimed fervently, "the fear is on my side. Your sex always frighten me. Witness my desire to stand well with Mrs. Carter to-night."

They came to the end of the garden and instinctively both halted by the trellis where the rose-trees were. Tacitly no reference had been made to the former tenant of the White House, but a chord of memory was now stirred in them both.

"I won't suggest a rose for you," she said demurely; "it's never well to pick them at night."

"I don't want one yet," he replied pointedly, "I'm not going until Monday."

She resumed her steps at once with this and they returned slowly to the house.

The next day was one that would be always remembered by Mark Romilly as a red-letter day in his life, for it was then that he first realised decisively that Maude McIver might not after all be beyond his reach.

She was almost constantly near him the whole day long. In the morning they went for a long walk upon the sands. Mr. McIver brought Vulcan out with them for exercise, and as he was apparently far more interested in the big boar hound than in his two companions they were consequently left very much to them selves.

They talked confidingly together as if they were old friends, and he told her a great deal of the happenings of his life. He glanced at her a lot when he was talking, and very often their eyes met in a deliciously sympathetic sort of way. A hundred times he though to himself how beautiful her eyes were, but in her face, with all its sweetness, there was such a wealth of pride that she almost overawed him, and once or twice he was quite frightened to remember that he had dared to fall in love.

Maiden in every dainty way she was so obviously, and it would be almost wicked, he told himself, to quicken answering love in her. It would be like robbing the unpicked flower of its fragrance or the untouched peach of its bloom.

In the afternoon Mr. McIver took them for a drive among the hills in the car.

"You will sit at the back with my aunt, Mr. Romilly," said the girl, with a sly smile. "She is bringing Ko-Ko with her and so both of you will be quite happy. You can be instructing aunt how to prepare Ko-Ko for the next show. She is most keen now on entering her."

Romilly made a little grimace of disappointment, but Mrs. Carter at that moment coming out, he gallantly escorted her to the car, and for the first part of the drive was intensely bored by having again and again to enumerate the outstanding good points of the wretched Pomeranian Ko-Ko.

Maude McIver, however, apparently enjoyed it all. Sitting just in front she could, of course, hear most of what was being said, and from time to time, her slim and elegant shoulders quivered in real appreciation of the fun.

Presently Mrs. Carter began to complain that she was getting too much wind, at the back, and with just a little hesitation, her niece very obligingly offered to change places with her.

Henceforward the drive then was all a Paradise to Romilly. The girl was close by him and sometimes when the car swayed among the narrow turnings in the hills, for the fleeting seconds, he could feel the touch of her lithe body next to his. Once under the outspread rug their hands met accidentally, but she moved hers away casually as if quite unaware of the fact. They touched again in a minute or two, however, and this time at once, for a moment, he imprisoned the soft warm fingers in his own. Only for a moment, however, and she had quickly drawn her hand away.

For a little while then he was afraid to look at her, but feeling her eyes upon him he glanced up suddenly and saw that she was smiling and frowning at the same time, but with no appearance of annoyance on her face. She only shook her head reprovingly at him, and made a little meaning nod in the direction of the unsuspicious aunt sitting just in front.

He smiled back in understanding, and for the rest of the drive had to content himself with furtively regarding her out of the corner of his eye. For her part she had folded her arms and lay back looking straight in front of her.

No doubt she was thinking of what had just happened, but from the expression of her face her thoughts were not unhappy ones.

It was the Sunday evening and they were walking slowly round the garden the last thing before going to bed. Romilly had been telling her his plans for the future and she had been listening happily with her face upturned to his. Suddenly a silence fell upon them as if they had nothing more to say.

Reaching the drawing-room windows she stopped before them in the light.

"Well, good night," she said, with a sudden shyness. "I'll leave you to your cigarette. I must be going in now."

"Oh, just once more round." he pleaded.

She hesitated for a moment and then without replying, resumed her walk. They were still silent, but it was the silence of tender and caressing thoughts.

There was only the star-light above them but in their hearts were lights that shine surely from another world.

So, they walked round the garden and, reaching the house again, she stopped as she had done once before. But this time she stopped in the shadows.

"Good night," she said very quietly, holding out her hand.

"Good night," he replied softly, taking it in his own.

So for a moment they stood, each looking down. He with his eyes upon her face—she with her eyes upon the ground.

Suddenly she looked up and in an instant she was in his arms. He had seen something in her face that had told him surely what he might do. Tenderly, very tenderly, he tilted up her chin, just as he had told himself in his dreaming that one day he would do. She closed her eyes, and gently, very gently he put his lips on hers.

She shivered violently and almost a cry escaped her. He pressed her tightly to him, and then suddenly with a great sigh, released her from his arms. She ran quickly into the house.

It was fully a quarter of an hour or more before Romilly went into the house. Mr. McIver was standing by the dining-room door.

"Come in and have a drink," said the old man, looking hard at him over his glasses.

They sat down and for a little while there was silence between them.

"I hope you've enjoyed your visit," said Mr. McIver at length. "I'm sure we've been very pleased to have you."

Romilly replied how he had enjoyed himself and expressed his appreciation of their kindness. Then again the silence fell.

"Well, my boy," said Mr. McIver in a moment, "you seem to have got on very well with my niece." He went on grimly—"She is a very rich woman, Miss McIver. I expect you understand that."

"Oh yes," assented Romilly very quietly. "I quite expected so."

"But then of course," said the old man drily, "money doesn't count with you. A man who refuses two thousand pounds for nothing must be pretty contemptuous of the advantages of hard cash."

"Oh, please don't rub that in," laughed Romilly; "it was hard enough to refuse without the soreness of being reminded of it."

"Well, I told you at the time you were a fool, but come now, why didn't you take it? Be honest with me now. Was it because of Maude? Was it a matter of sentiment with you?"

Romilly took a long thoughtful puff at his cigarette.

"It might have been partly that," he said slowly. Then he went on warmly. "At any rate it gave me more pleasure to refuse than to accept, and honestly I should do so again. That's truth."

The old man eyed him narrowly.

"Then I suppose you've fallen in love with Miss McIver, haven't you?" he said brusquely.

Romilly was very calm and deliberate.

"Your niece is a lovely woman, sir," he replied, "and I should be no man if I had not."

Mr. McIver was thoughtful again. "I like you, Romilly," he said quite kindly at length, "or I shouldn't have asked you up here. But it's a great matter to protect my niece. No, no, man," he went on quickly, "I'm not your enemy and I'm not against you. Beyond certain limits it's not for me to interfere. I know it's the girl's own affair, but I'm only anxious she should get happiness in her life. But come, let us leave it for the present. Help yourself to some whisky and tell me about your future plans."

Chapter XVI

Mark Jervis Romilly.

Breakfast-time at Clyde House the next morning was not without its embarrassments for three of the four people seated at the table, and it was only Maude McIver herself who seemed entirely at her ease.

Mr. McIver was thoughtful, and curious as to how far his niece and Romilly had committed themselves together the previous day; Mrs. Carter was in a bad humour because of an attack of rheumatism that she was sure was coming on, and Romilly himself was nervous that perhaps he had been too forward the previous evening and had lost ground with the woman that he loved, for with the morning light, the presumption of his intending to ask her to be his wife, seemed, to say the least of it, to be a staggering one.

But Maude herself was radiant, and the three others at the table there wondered each in their own several ways if anywhere there could be a brighter or a happier looking girl than the one now sitting before them.

Romilly regarded her in the way a lover always does before his happiness is assured—admiring, almost reverential and with eyes of hungry longing. Mr. McIver smiled grimly to himself with just a touch of sadness in his heart that the sweet white rose was now so openly unfolding her petals, and Mrs. Carter wondered rather sourly what on earth the girl had done to make herself so pretty.

The meal over, they went into the garden, and Mrs. Carter, whose animosity against Romilly had seemingly all returned, did her utmost to make herself as disagreeable as possible.

She asked interestedly as to what time his train was going, and she supposed, pointedly, that he would not be down in the city again for some years. She gave it as her opinion, too, with a significant glance at her niece, that probably some very great changes would have eventuated before they would all be meeting again and, finally, she advised him strongly to marry, for he would find it hard, she said, to cook and manage on his own.

A deep flush of annoyance came into Maude McIver's face, but Romilly himself took it all in good part and smiled as if in amusement, when once he happened to catch the girl's eye.

Presently, to the great relief of the others, Mrs. Carter took herself back into the house and then, as Romilly had not to leave for some hours, Maude suggested a short walk along the sands.

Mr. McIver at once sportingly made an excuse for not coming and so, in a few minutes, it was Maude and Romilly alone, who were pacing slowly by the weaves.

In after-days Romilly always said that that walk was a very miserable one for him for he had been no longer in a mood to appreciate that he was alone with Maude.

Notwithstanding his own self-reliant nature, his assurance had been chilled violently by the remarks of the girl's aunt. It was quite obvious what she meant to imply, and although he had no opinion at all of her ideas, still she had undoubtedly revived to great strength in him the recognition of the inequality between his own position and that of Maude.

Was it colossal impudence, he now asked himself, that he should be daring to ask her to be his wife?—She, a well-endowed heiress and he, quite a poor man. There would be some people who would always say he had come after her money, and if fortune so greatly favoured him that Maude returned his affection, there would still be always those who would sneer at her that she had not been married for love. Could he, too, make up to her for the other sneer that she had married a man who had once been in the police?

His mind was in uncertainty and he wanted time to think.

His meditations were interrupted.

"You're very quiet, Mr. Romilly," said Maude with a smile. "I hope your thoughts are pleasant ones."

Romilly sighed and then he smiled too.

"I've known better-and worse," he replied enigmatically, and then he at once rallied himself, and went on to talk interestedly about the beautiful view before them and the sea. Apparently, his previous meditations had been quite trivial and casual ones.

But the girl was not deceived. She had guessed something of what was passing in his mind and she wanted to make up for her aunt's coldness and clear away the impression that her relative's remarks might have made.

Hiram Pellew had not been a bad judge of character when he had surmised that with all her gentleness and pride, love would give Maude McIver courage and make her bold. Notwithstanding her bright appearance at the breakfast-table that morning, she had slept little the previous night and, being under no misapprehension as to Romilly's feelings towards her, it was in her mind to make it easy for him to ask her to be his wife. She knew that she herself was willing, and she was determined that no consideration of money, or the want of

it, should debar them from the happiness that she was sure might now be theirs.

So she laid herself out to be encouraging to him, and during the next half-hour Romilly realised to the full then, if indeed he had never done so before, how gracious and tender she could be.

She asked him interestedly about the possibilities of his new life and she looked him frankly in the eye as she spoke.

She thanked him prettily for his kindness to them in the great trouble they had been in, and she told him frankly that both she and her uncle would be very sorry now if he went out of their lives. For herself, she said, she was quite disappointed he was going away.

But it was all to no purpose. She had reckoned without the chivalry of Romilly and the new-born determination on his part that she must not be precipitated suddenly into any position she might afterwards live to regret. He must have time to think, he kept on telling himself, he must have time to think.

So he fenced lightly with her and persistently relegated the personal equation into the background. He did not dare to look much at her, however, and many times he groaned inwardly and wondered if he were both a coward and a fool.

The girl was very puzzled at his attitude and could not understand.

The walk ended at last and they returned to the garden of Clyde House. Just inside the gate they met Mrs. Carter and Major Poole, the major was gallantly escorting that lady to a sheltered spot on the sandhills where she would be out of the wind.

The two men stopped to speak for a moment, and Mrs. Carter seized the opportunity to sidle up to her niece.

"Keep him at his distance, Maude," she whispered. "He never takes his eyes off you, when you are not looking, and if you're not careful he'll propose," she nodded her head viciously. "I believe the only thing that's kept him back so far is that he knows he's got no money."

The girl looked at her coldly but made no remark, and Major Poole having now finished his good-byes, the two couples again went on.

Romilly and Maude passed down to the end of the garden along by where the rose trees were, and suddenly the girl made up her mind. They were quite by themselves now and out of view of all the windows of the house. She stopped and faced her companion. Her heart was beating furiously, but she smiled easily with a happy smile. She had plucked a little Gloire de Dijon, and she held it out now to him, in a beautiful white hand.

"Isn't it lovely?" She asked innocently.

"Yes, lovely," replied Romilly gravely, and for the moment taken off his guard. "I've always thought it was."

Maude coloured up. She smelt the rose and brushed it lightly over with her lips, then she held it out towards him once more.

"Well, you can take it," she said ever so softly, "that is of course, if you want to."

Romilly got as white as a ghost, but he reached out quickly and took both the hand and the rose.

"Which may I have?" he asked hoarsely in a low whisper and looking her straight in the eyes.

There was a long silence and then Romilly suddenly straightened himself up and let her hand go.

"You're a rich woman, Maude," he said gently, "and I—am a poor man," and with a grave bow he made as if to turn away.

But Maude laid her hand upon his arm.

"Riches don't count always, Mark," she whispered, "and the richest woman may be the poorest if she's not brave enough to take love when it comes her way," and her voice choked as if she were going to cry.

For perhaps one second Romilly hesitated, but it was impossible now for him not to understand. With a great beating at his heart, he slipped his arm around her and pulled her to his side. Her head came to his shoulder unresistingly and for a long, deep moment he looked passionately into her eyes.

Her lips parted to a long-drawn sigh and then closed shiveringly as he bent to meet them with his own.

It was the moment to them—of both their lives, and love in all its glory overflowed to them in that kiss, it was a kiss of ecstasy, a kiss of rapture and yet a kiss so reverent and so gentle that, but for its length, it might have been no kiss at all.

Oh, love of man for maid, oh, love of maid for man. Lode-star of life and mystery of all years. Was ever Heaven nearer to us and was ever Earth more lovely, than when the swoon of passion held us and we wandered in the garden of Desire?

About an hour later coming in from the garden Mrs. Carter saw Romilly opening the door of the garage.

"So," she remarked gleefully to her brother whom she encountered the next minute in the hall, "Mr. Romilly's going off before lunch, is he? . . . I see they're getting out the car;" she laughed knowingly. "I thought he looked very dejected when we met them a little while ago, but I knew," and the laugh became almost spiteful here, "I knew that Maude would soon put him in his proper place."

Thomas McIver looked thoughtfully at his sister and for just a moment, perhaps, the very faintest flicker of a smile crossed into his face. Then he sighed gently.

"Well, they'll be married in less than two months, Elizabeth," he said quietly. "They've gone off now to the city to buy the engagement ring, but they'll be back in time for lunch."

Mrs. Carter, mute in the stalemate of her own emotions, sank into a nearby chair.

A few weeks later, one evening towards dusk, a big grey car was speeding along the coast road under the cliffs towards Cape Jervis. It is a lonely desolate road at all times and for many, many miles the seagulls are the only signs of life. There were a man and woman in the car and from the amount of luggage piled up at the back it might quite reasonably have been assumed that they were out on tour. A close observer, however, would have noticed at once that there was something quite unusual both about the car and its occupants. Everything about them was apparently quite new. The car particularly would have arrested the eye. The enamel on it was quite unscratched and without a blemish anywhere, the upholstery was quite beautiful in its freshness, the bonnet mirrored back exactly all the subtle shades of land and sky and the very tyres themselves seemed new and quite unworn. One might have almost thought that the car had just been bought, or given as a present. A wedding present perhaps. Then, too, the leather trunks looked new and one could have

sworn that the very straps were stiff and hard and would be difficult both to fasten and undo.

Altogether it was a car that, quite apart from its occupants, would have arrested attention anywhere.

But the man and woman were interesting too. They looked so happy together, and all the time they seemed to be smiling and looking at each other. Notwithstanding the care needed to negotiate successfully the narrow, winding road, the man's eyes never for long left the woman's face, and when he turned, her eyes were always waiting to meet his.

The woman was certainly very pretty and something had given to her face quite a lovely flush. Her eyes were sparkling brightly and she looked as sweet and happy as if there were no pain nor sorrow in all the world.

Altogether the car was in every way a car of joy and happiness and no one would ever have dreamed that misfortune was hovering so near. Yet so it was.

Suddenly—there was a loud, crashing sound. The car bumped roughly and tilting all on to one side swerved violently across the road. With a great effort the driver turned it straight again, and then, with a jar that shook both occupants unpleasantly, brought it ingloriously to a standstill.

"Not hurt, darling," exclaimed Romilly anxiously, for it was he who was driving the car, "not hurt?"

"No, dear," replied his wife brightly, "not a bit, but what's happened now?"

"Nothing much, only the axle broken I expect, but I don't mind that so long as you're not hurt," and, helping her out of the car, he kissed her tenderly as she stepped down.

"Oh, damn," he said, a moment later. "Beg pardon dear; yes, we're snookered right enough, axle gone to the pack. Now, Mrs. Romilly, what are we going to do?"

The girl laughed a bright silvery laugh. "What an adventure for our first day of married life! It's quite thrilling, isn't it?"

"Too thrilling for me," he replied grimly, taking out his watch. "Here we are—a quarter to five, miles from anywhere, absolutely helpless and it'll be dark in half an hour. Looks like rain, too."

But the girl was still smiling. "Never mind, dear, nothing matters on a day like this. But, oh, look, there's smoke over there among the trees."

He turned quickly to the direction in which she was pointing.

"By Jove, what a bit of luck, and I'd have sworn we were ten miles at least from a house anywhere. We'll go at once and see what's doing. We may be able to send for help, although I'm afraid there's not much chance. If not, perhaps they may be able to put us up."

Less than a hundred yards from where they were standing, the cliffs fell away for a short distance, and about a quarter of a mile inland they came upon a small farmhouse. A dog ran out to meet them, barking vociferously; he was followed immediately by two women and what seemed to Romilly, a whole pack of dirty and untidy children.

"Good Lord," he ejaculated feebly to himself, "what a place to commence one's honeymoon in, even if they can put us up."

He explained quickly what had happened and inquired anxiously if there were any possible means of getting a conveyance to take them to an hotel that night.

"No, sir," at once replied the elder woman shaking her head. "It's seventeen miles to Yankalilla, the nearest place, and there's no way of getting there to-night. My husband's away now, and there's no horse or trap, till he comes back to-morrow."

Romilly almost groaned in anguish. "Can you put us up?" he asked hesitatingly. "Can you give us a bed to-night?"

The woman looked doubtful. "We can give the lady a bed in the room with us," she replied at length, "and there's a little tent you can have to put up, outside; that's the best we can do. You see, we've only three rooms here and there are seven of us already to sleep."

There was no help for it and a few minutes later the newly-married couple were getting what necessities they needed urgently, for the night, from the car.

It was almost dark as they were retracing their steps to the little house, and Romilly was glum and disappointed to a degree.

But his wife squeezed his arm affectionately. "You dear old thing," she laughed shyly. "I'm so sorry for you, but it's only a few hours longer away, and I shall be all yours to-morrow. I shall be dreaming of you to-night, dear, at any rate, so think of me as you go to sleep."

"Go to sleep," growled her husband and then he, too, broke into a laugh. He kissed her fondly. "It would be quite funny if it weren't so tragic," he said. "Just fancy, anyone's honeymoon commencing like this!"

They had their meal with the rest of the family, and the bride and bridegroom, much to their astonishment soon found themselves laughing and talking almost as it they were in their own home. Maude had brought some biscuits with her from the car, and it was a real delight to share them with the children there. The little ones had soon forgotten their shyness, and, with their hands and faces well scrubbed for the occasion, they were not half so formidable to sit near to as Romilly had first thought. He joked with them, chucked them under the chin, and tossed them for sixpences, until, when bedtime came, so fascinating had he made himself to them, their mother had great difficulty in getting them away. Everyone went to bed early. Maude said she was not sorry for she was tired and wanted a good sleep.

She bade her husband a passionate good night at the house door, and with a whistle of philosophical resignation, the latter marched off to his lonely couch in the little tent.

An old campaigner, he had made himself as cosy a shelter as possible among the bracken on the hill side, about a hundred yards from the house. The small tent they had provided for him was a patchy dilapidated sort of affair at best, but he had fixed it up in a workmanlike manner, and at least, he thought, it would afford him cover should any rain fall.

He had made himself a comfortable bed of hay, spreading one motor rug on top, and with another and a couple of blankets for cover, he looked forward to being as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.

He undressed, and, with a wistful glance at the little house below, tucked himself in and tried to forget his disappointment in sleep.

But sleep was decidedly shy of coming. Firstly, his thoughts kept him awake and then the lighthouse on Cape Jervis troubled him. He had left his tent flap open, so that as he lay he could watch the window of the room where he knew his bride was sleeping. He could be thinking of her all the time he told himself, and would then gradually drop off to sleep. But he had not taken into account

the disturbing factor of the great light on the Cape Head. It was directly opposite to him about three miles away, and there was an annoying fascination in watching it in the dim blackness of the night.

For quite an hour, but it seemed much longer to him, in spite of his wish to ignore it and go to sleep, he lay watching it, and in desperation he was just going to get up and pull the tent flap down when suddenly a slight sound from the direction of the house arrested his attention, and kept him perfectly still.

He heard the gentle click of a door and then saw a faint shadow detach itself from the darkness of the house. To his amazement it picked its way quickly in his direction. He leant up upon his elbow and then—he held his breath. The figure was all muffled up, but there was no mistaking that walk—it was his wife's.

He was on his feet in an instant, and, holding open the tent door, waited for her to approach. She saw him watching her and put her finger to her lips. In a moment he had folded her passionately in his arms.

"I simply had to come, dear," she whispered between his kisses. "I couldn't bear to think of you here by yourself, to-night."

"You are an angel, darling," he whispered back, "but you really ought not to have come. You said—you said," and he looked straight into her eyes, "you wanted to go to sleep."

The months had rolled on and it was nearly spring again.

Two men were talking on the steps of the General Post Office in Adelaide, when a big grey motor-car flashed by.

"There goes the luckiest man in all Australia," remarked one of them enviously. "In the Police only about eighteen months ago, and now one of the wealthiest men in city, and with a fine, good-looking wife, too. My word, but she is a lovely woman, Mrs. Romilly; do you know her?"

"Yes, my boy," returned the other, "and she's as charming as she's lovely. They've got a kid now too."

"Oh, I didn't know that, but I've been away from Adelaide lately. What is it? a boy or a girl?"

"A boy. My wife went to the christening last week."

"A son, eh? Well, what have they called it?"

"One name is rather peculiar. It was christened Mark Jervis Romilly."

"Oh, that sounds all right, but I quite thought for the moment that you were going to tell me they had called it Joseph Cloud."