# The Man Who Knew

**by Fred Merrick White, 1859-1935**

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# Chapter I

THE clock in the tower of St. Botolph's was booming the hour after midnight, as Acting-Sergeant Philip Lashbrook came slowly along Orford street, having accomplished the mission delegated to him by his superior officer, and, therefore, being now more or less off duty, although he was still wearing the badge of his office. So far as he could see, there was not a soul in sight, not a sound to be heard either, except the distant hum of traffic that came from Regent Crescent on his far right. He gave a casual, but professional eye to the various shops as he walked along. For Orford street is one of fashion, and some of the establishments there are of world-wide renown. In a few moments now he would be back at headquarters, and then free to seek his lodgings.

He came at length to the spot where Mansfield street crosses Orford street at right angles. Along this former thoroughfare he flashed a fleeting glance, and then, crossing the road, was about to resume his patrol on the far side of Orford street, when he was suddenly pulled up by a call that seemed to come to him from some spot in Mansfield street, where he could dimly make out the figure of a man standing there.

"Hi, constable!" came a clear voice with no suggestion of agitation. "You are wanted. Come this way."

Lashbrook turned in his tracks and approached the man who had hailed him. By the light of a street lamp close by he saw a tall, wiry-looking figure in evening dress, over which a light summer overcoat was carelessly flung.

"What's the trouble, sir?" Lashbrook asked.

"Well, it seems to be this," the tall man said almost casually, as he pointed down to an object lying half on the pavement, and half in the gutter. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, it seems to me that I have found a dead body."

Without comment, Lashbrook bent down over the inanimate object lying there so silently. As he did so, he stiffened.

"Dead enough, sir!" he said. "And, if I am not greatly mistaken, murdered."

Saying this, Lashbrook held up a hand which was smeared with blood. Then he turned his lantern and flashed it full on the figure of the man in evening dress, and immediately registered a mental photograph of what he saw.

What he saw was a tall, athletic-looking individual of some fifty years of age, with thin, aquiline features, and a resolute mouth under a close-clipped military moustache. A man of some position, evidently, by his easy carriage, and the accent in which he spoke. In that flash of the lantern, Acting-Sergeant Lashbrook had visualised everything connected with the man who stood opposite to him, noted one or two peculiarities, and then had become the ordinary policeman once more.

"Perhaps you had better explain, sir," he said.

"I am afraid there is nothing to explain," the stranger said. "I was coming along the road just now from spending the evening with a friend, and was on my way to

my club, thinking of nothing in particular, except that I was feeling rather tired, when I came suddenly on this."

"Indeed, sir," Lashbrook said. "You saw nothing, I suppose? No sign of a struggle or anything of that sort?"

"I have already told you that I saw and heard no sound of any sort. I just blundered on this figure, lying in the gutter, indeed, I almost passed it without noticing anything."

Once more Lashbrook bent over the body.

"A bit strange, sir, isn't it?" he said. "I mean, this poor fellow can't have been dead many minutes. There is still a movement of the muscles, and the body is quite warm. Are you quite sure, sir, that you heard nothing?"

"Absolutely, my dear officer," the stranger said calmly. "It may seem strange, to you that I didn't hear a shot fired."

"I said nothing about a shot," Lashbrook pointed out. "I don't know yet whether the man was shot or stabbed."

"Oh, don't you?" the stranger asked indifferently. "One naturally concludes, in a case of this sort, that either a revolver or automatic has been used."

Lashbrook made no reply for a moment, but once more, with the aid of his lantern, he examined the prone figure in the gutter.

"I think you are right, sir," he said presently. "This man has been shot. Shot by somebody who came up behind him and murdered him at fairly close quarters. If you look, you will see where the bullet entered under the left shoulder blade. If it had been a knife, there would have been a deeper cut in the deceased's overcoat. I am afraid I shall have to ask you to give me your name and address and, perhaps, invite your company with me as far as Wine street police station."

"Oh, certainly," the stranger said. "My name is Crafton, Selby Crafton, and my address is the Wanderlust Club. Here is my card. Of course, I will gladly give you all the assistance I can, which will not be very much, I am afraid."

With that, the speaker handed over a visiting card which Lashbrook put in his pocket. Then he put a whistle to his lips, and, almost instantly, two policemen appeared, as if out of nowhere. The man stared at the blue coated officers in amazement. He was evidently wondering where they came from and where they had been hidden, for he had not seen a ghost of a uniformed officer during the whole of his walk.

"Now, get busy," Lashbrook said curtly. "A man has been murdered here. Shot in the last few minutes. This gentleman who found the body must have come across it almost before the crime was committed and yet he declares that he heard no sound of a shot and saw no one along the whole length of the street. Call up the ambulance and let us get along to Wine Street."

A few minutes later, the body of the murdered man had been conveyed to the mortuary behind the police station, and there the sergeant in charge proceeded to interrogate the man who had given the name of Crafton. The latter, who seemed to be utterly unconcerned, answered every question put to him readily enough and even smiled at a certain interrogation that came from the lips of the sergeant.

"I have told you everything I can, officer," he said. "I heard no shot fired and I saw no sign of a disturbance or struggle. I know you must do your duty, but don't make it any harder for an unfortunate individual like myself if you can help it. I

might easily have ignored the body at my feet as I passed it and left the finding of it to somebody else. But, dash it all, officer, there is a certain duty one owes to society. That last question you put to me had a most unpleasant suggestion about it. You don't suppose I had anything to do with the crime, what?"

"I didn't infer that you had, sir," the sergeant in charge said.

"Oh, didn't you? Sounded like it, anyway. Just try and realise how easy it would have been for me to have walked on down the road and said nothing. There was not a soul in sight, except this officer here, and he would have been none the wiser if I hadn't called him back. And now, if you don't mind, I should like to get along as far as my club. What about it?"

The sergeant in charge reddened slightly.

"No offence, sir," he said. "No offence. It's all right, Mr. Crafton. I have your address, so that I shall know where to find you when the inquest takes place. Of course, you understand that you will be called as a witness."

Crafton intimated that he was quite aware of that and, after pausing just a moment to light a cigarette, nodded generally in the direction of the officers present and swaggered out of the station. He had hardly disappeared when one of the men, who had been sitting quietly at the table, rose and glanced significantly in the direction of his superior.

"All right, Simmons," the latter said. "Better follow him at a discreet distance and see if he really does go into the Wanderlust Club. One can't be too careful."

"But you don't suspect anything!" Lashbrook asked.

"Not for a moment," the sergeant smiled grimly. "But it is always as well to be on the safe side. I don't exactly see a murderer summoning the police within a few seconds of having committed a crime when he could have walked away quietly and covered his tracks. But, at any rate, there is no harm done by verifying the address of the man who found the body. I suppose there was no trace of a weapon?"

"None whatever," Lashbrook said emphatically. "I saw to that, Sergeant. There was no weapon lying in the road or on the path, and, after the body had been removed, I lingered behind a minute or two to make a thorough search. Whoever was responsible for the crime either carried the revolver away with him or got rid of it in some safe place where it couldn't be found. But what about calling in the police surgeon?"

The sergeant put through a call on the telephone and, ten minutes later, Dr. Gott, the police surgeon, bustled into the station with a black bag in his hand.

"You wanted me, Sergeant?" he asked. "Case of murder, isn't it? Knife or revolver?"

"Revolver, doctor," the sergeant said. "Or, at least, some weapon with a bullet in it."

"Then lead the way," the doctor said briefly.

## Chapter II

AT the end of an hour or so, the police surgeon made his report. The man had been shot at fairly close range by someone standing behind him, for the bullet had entered under the left shoulder blade, penetrating the heart, so that the victim must have perished almost instantly. There were bruises on his face which, no doubt, had been caused by violent contact with the pavement as he fell. More than that, Dr. Gott had extracted the bullet and handed it over to the sergeant in charge.

The latter regarded it long and patiently.

"Well," he said. "I have a good deal of experience with this sort of thing. I was under the impression that no automatic or revolver existed concerning which I know nothing, but I am bound to confess that I have never seen a bullet like this before. Nickel cap, too. And a peculiar shape. I should like to see the revolver this came from."

"Well, that is your business," the doctor said. "Meanwhile, if you don't mind, I think I will toddle off to bed. Let me know when you have fixed the hour and date of the inquest."

There was nothing more for it now but to wait upon events. There would be an inquest later on, but, meanwhile, the police could do nothing and move in no direction until the dead man had been identified. The hour was too late to get in touch with the morning papers, but later on there would be an item for the evening journals which might produce definite results.

But when the evening papers appeared on the following afternoon, most of them had varying paragraphs in connection with the murderous outrage which had taken place the night before in Mansfield street. One newspaper man, more enterprising than the rest, had managed to invade the Wanderlust Club and there interviewed one of the leading characters of the drama. He had walked into the club late in the afternoon and coolly asked if he might have a few words with Mr. Selby Crafton, and Crafton had come down into the strangers' room in no pleasant frame of mind.

"Now, what the devil do you want?" he asked.

The question was put offensively enough, but the ambitious journalist in search of a story is never deterred by such a little thing as that. The representative of the 'Morning Cry' coolly stuck a cigarette in the corner of his mouth and offered another one from his case to the frowning Crafton.

"Well, you have got a nerve," the latter said, taking the cigarette, nevertheless. "Get on with it."

"Well, it's like this, Mr. Crafton," the pressman went on coolly. "I got a bit of information from Wine street police station this morning with regard to that poor chap who was killed last night, and, when I knew that you were mixed up with it, I thought I would toddle round here and have a word or two with you."

"With the risk of being thrown into the street, eh?"

"All in a day's work," the little man said. "But you might just as well tell me, because if you don't, you will have a score of my push round here in the course of the day, all of them avid to interview you. Fact of the matter is, I am saving you a lot of trouble. Let me have the story I want and you can tell the rest of the chaps as they come along that Tim Branston has been before them. That will send them off."

“Well, there is something in that,” Crafton agreed. “Now, what, precisely, do you want to know?”

“All about yourself,” the reporter grinned.

“Oh, is that all? Like to see my birth certificate, I suppose?”

“No, nothing so personal. You see, I already know how you found the body last night, and how you hailed Acting-Sergeant Lashbrook and all that sort of thing. The first thing I am going to ask you is this: Did you ever see the dead man before?”

“Of course I didn’t.” Crafton smiled. “If I had, do you suppose I should have been fool enough to keep the fact from the police? Why, my good ass, that would simply be asking for trouble. I don’t want to be kept dancing about London for the next three months at the tail of the police. You see, I am a traveller, a wanderer on the face of the earth, which most of us members of the Wanderlust are. Here to-day and gone to-morrow, if you know what I mean. I have been doing this sort of thing all my life. I could tell you a story or two if I liked.”

The reporter grinned appreciatively.

“Ah, Secret Service, and all that sort of thing,” he cried. “If you don’t mind my saying so, you look like a gentleman of that sort. Military training written all over you and so forth. Well, sir, if you can tell me a story or two of that kind, I shall be exceedingly grateful. Spies and adventures on behalf of the Fatherland and what not. See what I mean?”

“Oh, I see exactly what you mean,” Crafton replied. “And that is exactly what you are not going to get. If you insist upon knowing, I was in the army at one time. After that, I was mixed up in a good many queer things in the Near East, but, as far as details are concerned, no. You can tell your readers that I was educated at a public school, and finished off at Bonne. I can speak three or four languages fluently, and, without undue modesty, I can tell you that I have done the State some service from time to time. I am unmarried, and likely to be, and I am of independent means. I have no local habitation in England, except the Wanderlust Club, and I make very few friends. And with that, you will have to be content.”

Whereupon, the little man went his way, and in the late afternoon edition of the ‘Morning Cry’ managed to spread himself out to the extent of a couple of columns. There were others on the warpath, too, so that by 6 o’clock in the evening the streets were echoing with the shouts of the newsboys, proclaiming the latest details of the “‘orrible murder in Mansfield street.” It happened, just then, that news was scarce, and startling events few and far between, so that the Mansfield street business created more of a sensation than otherwise might have been the case.

Lashbrook and the sergeant in charge of Wine street police station noted all this with grim satisfaction. Lashbrook transpired during the day to help the authorities in any way, and there was always the hope that this publicity, spreading as it did, far and wide, would induce some relative of the murdered man to come forward and identify the body. Until that was done, the hands of the police were tied, and they were rendered helpless.

“Something is sure to come of this,” the sergeant in charge said, as he passed a sheaf of papers over to Lashbrook. “Funny thing, wasn’t it, that we shouldn’t find

a single paper or card or letter on the body? Nothing but a few Treasury notes and some loose silver."

"Yes, and no way of identifying the clothing, either," Lashbrook agreed. "It looks to me as if that poor chap removed everything from his suit of clothes to his shirt that might lead us to some definite conclusion."

"That's right," the sergeant said. "I examined the tag on his coat through a magnifying glass and I found distinct traces where threads had been removed, just in the very place where you would expect to find a tailor's tab at the back of the collar. Much the same thing with the underclothing and handkerchief. The man was evidently an Englishman, too. About 50 years of age, I should say, and of fairly good social position. You can tell that by his linen, and the clothes he was wearing."

Before Lashbrook could make any observation, a constable in uniform came into the office, followed by a commissionaire in all the glory of gold braid and blue uniform.

"The hall porter of the Wanderlust to see you, sir," he said. "He wants to have a look at the body."

The sergeant sat up, alert at once.

"Do you think you can give us any information?" he snapped.

"Possibly," the commissionaire replied. "The secretary of the club sent me round here because one of our members is missing. He went out last night about ten o'clock, saying that he was expecting a friend and would be back before midnight, but when we went to rouse him in his bedroom this afternoon we found that he had not returned. I was reading all that stuff about a murder in the evening papers and the secretary sent me round here on the off chance that our member—well, you know."

"Come this way," the sergeant said.

A minute or two later, the sergeant and the commissionaire, together with Lashbrook, foregathered in the mortuary, where the body was lying.

"Now, have a good look at him," the sergeant said. "It is not a pleasant job, but it might be worse."

"Well, it might," the commissionaire said grimly. "But then, you see I am an old soldier and it wouldn't be the first time that I have been in contact with a corpse."

The sergeant flashed a strong light upon the silent figure there, and immediately the man looking down on him stiffened.

"That's our man, Sergeant," he said hoarsely. "That is Mr. Andrew Millar. One of our regular members. Funny, wasn't it, that he should have been murdered like that, and that his body should have been found by an other member, Mr. Crafton?"

## Chapter III

THE significance of the commissionaire's remark was by no means lost on his hearers. It was indeed strange that the dead man and the individual who found

his body should belong to the same club, and more or less live under the same roof. And not the least remarkable feature lay in the fact that Selby Crafton had declared that he had never seen Andrew Millar before.

But, on this point, the officer in charge of the proceedings was silent, though he exchanged a significant glance with his subordinate. Then, with a wave of his hand, he intimated to the witness that the interview was closed.

"I don't think I want to detain you any longer," he said. "Of course, you will have to give evidence at the inquest, which will probably take place tomorrow, but, as to that, you will be notified all in good time."

But no sooner had the man in the resplendent livery departed than the speaker turned eagerly to Lashbrook.

"This is a very strange thing," he said. "I suppose you noticed the amazing coincidence?"

"Yes, sir," Lashbrook replied. "Of course I did. Still, it doesn't get us very much further. You see, the Wanderlust Club is on my beat and I happen to know a certain amount concerning it. Of course, it isn't a swagger establishment likes The Travellers, for instance. But it is very well known and some of its members are by way of being celebrities. Men who travel all over the world, pioneers of civilisation, orchid gatherers, and all that sort of thing. A good many of these are foreigners. I suppose, altogether, that the club must number at least a thousand members, so that you can conceive it is quite possible for two men to use the club regularly and never meet one another."

"Yes, I know all about that, Lashbrook, but I dare say we shall learn a good deal more during the course of to-morrow."

Quite a large gathering filled the Salisbury Hall next morning when the inquest on Andrew Millar opened. It was not one of those international crimes that appeal forcibly to public opinion, but seeing that things were quiet just now, a large number of curious and morbid-minded people came thronging through the doors of the hall, and were waiting eagerly for what was likely to transpire when the coroner opened the proceedings.

At the far end of the long table at which the functionary in question presided was seated a dozen or more reporters with notebooks. These were not all of the male sex, for at least two of them were women, one of whom was young and attractive, dressed neatly in black with a small, close-fitting hat that served to disguise the attractiveness of her face. As Lashbrook stood there in the background, his eye roving from place to place, it seemed to him, in a vague sort of way, that he had seen that lady reporter before. Then the coroner began to speak and Lashbrook became the mere policeman again.

The coroner was one of the pompous, fussy type, with an exaggerated opinion of his own importance, and it seemed to Lashbrook that he was wasting a good deal of time in coming to the main point. Then, at length, the little man paused and looked up at the inspector who was in charge of the proceedings and intimated that he would like the latter to call his witnesses.

"Very good, sir," the inspector said. "Philip Lashbrook."

Philip stood forward. He took the oath and proceeded to give his evidence in chief. It was no more than a bald statement of what had happened in Mansfield street. But the Coroner did not appear to be satisfied.

“Are you sure that is all you have to tell us, constable?” he asked. “Are we to understand that you were called back just as you passed down Orford street by the man who found the body? I mean that you heard and saw nothing whatever until you were hailed by Selby Crafton, and went back until you came to the place where that individual was standing by the corpse.”

“I heard and saw nothing, sir,” Lashbrook affirmed. “I turned sharply to my right when I reached the spot where Orford street crosses Mansfield street, and I saw nobody. It was late at night and the place was deserted.”

“Can you give us the exact time?”

“I can, sir,” Lashbrook went on. “As I came to the junction of the cross roads, the clock in the steeple of St. Botolph’s chimed the hour of one. That I heard distinctly. It was only a few seconds after that when I heard a shout and went back along the far side of Mansfield street where I found Mr. Crafton by the body of the dead man.”

“Yes, but according to your deposition, you decided that the murdered man had only just died. Muscular action was still going on and the body was quite warm. Do you mean to tell us that you did not hear a shot fired?”

“I am quite sure I didn’t, sir.”

“And yet everything was absolutely silent.”

“As silent as the grave, sir. I heard no shot. If there had been one I must have heard it, even if I had been two or three hundred yards away.”

The coroner fussed and fumed, in his important way, but nothing more could be elicited from the witness, and he was told, more or less peremptorily, to stand down. He was followed by the police surgeon, whose evidence was purely technical, so that there was no opening for the coroner’s astuteness, and he was followed in turn by the commissionaire of the Wanderlust Club, whose business it was to identify the body formally. When he had done this, he turned as if to leave the box, but the coroner had not done with him yet.

“One moment, my man, if you please,” he said. “I presume you are well acquainted with the appearance of deceased?”

“Oh, yes, sir,” the witness said. “It is my business to know every member by sight. Mr. Millar has been a member of the club ever since I went there nearly twenty years ago.”

“And he lived there regularly?”

“Well, on and off, as you might say, sir. He came and went, sometimes being in London for months together and then, perhaps, a year or so abroad. A very quiet, reserved gentleman who kept himself very much to himself. I can’t remember ever seeing him go in or out of the club with another member.”

“And just as reserved inside, I suppose?”

“Well, as to that, sir, I can’t say because mine is more or less an outdoor job. You will have to ask the secretary or one of the waiters as to that matter.”

At this point the inspector in charge interposed.

“We are calling the secretary of the club, sir,” he explained. “He is the next witness on my list.”

A minute later, the secretary of the Wanderlust stopped briskly into the box. It was not much he had to say, except that the dead man was a very old member of the club, and that he had lived there, on and off, for years. He had some sort of

idea that the dead man was engaged in Government business, but, as to that, he could not be definite. Mr. Millar was an exceedingly reticent individual and rarely spoke to anybody. He had no callers and no letters, and had never been seen to post one in the pillar box that stood in the hall of the club.

"Then you know nothing about him?" the coroner snapped.

"Nothing whatever, sir. He was elected before my time and, so long as he paid his bills regularly, it was no business of mine to inquire into his movements."

"But you must know something about him. For instance, you know the bank on which he drew his cheques."

"He never drew any cheques, sir. He paid his account regularly every Monday morning in cash. It was his habit, when he returned from one of his wanderings, to hand me over sums of money which, at his request, I placed in the club safe. He came back to England about a month or so ago, and the night he returned he gave me £500 in Treasury notes. Subject to certain deductions, I have that sum of money at the present moment."

The coroner fussed and fumed over his notes, evidently feeling that he had come to something like a dead end. It was quite plain that the last witness could say nothing more and after Crafton had given evidence as to the finding of the body, the proceedings were adjourned for a week and, thereupon, the disappointed spectators began to file out of court. Already, most of the police officers present had vanished, leaving Lashbrook behind.

He hardly knew why he lingered, save that he was interested in a lady reporter, who was now completing her notes and putting up her papers before leaving the hall. She rose presently and as she came closer to Lashbrook, who was watching her every movement, she looked up for a moment, so that he was enabled to get a full sight of that attractive face of hers.

He gave a little whistle of astonishment and then smiled, as if something had suddenly pleased him. As the girl in the small hat was passing him he reached out a hand and touched her lightly on the shoulder. She wheeled round swiftly.

"Surely," he said, "surely I am not mistaken. You must be my old playmate Mary Heaton."

## Chapter IV

THE girl addressed as Mary Heaton flashed a glance at Lashbrook and then her face suddenly wreathed in smiles. It was not till then that Philip realised how really attractive and beautiful she was. Not precisely beautiful in the classic sense of the world, but wonderfully alluring with her grey-blue eyes and sunny hair and the clear ivory of her face, that was innocent of anything in the way of powder.

The same Mary Heaton that Lashbrook had known years ago as a child, but strangely different. For the pretty child had grown into the beautiful woman, changed almost beyond recognition, but not so changed that Lashbrook failed to recognise her.

“Why, it’s dear old Phil,” she cried. “Philip Lashbrook. The boy I used to know before the war destroyed everything. The boy I used to play with, and who was my hero in those happy days. Phil turned into a policeman!”

“Ah, you are just the same Molly,” Lashbrook laughed. “You have grown older and—well, I don’t wish to pay you any compliments, because your mirror does that for you. Fancy me running against you like this. I thought you were still in the old home.”

“Oh, my dear boy, the old home has been broken up long ago. The home you speak of was smashed up, and my father is no longer in the land of the living. You see, he left me very badly off, so that I had to look to myself.”

“Just exactly my case,” Lashbrook said. “When the war broke but the poor old guv’nor lost all his pupils and that famous Army class of his was dissolved for ever. And that is why I am a policeman to-day, Molly.”

“Well, we both seem to have had our share of misfortunes,” Molly Heaton smiled. “Little we dreamt of the future in those dear old days when we were young and had nothing to worry about. But, Philip, I am glad to have met you again.”

“Are you?” Phil grinned delightedly. “Well, it’s mutual, anyhow. But I suppose you have lots of friends.”

“My dear boy, I have very few. You see, I have to work pretty hard to get a living. When the crash came, and everything was realised, I had less than a thousand pounds in the world. So I came up to London and learnt typewriting and shorthand, and I managed to get a job as police court reporter with an evening paper. Only a bit of a rag, but it is enough to keep me in bread and cheese. Then I had a bit of luck. I found a woman who was running a more or less flourishing typing agency, and when she told me she was going to give it up in order to look after the house of a widowed brother of hers, I bought the business. Oh, I am all right now. But it’s not altogether a bed of roses.”

“Neither is mine,” Philip said. “When our crash came, I was absolutely at a loose end, and I could not find a job for love or money. I made an effort to stay in the regular Army, but it was no good. Besides, I was so unsettled that I couldn’t buckle to anything regular. Then somebody told me there was a good opening in the Police Force for a man of education, and I made up my mind to join up. At the present moment I am a sort of acting sergeant with every chance of promotion, especially if I can get into Scotland Yard, which is my ambition. But look here, Molly, we are not going to meet and part like this, are we?”

Those melting blue eyes looked smilingly into Lashbrook’s face. There was no resisting the appeal.

“Why, of course not, Phil,” she said. “Do you think I can ever forget those happy days when we went bird-nesting, and swimming, and rowing, together. Why, I used to think then that there was nobody like you. And when I come to look at you now—”

She broke off suddenly, and the colour flared in her face.

“That’s right, that’s right,” Phil said hurriedly. “Now, listen to me, Molly. After to-night I shall be free for two or three days. Just now I have a special stunt on, which, of course, I shall not discuss with you. But if I am successful in what I have undertaken, then it is more than possible that I shall go up a step or two. Merely a little idea of my own, which I have laid before my superiors, and they

were good enough to tell me to get on with it. Now, when my job is finished, I shall be less tied than I am at present. I mean that next week I shall have my evenings free. Now, what do you say to a little dinner in some quiet restaurant and a show afterwards?"

"I should love it," Molly said heartily. "Of course I should. Do you know, I haven't been inside a theatre for two years. A picture palace now and then has been the limit of my extravagance."

"Well, I can say much the same thing," Phil smiled. "There is not very much left of my pay after certain expenses have been deducted, but I have managed to save a bit, all the same. Now, if you will let me have your address—"

Molly Heaton produced from her bag a neat little business card in the corner of which she pencilled her private address. This she handed to Lashbrook, who put it carefully in his pocket.

"Now I really must run along," she said. "I have to transcribe all these notes for my paper, after which any amount of work is waiting for me at the office. But, oh, Phil, I am so glad to have met you again. I was beginning to wonder if anything had happened to you. I should have written to you if I had only known where to find you. When the time went on and I heard nothing about you, I began to think you had emigrated aboard, like so many of our countrymen. But, really, I must be getting along; I mustn't stand chattering here all day."

"Oh, very well. All right," Phil said. "Next Monday evening, then, at 7 o'clock. I'll pick you up at your lodgings, and we will go out for the evening and pretend for a few hours that we are people of importance, roughing it with the best of them, and all that sort of thing. I have got a dinner jacket somewhere."

A minute or two later, and Lashbrook was going thoughtfully on his way, with a smile on his face, and a glow in his heart that he had not experienced for a long time. Fancy meeting little Molly again like that! Little Molly, who had grown from a pretty child into a beautiful woman. Not much of a squire of dames was Philip Lashbrook, but somehow Molly was different. She had always appealed to him, even when she was a long-legged creature with a mop of hair hanging down her back. And now?

Well, Philip told himself, he must not think of that. What right had an acting sergeant of the police, with nothing but his pay, to think of pretty girls and a snug little home somewhere? Besides, Molly Heaton was entitled to something better than that.

So, for the moment, at any rate, Lashbrook put the matter out of his mind absolutely, and went back to his work. It was late in the evening, long after 11 o'clock, before he turned his face once more in the direction of Mansfield street. This was, ostensibly, his beat, although, just now, he was more or less at a loose end with considerable latitude as to his movements. There was something rather wrong going on in the neighbourhood of Mansfield street, and, if his suspicions were correct, and he had average luck, there was more than the chance of a sensational arrest that would bring him under the immediate eye of his superiors. And then, perhaps, he would be able to gratify his ambition and find himself posted to Scotland Yard.

It was nearly 12 o'clock before he found himself in Mansfield street, within a few yards of the spot where the body of the unfortunate Andrew Miller had lain. And

then, to his vexation, he saw, instead of the deserted road which he had expected, a small gang of workmen engaged in opening up a portion of the road which lay close to the pavement. There were four or five of these men altogether, obviously of the navvy class, and already they had torn up a part of the road fringing the curb.

Rather annoyed and put out by this Lashbrook approached the group and asked what they were doing.

"Opening up a drain," a man who appeared to be the foreman said. "Bit of a stoppage between one of the houses here and the main."

"Going to be long?" Lashbrook asked.

"No, only an hour or so," the workman explained. "'Ere, Bill, pull off that cover and see if it's got anything to do with the trap. Eh, wot's that? Something jammed in the trap, eh?"

"Something like that," a man muttered. "Eh, wot's this? looks to me like one o' them there revolvers."

Lashbrook darted forward and took the object from the speaker's hand. He thrilled as he held it up to the light. A new automatic, beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"I think I will take care of this, if you don't mind," he said, speaking as quietly as possible.

With that, he walked on, as if it was all in a day's work but he knew that, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that luck had handed him the weapon with which Millar had been murdered.

## Chapter V

LASHBROOK dropped the revolver into his overcoat pocket as soon as he had laid hands upon it, his idea being that the less the workmen saw of it, the better. And then, as he strode along Mansfield street he hesitated just a moment. Would it now, perhaps, be better to go back and warn the workers to say nothing of their discovery? Perhaps, on the other hand, it would be just as well to do nothing of the sort, because it was long odds that those simple labourers working on the drain would not dream of connecting the slim weapon in Lashbrook's pocket with the crime that had taken place in the vicinity not so many hours before.

Therefore Lashbrook went quietly on his way, though he knew perfectly well that, so far as his night's work was concerned, he was merely wasting his time. As a matter of fact, the special duty to which he had been allotted was to keep his eye upon a block of flats further along the street, where it was suspected that a resident was running a gambling club. It had been on Lashbrook's own information that the authorities were acting, so that he had been given a free hand to carry on his investigations. And he knew perfectly well that, with those workmen so close at hand there would be no particular activity in the suspected flat that night. Lashbrook felt that he was dealing with an exceedingly cunning combination of criminals, and it was only common sense to come to the

conclusion that they would regard those workmen as part of a ruse in connection with the police.

So that Lashbrook went quietly on his way and, having reported himself to the sergeant in charge at Wine street, repaired presently to his own bed-sitting room not far off, without saying a word as to the discovery he had made.

He did not doubt for a moment that, by a fortuitous accident he had been placed in possession of the weapon by means of which Andrew Millar had been killed. Moreover, it was no business of the people in Wine street, because, already, Scotland Yard had taken the case up, and it was to headquarters that Lashbrook made up his mind to report his discovery.

In the seclusion of his modest quarters, he examined the weapon at his leisure. It was an exceedingly neat weapon, small, except as to the handle, which was long and slim and, so far as Lashbrook could see, the automatic had not suffered by submersion in the drain. There was no sign of rust or dirt, though, the thing was wet from the water in the trap, and this, of course, had prevented the rust from accumulating anywhere. It was a narrow weapon, too, not much more than half an inch in width, so that it would have been an easy matter for the murderer to drop it between the bars of the drain grating. Evidently, the whole thing had been planned out to a nicety by some cunning criminal who was taking a minimum of risk in the despatching of his victim. There was a clip of six cartridges attached to the automatic, one only of which had been exploded. Altogether, a very neat and compact affair of fine finish and workmanship, but absolutely without identification marks of any kind. The most minute examination of the automatic failed to disclose any trace of its source.

And yet it seemed to Lashbrook that he had seen something like it before. He could not think where or how. Probably a weapon manufactured for some definite purpose, and what that purpose was it would be for someone more expert than himself to discover.

It was well into the following afternoon on the next day before Lashbrook made his way to Scotland Yard. He was in his civilian clothes, but the presentation of his official card enabled him to enter into the sacred precincts and obtain an audience with somebody in authority.

“I want to see one of the inspectors,” he explained. “You see who I am. I have certain information in connection with the murder of the man, Millar, in Mansfield street, and I shall be very glad if you will take a message up and put me in contact with anyone who can listen to what I have to say.”

“Oh, it’s like that, is it?” the man to whom Lashbrook was speaking smiled.

“Let me see—Lashbrook, Lashbrook. Oh, you are the man who found the body?”

“That’s right,” Phil said curtly.

“Then you had better come this way with me.”

So saying, the official led the way up a flight of stairs, and, leaving Lashbrook in a waiting room for a moment or two, came back presently and jerked a thumb in the direction of a door, which was situated at the end of a long corridor.

“Go in there,” he said.

Lashbrook entered the room to find a tall man seated at a big desk in a window overlooking the river. He was a man of middle age, with grey hair and a benign expression, and a pair of grey eyes with a sort of twinkle in them. He looked on the

whole, more like a distinguished actor than a Scotland Yard inspector as he turned pleasantly in the intruder's direction.

"Great Scott," he said quite unexpectedly. "Why, it's Philip Lashbrook. Now, young fellow my lad, tell me what this means. And how long have you been in the Force?"

Phil abated not a jot of his attitude.

"Good afternoon, sir," he said. "Acting-Sergeant Philip Lashbrook, at your disposal. I have come here to make an important statement in connection with the Mansfield street murder. I ought, perhaps, to have mentioned it to my superior officer at Wine-st., but seeing that the Yard has taken over the case, I thought it best to come direct to headquarters."

Inspector Klein smiled blandly.

"Now, look here, Phil," he said. "What is the good of going on like this? Of course, I quite appreciate the correctness of your attitude, but when you come here you didn't expect to run into your old friend and companion, Robert Klein. All in good time, my lad. Now, you knew perfectly well where I was to be found, so why on earth didn't you come to me in the first instance before you joined the Force? If you had, I would have put you on the strength here at once. Good lord, man, do you suppose that I should have lost the chance of getting hold of an officer who did such fine service for his country during the war? Now, tell me, how long have you been a bobby? We will get back to the official attitude all in good time. Sit down and take a cigarette and tell me your story at your ease."

There was nothing for it but to obey.

"Very well, old chap," Phil said. "I suppose there is nobody within hearing, so I can speak freely."

"My dear fellow, that is just what I want you to do."

"Well, it's like this, Klein. When a year or two ago I found myself at a loose end I tried all sorts of things, but I could not get hold of a job for love or money. So, as I had little of the latter myself, I had to do something. What better than the London Police Force? Oh, I knew perfectly well that you held a position of authority, but, you see, as the man said in the story, 'I 'as my pride'."

"I see," Klein twinkled. "Didn't want to be beholden to anybody. You haven't changed a bit, Philip."

"Well, there it is," Lashbrook said. "I joined the Force and in two years I have got where I am. But I need not tell you that my ambition is to get my head in here."

"And it is going to be gratified," Klein said. "God bless my soul, you are just the very class of man we are always praying for. An athlete and a gentleman, to say nothing of being an excellent French scholar, with a knowledge of German. But I see you are anxious to tell me something. So get on with it. But understand this, Philip—you are not going to stay where you are any longer. I can find you a corner here, where your abilities will have full scope."

"That is awfully good of you," Philip said gratefully. "Of course, I hadn't the remotest idea that I was going to run into you when I came here. But that has nothing to do with it. Now, my dear old friend, if I can drop the official for a moment or two, I should like to have your opinion on this."

With that, Lashbrook drew the automatic from his pocket and laid it on the table before his superior. Klein examined it minutely and then turned for an explanation.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Well, unless I am greatly mistaken, it is the weapon that killed Andrew Millar. But perhaps I had better tell you exactly how the thing came into my hands."

Klein listened with the deepest attention to all that Phil had to say. It was evident that the statement had made a considerable impression upon him.

"I should think you are not very far wrong," he said thoughtfully. "Yes—within a few feet of where the murdered man lay. A very neat weapon, complete with a silencer. We will keep this little bit of information to ourselves, if you don't mind. Now what, precisely, do you want me to do?"

# Chapter VI

"WELL, it may sound a bit like cheek on my part," Philip said. "But I want you to arrange so that I can be put on to this job, because I have an idea in the back of my head which may lead to important results."

"I can't promise to give you a free hand to the exclusion of everybody else," Klein said. "But I can arrange for you to be taken over by the Yard and allowed to follow up your own line. There will be one or two others working in another direction, but that is no reason why you should interfere with each other's work. However, what is the general idea?"

"Well, I can hardly tell you yet," Philip confessed. "You see, it is only a little theory of mine, and it came into my head the other night as I was talking to Crafton, who is the man, you will remember, responsible for directing my attention to the body. Just a trifle, but as you know perfectly well, these trifles often lead to great results."

"Nobody knows better than I," Klein agreed. "But you are not seriously suggesting that Crafton had anything to do with the murder of Andrew Millar, are you?"

"No," Phil responded. "It is a bit of a coincidence that they both belonged to the same club, though it is more than possible that they were not acquainted. The Wanderlust boasts over a thousand members from all parts of the world. So if one of these said he didn't know another by sight, then we should have to take his word for it. Another thing, if Crafton had had a hand in putting Millar out of the way, he would never have stood there by the body and coolly called my attention to the fact that it was lying there. He could have slipped away and none any the wiser. Did you ever know of a case where an assassin shot his victim and waited for the police to come along to identify the corpse?"

Klein nodded in agreement.

"Yes, I am quite with you," he said. "But what about this weapon? I think we are right in assuming that it was with this automatic that Millar was murdered. And, no doubt, everything has been planned out beforehand. The unfortunate, followed

by the murderer, who knew exactly where that drain was, and that he would be able to down his man and drop his weapon into a place where it might have lain for years without discovery. I suppose you realise that we have got an exceedingly cunning criminal to deal with. But don't let us get too far ahead. What I want to know is where that automatic was made."

"Ah, that will take us some little time," Phil said. "It was evidently a special weapon, made for a special purpose. Moreover, there is no sign of what I might call its nationality. A strange thing, isn't it, that the makers of such a fine piece of work should be ashamed or unwilling to put their mark upon it? It may be of English manufacture; it may be German, or French. But, somehow or other, I have an idea that I have seen a weapon like it before. Do you remember an occasion, early in 1918 when every man we could scrape together was rushed up to Amiens when the Germans were making their great push. It was a night in late April when we managed to lay a spy by the heels."

"By Jove, I do," Klein said. "A German in British uniform. We only tumbled to it by accident."

"Yes, and what happened? Before we could lay hands upon him the man was dead. I mean to say, he saw exactly what was coming to him and contrived, in some manner, to make away with himself. Just collapsed and died, as we were on our way up the stairs to arrest him in the ruined cottage where he had his quarters. Of course, we found no papers or anything of that sort and no weapon, except an automatic pistol which, now I come to remember it, was very like the one lying on the table there."

"Ah, it all comes back fresh to my mind now," Klein said. "The man contrived to poison himself in some way. And you are right about the pistol he was carrying. It did bear a curious resemblance to the one you found last night. Not that the fact helps us much."

"I am not so sure about that," Phil smiled. "If you will let me have that revolver for a few hours, I think I shall be in a position to trace it to the source of its manufacture. It's just a chance, of course. What do you say?"

"Rather running a risk as far as I am concerned," Klein said. "But still, you can have it, it you like."

"Then I am free to make my investigations."

"Yes, you can bank on that," Klein said. "I will make everything easy for you. So get on with it, and don't give another thought to your superiors in Wine street."

More than satisfied with his afternoon's work, Lashbrook went off presently and, later on in the evening, found himself somewhere in the neighbourhood of Hampstead. He came at length to one of the smaller side streets, where he knocked at the door of a house in the terrace and inquired of the slatternly servant who came to the door for one, Michel Rothbarth.

"Yes," said the slovenly maid. "Mr. Rothbarth is in his room. Would you like to see 'im?"

Phil gave his name and intimated that he had come there on purpose. A minute later, he found himself in a small sitting room, where a man about his own age looked up and regarded him through a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Why," he exclaimed. "It's Philip Lashbrook. My dear fellow, I haven't seen you for years. I suppose you are still friendly or you wouldn't be here."

"That's right," Phil said. "Seems ages since we were at Bonne together, and on the best of terms. And after that we met more than once in London. Then the war, of which the least said the better. And that's done and past now, and we can meet just as we used to do in the old days."

"But how did you find me out?" Rothbarth asked.

"Oh, I have known for a long time that you were back in London at the old job once more. I was going to look you up but really I haven't had the time."

"And what are you doing now?" Rothbarth asked.

"Well, I am—or was till yesterday—a common or garden policeman," Lashbrook smiled. "And I daresay you will wonder if that fact has anything to do with my visit here tonight. Well, as a matter of fact it has."

Rothbarth looked up in some alarm.

"Nothing wrong, eh?" he asked uneasily.

"Oh, dear no. Not at least, as far as you are concerned. But it occurred to me that you might be in a position to give me certain information. You can speak as plainly as you like, because I have Scotland Yard behind me. Now, I suppose you read something about that murder in Mansfield street?"

"Certainly I did," Rothbarth agreed. "But you are not suggesting that I can help you in that matter, are you?"

"Well in a way, I am. Because I know that you held a commission in the German Army during the war. And, on one occasion, as I ascertained from some prisoners we took, you were jolly near to falling into our hands. Now, Rothbarth, the firm you represent in London has to do with small arms, more or less."

"Quite right. Proceed," Rothbarth said.

"As agents for a manufacturing combine in Germany. Tell me if I am wrong. No, I see I am not. Now, I am going to take you more or less into my confidence. Unless we are greatly mistaken, we have found the weapon with which Andrew Millar was shot. In fact, I have got it in my pocket at the present moment. I have a sort of feeling that it is of German manufacture and, if so, you may be in a position to put me in touch with the makers. Here it is. Have a good look for yourself."

Rothbarth took up the weapon and, almost at once a dawning smile broke out behind his spectacles.

"You have come to what you call the right shop, my boy," he said. "As a matter of fact, I can tell you all about that weapon. It was designed and manufactured in Munich, early in the war, for the use of what I must call our spies. That is why there is no identification mark on it whatever. You see, what we call a spy the other side calls a patriot—it all depends upon the point of view. And you know the risks that attach to war espionage. Well, suppose one of these secret service men fall into the hands of the enemy. If they are clever enough, no papers are found on them, nothing but a revolver, which cannot be identified as made in their own country. But this particular weapon is quite familiar to me. Each of our secret service men carried one when he was on active service."

"Yes, I rather gathered that," Lashbrook said. "But what beats me is how several of your country-men, who were caught behind our lines, managed to do away with themselves just before they were laid by the heels."

Rothbarth smiled again as he took up the revolver, and, pressing a spring just behind the trigger guard, detached the handle. This he turned upside down and out of it fell a small capsule, together with a long slender key.

"Well, what do you make of these?" he asked.

"Nothing of the capsule," Lashbrook said. "But the key looks more or less familiar. Unless I am greatly mistaken, it is a key to a hiding place in some safe deposit."

## Chapter VII

LASHBROOK fingered the key that had fallen from the base of the revolver in a thoughtful mood before he turned to Rothbarth for some further information.

"Your story is very interesting," he said. "But surely you did not expect to find a key hidden in that weapon? And, if you did, what, precisely, does it mean?"

"Well, I didn't," Rothbarth admitted. "To be quite candid, I don't in the least understand how the key got there, or what it signifies. Mind you, I was not surprised when the capsule rolled out, and I should not have been much astonished if a paper or two had been concealed. You see, it's like this. Those revolvers were made specially for our Secret Service men. I don't suppose there are more than a couple of hundred of them altogether, and they were recalled early in the war because the heads of the German General Staff in Berlin had an uneasy suspicion that your Intelligence Department had hit upon the secret. As a matter of fact, a few months before the war I had one myself."

"But, my dear chap, you were in England then."

"Of course, I was," Rothbarth smiled. "I had been in England for three years, but though I was connected with a business house, and doing my best to make a fortune, I was an officer in a Brunswick regiment before I came. There is no reason why I should not tell you the truth now. Prior to 1914 I was supplying a lot of valuable information to Berlin. So were hundreds of others of us, and we never realised that we were under suspicion here until hostilities actually broke out. In the last week of July, 1914, I had my call, and left England without undue ostentation. Four days later, practically every spy in England was rounded up and placed under arrest. It was a wonderfully smart piece of work on the part of your Secret Service, and I take off my hat to them."

"Yes, I know all about that," Lashbrook said, "because you see, I was connected with a branch of the Secret Service myself. As a matter of fact I was acting in connection with the Belgian and French espionage all through the war. But surely you can tell me something about this key."

"Not a thing," Rothbarth declared. "It is pretty evident to me that one of your men got hold of that automatic and discovered its secret hiding-place. He must have used it for his own purpose afterwards and hidden the key himself."

Lashbrook turned the key over in his hand and proceeded to examine it carefully. He could see a number stamped on the barrel and something that looked like a monogram.

"But this is English all right," he said. "Look at the word 'No,' which is an abbreviation for number, in front of the figures. You wouldn't see that on a German key. Unless I am altogether mistaken, this key is in connection with a safe deposit somewhere. Then look at the monogram. Let's see if I can make it out. 'M.L.S.' and yes, the word 'Co,' inside the monogram. Let me think a minute. I've got it!—Martin Lane Safe Company. Now, why the deuce did the man who murdered Andrew Millar with this weapon throw it away? He must have known that inside the handle of it was a key to a safe—unless, of course, he had called a day or two before at the safe deposit and got away with the contents."

"Yes, and on the other hand, he may not have known that the key was concealed in the handle of the automatic," Rothbarth replied.

"That is very smart of you," Lashbrook said. "However, before long we shall know all about that. What I cannot understand is how that weapon found its way into the hands of an Englishman."

"Can't you?" Rothbarth smiled. "I can. You are not going to tell me that you believe every Englishman, and Frenchman and German was thoroughly loyal during the war. My dear chap, there are traitors in every country. I know there were in mine and I think you must admit the same thing."

"Grudgingly," Lashbrook said. "I came in contact with more than one of that kind during the war. What novelists call double-crossing. Men who didn't care a hang about their country so long as they sold to the best personal advantage. I should think it is very likely that it was one of these who was responsible for the death of Millar."

"After what you have just told me, I should not be at all surprised," Rothbarth agreed. "It is not a very savoury topic and I don't think we need pursue it any further."

"There I agree with you," Lashbrook said. "I am very much obliged to you for giving me a valuable piece of information which I should never have discovered for myself and all I ask you to do is to say nothing of this to anybody for the time being. But I am curious as to the capsule."

"Yes, and you had better be careful with it," Rothbarth said. "The capsule contains enough prussic acid to kill a man in ten minutes. That was the idea, you see. Supposing one of our men had certain plans or information on this tissue paper hidden in the handle of the automatic and found himself suddenly face to face with certain arrest. Which, in other words, meant certain death. He would open the breach of the weapon and close it again, after popping that capsule in his mouth. Then, when he came to be searched, nothing would be found on him, except an automatic which would not be suspicious in the circumstances."

Lashbrook nodded. He quite saw the logic of the German's remarks. Then, after a little further desultory conversation, he went back to his own bed-sitting room, and, for the time being, put the problem out of his mind.

After breakfast, the next morning, he made his way as far as the Wanderlust Club and there asked to see the secretary. The dapper little man whom Lashbrook had seen at the inquest came forward and introduced himself as John Clift. Lashbrook came straight to the point and suggested that he would like to inspect the bedroom which Millar had been occupying for some time before his death.

"Oh, you can do that with pleasure, officer," Clift said. "But I don't think you will find much there. Only a battered old portmanteau containing a certain amount of clothing, and a locked tin box. Beyond that, nothing."

"I am obliged by your consideration," Lashbrook said, "by the way, I suppose you haven't had any inquiry as to the dead man by any relatives or friends?"

"Only one," the secretary explained. "A queer sort of fish who came here late last night more or less intoxicated and declared that he was our late member's brother. You see, he had been reading the papers and was anxious, without further delay, to get his hands on the £480 odd in cash which Mr. Millar had deposited in my keeping and which, at the present moment, is in the safe."

"That's interesting," Lashbrook said. "We were wondering why nobody who knew the poor fellow had come forward to claim relationship. You see, until we can glean something about Mr. Andrew Millar's past we are more or less at a loose end. Did the man you speak of leave any address? Or did he leave you under the impression that it was a sort of a try on?"

"Not precisely," Clift explained. "There was a certain likeness between the two men to give me reason to believe that the fellow was telling the truth. Only, as I told you, he was a long way from being sober, and I couldn't make much out of him. One of those men who has been a gentleman once. You know what I mean. Good accent and manner and frightfully shabby clothes, that had evidently been the work of a first class West End tailor. I shouldn't be at all surprised if it turns out that the chap in question is an old jail bird. You see, Mr. Lashbrook, I have had a good many years' acquaintance of all sorts and conditions of men, and I flatter myself that I am a pretty good judge of character. That half-defiant swagger, that furtive glancing over the left shoulder. However, you will have a chance of interviewing the individual himself if you care to come here to-morrow afternoon at 2 o'clock. He said he should return then with his credentials, when he hoped that I should hand that money over to him. In which hope, I need not tell you, he will be disappointed. That money will remain in my safe until I am satisfied that the proper legal claimant is entitled to it. And now, if you like, I will show you Mr. Andrew Millar's bedroom."

It was exactly as the secretary had said. There was nothing in the room, except a huge portmanteau filled with clothing, from which Lashbrook noticed that every trace of identity had been removed. He turned it over and over again and was fain, at length, to admit that there was nothing of the slightest use to him in his search. Then he turned to the little tin box, the lock of which he forced, and poured the contents out on to the bed.

Here, again, he found himself baffled, for the box contained nothing but a few letters from various correspondents, a heap of newspaper cuttings, and, finally, a handful of photographs, one of which had been torn right down the middle. More or less idly, Lashbrook sought for the second half of the photograph, which, however, was nowhere to be found. Then, as he closely examined the section in his hand, he smiled significantly to himself, as he slipped the scrap of cardboard into his pocket.

"Found a clue, what?" Clift asked.

"Possibly," Lashbrook smiled. "A very slender one, anyway. But, then, you never know."

# Chapter VIII

IT was late in the afternoon after Lashbrook's visit to the Wanderlust Club that he found a note waiting for him at his lodgings from Mary Heaton. In it she explained that she would be unable to meet him, as arranged, on the Monday, as she had to go out of town on business, but perhaps, if he was not otherwise engaged that night, he might find it possible to call round at her rooms and thus put forward the dinner and theatre engagement by a day or two.

Accordingly, a little after seven o'clock that evening, Lashbrook, nicely turned out in a jacket suit, found himself on the way to a quiet little restaurant in the neighbourhood of Soho, accompanied by Mary, who was looking her best in a fur coat and a small, close-fitting hat.

"I hope you didn't mind, my altering the arrangements," she said. "But you see, I have got to go down into the country on Monday, to do a day's work for an old literary gentleman who refuses to let anyone but myself do his typing!"

"And a very good judge, too," Lashbrook smiled. "As a matter of fact, the change of programme suits me exceedingly well. You know that I have been given, more or less, a free hand in the Mansfield street murder, which I hope is going to prove a feather in my cap. But I have come up against a bit of a snag and I don't want to go any further until I have had an opportunity of consulting my old friend, Inspector Klein. However, he has been called away to Manchester on some urgent business. So I am marking time."

They reached the restaurant presently, where they had a small table to themselves, and there, seated opposite each other, began to talk of old times.

"This is exceedingly pleasant, Molly," Lashbrook said. "You can't tell how pleased I am to meet you once more. You are just the same, and yet you have changed in a way that fairly bewilders me. To think that my wild, little tomboy playmate has grown into a beautiful woman, as you have!"

"I suppose that is a compliment," Molly laughed. "But don't forget, my dear Philip, that I have learnt a good deal of the world since those happy days, and when a man pays me a compliment I am prone to wonder if there is not some ulterior object behind it."

"Then you have very little else to do," Lashbrook said. "But, of course, you know you have grown into a beautiful woman, and a jolly capable one, too, I'm sure."

"Yes," Molly said thoughtfully, "I suppose I have, more or less. But then, after my father died, I found life a bitter experience. You see, for all my dear old dad was away from home a great deal, I had a very pleasant house to live in, and a favourite relative to see that I didn't get into much mischief. And then, suddenly, everything changed. My father died and, very soon afterwards, that dear aunt of mine followed him. And there was I, with my own living to get and not the slightest knowledge of how to do it. Of course, I realised that my poor little capital would not last for ever, and that is why I spent part of it in learning typing and

bookkeeping, and all that kind of thing, with a view to starting for myself. And, on the whole, it seems to me that I have a lot to be thankful for."

"You have a lot to take credit for," Lashbrook said. "You know, Molly, I could never quite understand your household. Your father, Colonel Heaton, seemed to spend so much time abroad. My old father often used to wonder why, because the Colonel was fond of his home, and one of the keenest hands with a rifle and a fishing rod that I ever saw. He taught me pretty nearly all I know in the way of sport, and those pups of my father's looked upon the Colonel as a sort of god. Did you ever discover what mysterious occupation the Colonel was following?"

"Never," Molly said. "All I knew was that he used to get mysterious envelopes from time to time—big official envelopes, with seals on the back of them. And, after one of them came, he would tell me, quite casually, that he was going to Paris or Rome, and he always seemed to be vague as to when he would be back. Sometimes it was within a week and sometimes he was away six months. But he never said anything to me about his journeys, and never described them afterwards."

"So you don't know what he was up to?"

"Nothing in the least definite, Phil. Still, I have my ideas. Rather romantic ideas, you may think. You see, in those days I used to read a good deal of fiction, mostly of the school of Ouida. And that is why I have always thought that my father had something to do with mysterious diplomatic work. Government secrets and all that sort of thing. I remember once, coming down to breakfast one morning and finding a huge, swarthy-looking man with an enormous black moustache having breakfast with my father. Where he came from or how he arrived, I never knew, although I was up quite late on the previous evening. But I discovered that he had reached the house after I had gone to bed and spent the night there. I was told to call him Mr. Nemo, though, of course, that was not his proper name. And then, very late that night he vanished as mysteriously as he had come."

"All very exciting and dramatic," Lashbrook smiled. "Do you know, Molly. I shouldn't be surprised if you were right."

"I am quite sure of it," Mary said emphatically. "And it was the matter of my father's death that convinced me."

"Oh, how was that?" Lashbrook asked, "I always understood that he perished during the War, when he was commanding a regiment."

Mary turned her blue eyes on her companion.

"Do you know, Phil, I don't believe he ever commanded a regiment at all. I don't believe that he was in the War from the day it broke out until his death. And I will tell you why. I never had the usual letter of regret from the War Office and nothing but an unsigned letter to say that Colonel Heaton had died in the service of his country. You can guess what that means."

"Yes," Lashbrook said quietly. "I happen to know exactly what it means, because, you see, throughout the War, I was an unofficial member of the Secret Service myself. My knowledge of French and German gave me that opportunity and showed me a phase of the War that I had never dreamt of before. Of course, our Secret Service was wonderful, but it entailed perils and dangers which are as bad, or rather worse, than those encountered by the ordinary soldier, and without any of the rewards that come to the gallant and brave in the heat of battle. If we

pull off a brilliant success, then somebody else always gets the credit. But if we fail, or fall into the enemy's hands, then we are promptly disowned. My dear girl, there is no harder work than that of the Secret Service. Still, it is very fascinating and exciting, despite the fact that in nine cases out of ten there is a rope or a bullet at the end of it."

"You must tell me all about it some day," Molly said. "Do you really think my poor old father died like that?"

"I am pretty sure of it," Lashbrook replied. "The intimation you had proves it beyond the shadow of a doubt. But isn't it time that we began to think about getting along?"

It had been a delightful evening, Lashbrook told himself later on, after he had seen Mary home, and was back again in his humble lodgings. Perhaps the forerunner of a good many other delightful evenings, when the Mansfield street murder was solved, and he had obtained the step that Klein had promised him. Then, the next morning, back to work again. But nothing to go upon, except that mysterious key and the section of a torn photograph in his pocket.

But the photograph had told him something. It was only the smallest of clues and might turn out, eventually, to be nothing more than a delusion and a snare. It showed the ragged half of a face in profile, that of a man with clean-cut, rather hawk-like features, and a well-shaped head and a small ear. Evidently the photograph of a man of breeding and education, with nothing on the back of it to show where or by whom it was taken.

It seemed to Lashbrook to represent an amateur effort, for the picture itself was mounted on a coarse blue background, on which two or three misty capital letters had been fixed with a crude india rubber stamp. A little thing in itself, but one that might easily lead to dramatic results. Lashbrook carefully deposited the section of photograph in a lock-up desk, and then, with the mysterious key in his pocket, set out to make inquiries in Martin lane.

He came presently to a rather imposing-looking set of buildings in granite which was the headquarters of the Martin Lane Safe Co. and here, after producing his credentials, he asked to see somebody in authority who could give him the desired information. There was some delay before a man, who announced himself to be the deputy manager, came forward and beckoned Lashbrook into his private office. His manner was curtly official.

"You must understand, Mr. Lashbrook," he said, "that we do not usually give information regarding our customers. But then, if you come as apparently you do, with the authority of Scotland Yard behind you, it is a different matter. I understand you have found one of our safe keys and wish to know the name of the owner. If you will give me the key, I will look the number up in the register and inform you. Perhaps you would like to open the safe."

The man in authority was back within the next five minutes with a scrap of paper in his hand.

"Here you are," he said. "I have here the name of the tenant of the safe. The tenant in question has been using it for years. His name is Colonel Heaton, of Croft Hatch, Bolbridge, Kent. And now after that, do you wish the safe opened?"

# Chapter IX

IT was not an easy matter for Lashbrook to conceal the immense surprise which he felt as he regarded the name on the slip of paper which the manager had placed in his hand. But four years' training during the war and his subsequent experience in the police stood him in good stead now, so that he merely regarded the incident as a commonplace one with no significance behind it.

"That is rather a strange thing," he said. "You see, I happen to know something about Colonel Heaton. Now, would you mind telling me exactly the date when the colonel took possession of the safe?"

This was not a difficult matter, and, in a few minutes, Lashbrook had established the fact that the key of the safe had passed into the possession of Mary Heaton's father within two years of the outbreak of the Great War. There was no particular significance in this, but it suggested something to Lashbrook which was not displeasing. That, however, he would go into later.

"I suppose you are quite sure," he went on, "that this key is really the original handed over to Colonel Heaton when he came to you first in the year 1912."

The manager turned over the key in his hand, and then returned it to Lashbrook with a smile.

"Absolutely," he said. "Our keys have certain peculiarities, what you might call secret marks or characteristics. Of course, you can't see them, but they are there, all the same. But perhaps you would like to open the safe for yourself?"

Lashbrook hesitated just a moment. The temptation was very strong, but he wisely put it on one side. The safe would have to be opened, and that before long, but he had no intention of doing so alone. His idea was to inform Klein of his discoveries and leave the latter the responsibility of opening the safe. There was no hurry, for the simple reason that, so long as he retained the key in his possession, nobody else could forestall him.

"I don't think I will, if it is all the same to you," he said. "This is a point where it seems to me that my superiors come in. I am much obliged to you for your courtesy in this matter, but I don't think that, for the moment, I will trouble you further."

Lashbrook went his way presently, more than satisfied with the way in which things were shaping. He would have to see Andrew Millar's brother a little later on, and, in due course, he made his way to the Wanderlust Club, and there waited in conversation with the secretary, Clift, until the other Millar put in an appearance.

He was exactly as the secretary had described him. A tall, slouching man, red eyed and tremulous, and, withal, a swagger that did not suffice to carry off the general seediness of the man, and the shabbiness of his erstwhile fashionable attire. He looked like some broken-down sportsman or business man of the stockbroking type who had met with misfortune, or, what was much more probable, had reduced himself to this condition with drink. For his hands were unsteady, and so was the weak, loose mouth, half disguised by a dragging moustache that drooped at the corners.

"This is Mr. Eden Millar," Clift said, by way of an introduction. "The brother of our unfortunate member who was murdered the other night. This man, Mr. Millar, is a police officer connected with Scotland Yard, who has part of the case in hand."

Eden Miller favoured Lashbrook with an uneasy glance.

"Oh, he is, is he?" he muttered. "I don't see that that has anything to do with me. I came here to get the balance of that £500 you hold on behalf of my brother, and the sooner you hand it over the better I shall be pleased."

"But the law doesn't act quite in that rapid way," Lashbrook pointed out. "Possibly, you have every claim to it, but you will have to prove, first, that your brother left no direct heirs behind him. For instance, he might have been married, and the father of a family. He might have other brothers."

"Well, he hasn't," Millar grumbled. "And no wife either. As far as I know, I am the last of our family. That is, as far as our branch is concerned. And I can do with that money. Moreover, I don't see why I shouldn't have it. I shouldn't have known anything about there being any cash if I hadn't read an account of the inquest, when Mr. Clift, here, gave evidence."

"Whatever happens," Lashbrook said, "with regard to that money, it has nothing whatever to do with my present inquiries. Now, Mr. Millar, I am going to ask you a good many questions about your family history, and your brother's past. First of all, would you mind telling me where and when you last saw him alive."

"I haven't seen him for five or six years," Millar said. "Come to think of it, it is more likely ten years since we met. Of course, I have had a letter from him, from time to time, when he happened to be more or less hard up and—"

"Stop a moment," Lashbrook said. "May I take it, without offence, that your brother was a bit of an adventurer?"

"What the devil has that got to do with you?"

"Oh, of course, you need not answer me if you like," Lashbrook said. "But I think you will see the advantage of doing so, instead of having a good deal of family dirty linen washed in public through the medium of the Coroner's Court. At any rate, you will have to give evidence at the adjourned inquest, seeing that you claim to be the only relative of the dead man, and a lot more information about yourself before Clift hands over that money."

"Oh, go on," Millar snarled. "Be as curious as you like. Just as well, perhaps, to tell you everything."

"Yes, I thought you would see reason," Lashbrook smiled. "Now, Mr. Millar, was your brother ever in the hands of the police?"

"Not in this country, at any rate," Millar said.

"Well, abroad then. France or Belgium, or perhaps Italy?"

It was a pure shot on Lashbrook's part but, at the last word, Millar sat up in an attitude of rigid attention.

"Ah, trust you police to know everything about a poor devil who is in trouble," he sneered. "Well, he was in Italy towards the end of the war. If you ask me what the trouble was, I can't tell you. But they threw the poor devil into prison for some reason or another and there they kept him for a year or two without trial, like they do in those God-forsaken countries. He hadn't a shilling on him when he was arrested, and, if it hadn't been for my sending him a pound or two every now and again, he would have starved. Of course, he couldn't say what the charge was in

his letters, as it wouldn't have been allowed, but I fancy it was something to do with the War."

"You haven't kept those letters, by any chance?"

"Of course I haven't," Millar declared. "Why should I? But I can tell you this—my brother always hinted that when he got free then he knew where to put his hands upon a fortune, and I was to share it. Mind, you, I didn't believe a word of what Andrew said, because he was a magnificent liar and, no doubt, thought he would get more cash out of me than he did if I credited his story."

Lashbrook gazed thoughtfully at the speaker. It seemed to him that Eden Millar was quite unconsciously giving him information which was going to lead to great results later on.

"And that is all you can tell me?" he asked finally.

"That's all," Millar echoed. "And not a nice story, either. But you will have to make the best of it."

A few minutes later, Millar departed unceremoniously, and Lashbrook turned in the direction of the secretary.

"Well, Mr. Clift," he said. "I am obliged to you for the help you have given me so far, but I think that you will be able to assist me still further. Now, I don't know whether it struck you as being a strange coincidence or not, but here is a case in which one of your club members was murdered in the street and actually found within a few minutes of the crime by another member."

"Well, it certainly does seem rather remarkable," Clift admitted. "But surely you don't think that Mr. Selby Crafton had anything to do with the death of his fellow member?"

"No," Lashbrook admitted. "There is not a shred of evidence to point to this conclusion—so far."

"What do you mean by that, 'so far'?" Clift said. "My dear officer, you don't expect me to believe that a man who deliberately murders another would stand quietly by the body and wait for a policeman to come along, whilst he pretended that he had nothing to do with the affair? According to my ruling of the matter, if Mr. Crafton had killed Millar, he could have got away with the greatest possible ease. It was very late at night, there was not a soul within sight, and even you, who were not very far off, heard and saw nothing. At least, that is what you said at the inquest."

"Yes, that's all very plain and logical," Lashbrook smiled. "And I am not going to argue with you, one way or the other. I should say, offhand, that Mr. Crafton behaved just like any other gentleman would who had the misfortune to find a dead body when he was returning home late at night. But then, appearances are sometimes deceptive. You must see that it is my duty to inquire very closely into the antecedents of everybody more or less directly interested in the crime. Now, how long has Mr. Crafton been a member of your club, and what do you know about his past? What does he do, and from where does his income arise?"

"That is rather a large order," Clift smiled. "Crafton was a member here before I took over the secretaryship, and, as far as I know, he is a man of private means. At any rate, he never seems to be short of money, and always pays his bills regularly."

# Chapter X

"IS he a man who travels much?" Lashbrook asked.

"Well—yes, I should say so. You see, most of our members do. That is why we call ourselves the Wanderlust Club. We have members of every nationality all over the world. They come; they go; they compare notes. Here to-day and gone to-morrow sort of thing, and a good many of them are pretty reticent. I know that a whole skein of our members were interned during the war, and most of them are back now, just as if nothing had happened."

"Yes, I have heard all that," Lashbrook said thoughtfully. "Now, Mr. Clift, I want you to try and help me."

"All I can do, of course," Clift murmured.

"Thank you very much. I want you to find out all you can about Mr. Crafton's coming and goings during the last six years. You can trace the times he was in England or abroad by looking up his accounts in your book. I need hardly say that you will be paid for all your trouble. I suppose you can manage that all right."

"It's only a matter of time," Clift agreed.

"Very well, then. Perhaps in the course of the next week or so you can post me all these details to an address I will give you, and, in the interval, I want you to make cautious inquiries amongst your servants and waiters as to whether any of them has ever seen Mr. Crafton in conversation with the murdered man."

"Still harping upon Crafton as a potential criminal, what?"

"Nothing of the kind, my dear fellow, nothing of the kind. I am only following the old-fashioned advice which tells us to leave no stone unturned. It is the rule of the police to suspect everybody. It is just possible that I may be keeping an eye upon you yourself."

"Don't try and alarm me," Clift smiled. "Anyhow, you can rely upon me to do anything in my power to help you."

With that Lashbrook took his way along the street with a feeling that he had been by no means wasting his time. The information he had gleaned both in Martin lane, and also at the Wanderlust Club had been startling enough in all conscience, but it left him in rather a muddled frame of mind. It would be a long time before he arranged his discoveries into a logical sequence.

To begin with, what en earth was the mystery behind that secret safe which Colonel Heaton had been renting? And why did a man like that, who was a typical English sportsman and a gentleman, need so furtive a subterfuge? Perhaps that most important point would be solved when the safe came to be opened, and Lashbrook put it out of his mind for the moment. But he could not prevent himself from speculating as to how the key to Heaton's safe found its way into the possession of the murderer of Andrew Millar. Surely the criminal could not have been aware of the fact that the automatic had concealed in its handle the key to a safe which might, or might not contain articles of great value.

AND yet, possibly, Andrew Millar might have known that Col. Heaton was in possession of a considerable sum of money which, for some reason or another, he had hidden in a safe deposit because Andrew Millar's brother had told him, only an hour or so before, that he had letters from his murdered relative in which he had hinted more than broadly that there was a fortune awaiting him when once he was free from his Italian prison. It might be, as Eden Millar had suggested, that this was merely a bait to extract a little more money, but in the light of what Lashbrook knew, it looked very much as if Andrew Millar had been speaking from his book when he wrote those letters to his brother. He had, sooner or later, succeeded in regaining his freedom, and returned to England, where he had taken up his residence once more in the Wanderlust Club. Still, it was evident that, from that time on, he had made no effort to communicate with his brother, although he was in possession of £500 in hard cash which he handed over to the secretary for safe custody.

At this moment Lashbrook paused in his walk, and, turning into the nearest telephone booth, called up Clift.

"Sorry to worry you again," he said, when he got through. "But I am going to ask you to undertake another little job. It's Lashbrook speaking. Recognise my voice, don't you?"

"Yes, that's all right," Clift said. "Go on."

"Well, you know what I asked you to do just now concerning Crafton. I want you to do exactly the same thing with regard to Andrew Millar. I want to know how often he has been in the club as a resident since the beginning of 1914 up to the night of his death. If you will tabulate that, and let me have it with the other matter, I shall be obliged."

"Right ho," Clift replied. "Anything else?"

Lashbrook responded that that was all there was at the moment, and went on his way. There was nothing further he could do until he had seen Klein once more, and that was impossible until the latter came back from his trip to Manchester.

The same afternoon that Klein returned, Lashbrook made it his business to repair to Scotland Yard, where he found him seated at his desk, and ready to hear all that he had to say.

"And that's not very much, I expect, is it?" Klein asked.

"Well, sir," Lashbrook said, in his most official manner, "it all depends what you call very much. However, let me show you what I have done, and then we can discuss the matter further."

With that remark, Lashbrook took the automatic from his pocket and, pressing the spring, released the handle, at the same time dropping the safe key and the capsule on the table.

"What the devil—" Klein said under his breath.

Lashbrook went on to explain at considerable length. He did not conceal anything from Klein, except the torn photograph, the section of which he had at that moment in his waistcoat pocket. But he did speak freely enough as to what Rothbarth had told him, and the result of his conversation with Eden Millar in the Wanderlust Club. But it was what he had to say with regard to the safe deposit and Colonel Heaton which seemed to interest Klein more than all the rest of the story put together.

“Well, you certainly haven’t lost any time,” he said. “If you go on like this, you will be one of our brightest ornaments before long. Now, what do you make of it? Are you going to suggest that Millar was murdered with the weapon, the hidden secret of which was unknown to the murderer? In other words, that he was shot by Crafton, who quite coolly stood by the body till you came along.”

“I am not going as far as that,” Lashbrook said cautiously. “Though I do think that Crafton and Millar and my old friend, the late Colonel Heaton, were all mixed up in some way together in this mysterious business. What that business was we haven’t the slightest means of discovering, but I have a very shrewd suspicion that it was not entirely unconnected with the Great War.”

“Good lad,” Klein said approvingly. “That is exactly the point that occurred to me. But how, when, and where? You see, there are lots of members of the Wanderlust Club who were engaged on mysterious missions between 1914-18. A pretty queer lot they are at the Wanderlust. I dare say a good many of them know what it means to be inside a jail—a reckless crowd, to whom spying and all that kind of thing would appeal instinctively, especially if there was a handsome reward attached to it. See what I mean?”

“Absolutely,” Lashbrook said. “Now, I was wondering if we couldn’t get the War Office to help us.”

“In what way?” Klein asked.

“Well, it’s through the War Office or the Foreign Office that our Secret Service works and, in a case like this, I should say that they would be only too glad to help, especially as Colonel Heaton belonged to the latter branch. His daughter says—”

“It doesn’t matter two straws what his daughter says,” Klein interrupted very emphatically. “You will find that the Foreign Office won’t help us an inch. You can try it, if you like, but you will find yourself up against a blank wall over which it is impossible to climb. The Foreign Office will tell you blandly that there is no such thing as a Secret Service, or if, unfortunately, there is such an organisation, then that is the first they have heard of it. Why, my dear boy, for all the war has been over these many years, if Miss Heaton went to the Foreign Office and asked how her father lost his life, then they would not tell her. Even if she could prove that the Colonel met an untimely end by a bullet or a rope in a foreign country, where he was engaged in espionage, they would gaze at her blankly and tell her in diplomatic language that there never was a Colonel Heaton who had anything to do with that mythical Secret Service. Of course, as I said before, you can try if you like, but, if you learn anything definite, then you will succeed where I, with the Chief Commissioner’s weight behind me, have failed on two important occasions.”

“You are not very encouraging, sir,” Lashbrook said. “At any rate, we can go along together and open that safe.”

“Ah, now you are talking,” Klein said, as he jumped to his feet. “Come along. It won’t take us many minutes.”

A few words with the manager of the safe deposit company and the two men were before the object of their search. Klein turned the key in the lock and threw open the door, disclosing a number of grey paper bags with certain characters on them. Into one he dipped his hand and produced a number of gold coins. Rapidly he calculated the number of bags and their contents.

“At least £20,000 in gold coins,” he exclaimed. “And, by Jove, German coins, too. Gold marks. And here is a strange thing. So far as I can see, there isn’t one of them that is dated antecedent to the year 1912.”

# Chapter XI

INSPECTOR KLEIN said very little as he and his subordinate drove back to Scotland Yard, and it was only when the two were shut up in the former’s private room that he dropped his official manner and spoke to Lashbrook in friendly fashion.

“Now, young fellow,” he said. “Will you kindly tell me what you make of this little discovery?”

“Well, sir,” Lashbrook replied. “I hoped to hear your views before I go any farther.”

“I think we had better drop that official business as long as we are alone together,” Klein said. “All very well when other people are about, but, there is no getting away from the fact that you and I were on much the same level during the war, and we did a good deal in the cause. Now, as far as I can gather, you know quite a lot about the late Colonel Heaton. One of these coincidences which the critical faculty ignores, but which are deucedly useful to us police from time to time. Now, tell me as much, as you can about Colonel Heaton’s past life.”

With that Philip went on to tell his superior officer a vast amount of detail concerning his youth, and how, in those days before the war, he and the colonel had been the best of friends. He spoke of his gallant neighbour, and, incidentally, brought in the name of Mary Heaton, at which Klein smiled.

“Oh, yes,” he said. “Miss Heaton. I understand you ran against her quite unexpectedly within the last few days. Now, would you mind telling me what sort of a young lady she is?’”

With a suggestion of colour in his face Philip complied. He attempted to make the description as bald as possible, but he could see that his superior was not in the least deceived.

“Ah, quite a little love story in its way, eh?” Klein smiled, “The pretty child grown into a beautiful woman. Self-reliant, and getting her own living. There is the making of a romance here, Lashbrook. Only I wouldn’t allow it to interfere with your professional duties, if I were you. Plenty of time for that.”

“Well, there it is,” Philip said. “Now, what I want to find out is this? What are we to assume from the discovery we made with regard to those gold marks, all of which must have been issued from the German mint before the war?”

“Isn’t that pretty obvious, my boy?”

“Well, I think it is,” Phillip went on. “Colonel Heaton was engaged in Secret Service work long before the war. I know that, because the last time I saw Miss Heaton we discussed the matter. His strange absences from home—sometimes they lasted for a day or two, and sometimes they lasted for weeks or months. And, so far as I can gather, it was only at rare intervals that his daughter heard from

him when he was away. Then there was the mysterious visit from the man with the black moustache I have just been telling you about. I think it is a fair assumption, therefore, that the colonel was working on behalf of the country."

"In other words, a spy."

"Yes, and not a nice word either. Still, I suppose that is about what it comes to. A spy, from the foreigner's point of view, and a hero who risks his life from ours. But don't you think we are wasting time, sir? It is pretty plain to me that, sometime previous to 1914, a considerable sum of money in German currency was placed at the disposal of Colonel Heaton for some national purpose. He must have been trusted implicitly by his superiors, which was only natural, because he was a man of the highest integrity. My idea is that that money was placed at his disposal, so that he could draw upon it from time to time without going near to the heads of the mysterious Secret Service and asking for cash."

"On the whole, a fair assumption."

"Very well, then. Let us go on and presume that the Colonel met his death before he had finished some big work, and that is why we found so much gold in the safe."

"Yes, I think you are precisely right," Klein said thoughtfully. "Anyway, it's a pretty tangle. Here we have a man like Andrew Millar, killed in the street by a more or less mysterious character, and his body found by another mysterious character, who gives the name of Selby Crafton. Then, within a few hours, coincidence steps in again and you, who practically found the body, managed to get hold of the weapon with which he was killed. I am assuming, mind you, that there is no question whatever about that. And then another tangle comes in. I mean, finding the key concealed in the automatic, which key reveals to us that hidden store of gold. Now, obviously, that key belonged to Colonel Heaton, who must have known the secret hiding place in the handle of the automatic—in other words, Andrew Millar was killed by a weapon that belonged to Colonel Heaton. Dash it, it must have been Heaton's weapon, or he would never have concealed the key of the safe in it. Now, how on earth did that weapon manage to find its way into the possession of the murderer? And why didn't he go to Martin Lane and collect the treasure that was waiting for an owner? The ostensible owner was dead, so that there was nothing in his way."

"Quite right, sir," Lashbrook said. "But isn't it equally obvious that the man who had that weapon had not the least idea of what was hidden in the handle of the automatic?"

"Of course, he hadn't, which makes it all the more amazing. Now, let us assume, for a moment, that Andrew Millar knew something about Colonel Heaton. We know, now, that towards the end of the war and for a year or two afterward, Millar was in an Italian prison. It ought not to be difficult to find out why, and how it was he came to be released without any charge being brought against him. It is all pretty vague, but I think if we can establish the fact that Colonel Heaton was engaged upon espionage work in Italy, or somewhere beyond the frontier, there was some kind of connection between himself and the man who was murdered in Mansfield street. I would suggest that you see Miss Heaton and ask her if she had ever heard from her father when he was in Italy."

“Yes, I think I can see what you are driving at,” Lashbrook said. “I will go round to her office presently and have a chat with her. Meanwhile, what are you going to do about that German gold?”

“Nothing,” Klein said curtly. “It’s no use worrying about that. I am ready to give long odds that that money will never be claimed by anybody. Of course, there are a dozen people in England and men in high places, too, who know all about it. But they would deny it unblushingly if the matter were mentioned. I suppose your idea is to go to the Foreign Office and see if you can find out when and where and why that money was given to Heaton?”

“Well, I did think of it,” Philip admitted.

“Ah, well, you can save your breath to cool your porridge, as the Scots say. Have a try, if you like; in fact, I will give you a note of introduction to one of the Foreign Office secretaries. But nothing will ever come of it.”

Armed with this document, Philip set off presently with a view to calling on Mary, and afterwards doing the best he could with one of the Foreign Office mandarins. He found Mary in a small suite of offices off the Strand, where three or four girls were busy typing, and, in an inner room, Mary herself, together with her chief assistant, whom she introduced as Linda Waller.

Miss Waller was a slight, romantic-looking woman in the early thirties, who looked up with an interested eye through big, horn-rimmed spectacles as she heard Philip’s name mentioned. She had seemingly heard something of him and his profession, and was evidently thrilled to find herself face to face with a real live detective.

“It’s quite an adventure to meet you, Mr. Lashbrook,” she said. “I have never come in contact with a Scotland Yard official before. You don’t know how excited I am.”

“Linda is a romanticist,” Mary laughed. “I suppose she reads every detective story that is written.”

“Well, she is in pretty good company,” Philip smiled. “I understand that a great many of our leading men are prone to the same sort of weakness. But I can assure you, Miss Waller, that there is very little that is romantic in my business.”

“Oh, please don’t say that!” the little woman cried excitedly. “I should never enjoy another book or a film dealing with crime again if you made me believe that. Do you know that, if there is one thing I love more than another, it is typing a crime story. We get a great many of them here, from time to tine, and I always put them on one side to deal with myself. And then, when I read them in magazines afterwards, it is nice to feel that I saw them before anybody else.”

“Yes,” Mary explained. “We rather specialise in author’s work in this office. The woman from whom I bought this business is the daughter of a novelist, so that she started with quite a literary clientele. We still have it, I am thankful to say. But you didn’t come and interrupt us in the middle of our business to talk about detective stories, did you?”

“No, I came to ask you one or two questions with regard to your father,” Philip explained. “It is a most remarkable thing, but he seems to have been in some way mixed up with that Mansfield street murder. That is, of course, indirectly.”

Miss Waller gave a little cry of delight.

“How thrilling!” she breathed. “But, then, perhaps, you want to speak to Miss Heaton alone?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Philip said. “You can stay if you like—only don’t discuss what you hear outside.”

## Chapter XII

FOR the moment, at any rate, it was not Lashbrook’s intention to say anything about the discovery of those gold marks in Martin lane. All he wanted to know was whether or not Mary had had any letters, or could recollect any letters, that her father had written from Italy, either just previous to the war, or during the course of hostilities.

“Now, let me see if I can remember,” Mary said. “I did have letter from my father occasionally when he was away on his mysterious journeys. But they were few and far between, and never with addresses on them. For some reason best known to himself, he did not desire that I should write to him at any particular place. If anything extraordinary transpired, then I was to write to him and address my letters through the medium of some mysterious agents in London—Box something or another, you know what I mean.”

Philip knew exactly what she meant.

“And then, you see,” Mary went on, “nothing extraordinary ever did transpire, so that I had no occasion to use the medium of those agents. But, when I come to think of it, I did have two letters at intervals. I can’t tell you what the postmark was, because I was never curious enough to look. But I know that they both bore Italian postage stamps. Oh, yes, and once one with an Austrian stamp.”

Here was a bit of interesting information, though Lashbrook showed no signs of the fact as he listened. He asked a few more questions and then turned to go.

“What, are you leaving us already?” Linda Waller said disappointedly. “Oh, do stop a bit and tell us something about that mysterious affair in Mansfield street.”

“I would if I could,” Philip said, with an evasive smile. “I should like to know a lot more about it myself. Now, perhaps you can help me, Miss Waller.”

“The very idea,” the little woman giggled. “But do you know, Mr. Lashbrook, when I read all about that murder in the papers, it struck rather a familiar note. It seemed to me that I had heard somewhere or another about a crime on exactly similar lines. I mean, the man lying dead there and the other man in evening dress who called a passing policeman’s attention to the body. I am quite sure that I have heard something like it before.”

“In your reading, perhaps,” Philip suggested.

“That’s it,” Miss Waller cried delightedly. “No, not something I had read, but something I had typed, years ago. A story by some author whose name I have forgotten, and who has probably never been heard of since. Not a popular author, or I should not have forgotten it. Now, what was the name of that story? Let me think. Yes, I have it. It was ‘The Man Who Knew.’”

“Now, that is rather interesting,” Lashbrook murmured. “Do you happen to remember any details of that story?”

“No, I can’t say I do,” she said regretfully. “But I think I can do better than that. I think, if I make a careful search, I can find a copy of the original.”

“I should think that is highly probable,” Mary remarked. “You see, Philip, we do a good deal of work for authors from time to time and we find them exceedingly careless with regard to their manuscript. So it is our practice to take a carbon copy of all the stories we type in the way of business and file them. There must be hundreds hidden away in a big cupboard out on the landing. If you like, I will get Linda to look this particular story up.”

“I wish you would,” Philip said. “I don’t suppose for a moment anything will come of it, but you never know. At any rate, it is rather remarkable that somebody or another, at some time or another, has written a story precisely on the lines of the Mansfield street murder. Now, Miss Waller, if you don’t mind, I will come back in a day or two in the hope that you have been successful.”

Miss Waller expressed her determination to do her best, and Lashbrook departed presently with the idea of going as far as the Foreign Office where, possibly, he might be able to carry his investigations a step or two further.

Half an hour later, he found himself cooling his heels in a dreary waiting-room before an immaculate youth came along with the intimation that General Evanson would see him. This, of course, he owed entirely to the note that Klein had given him. Upstairs in a luxuriously furnished room, a little man, with grey hair and moustache, regarded him distastefully through a highly polished monocle and asked him with staccato rudeness, what he needed.

“Well, sir,” Lashbrook said. “I think Inspector Klein’s letter will explain that. And if you can give me any information I shall be more than obliged. You see, this afternoon Inspector Klein and myself visited a safe deposit in Martin Lane, acting on information received, where we found a large sum of gold and—”

“Gold, gold?” the General barked. “What on earth have I to do with gold? You come here, asking us to take an interest in what appears to be a police case and expect to cross-examine me as if I were in the witness-box, dammit.”

“I am very sorry, sir, to find that you have that impression,” Philip said. “But you see, we have every reason to believe that the money in question was part of a sum handed over to the late Colonel Heaton in connection with the Secret—”

“Secret—secret, sir. What on earth do we know about secrets here? Don’t you understand that this is the Foreign Office, where we have no secrets? And even if we had, those fellows in the House of Commons would soon drag them out of the Foreign Secretary. And who the deuce is Colonel Heaton?”

“Colonel Heaton, sir,” Philip said, with quiet determination, “was a gallant officer who died in his country’s service. I have that from his sole representative. Therefore, as I had the honour to be attached indirectly to the Service in question during the War, I have no delusions. As to the circumstances in which my old friend laid down his life—I need not remind you, sir, that an intimation from the Foreign Office that a trusted officer has died in the interests of his country means one thing and one thing only. That is why I am here in search of information.”

The little officer tapped his table impatiently.

“Don’t you come here, sir, talking to me like that. If you think you are going to bully me, you are greatly mistaken. I know nothing about a Colonel Heaton, and, egad, I shall be very much surprised if you find anyone under this roof who is not equally ignorant. And as to that money you speak of, why, it is nothing to do with us. It has nothing to do with the Secret Service, and if, as you maintain, a certain Colonel Heaton died, leaving behind him a large sum of money in his safe, for which nobody can account, then all I can say is that the Colonel’s family are lucky, devilish lucky.”

Philip made one more attempt. He knew that he was up against a blank wall, as Klein had told him he would be, but he was not going to give in without one last struggle.

“The money I speak of sir, was in German gold marks, all minted before the war. Perhaps that may induce you—”

“What, trying to bully me again? What have we to do with German gold marks? If this mysterious Colonel Heaton liked to buy foreign gold and hide it away in a safe there was nothing to stop him.”

With that, the General smote on a bell, and immediately a subordinate came into the room. The General turned to him.

“Take this man to No. 1056,” he said.

Just that, and nothing more, so that a minute or two later, Philip found himself standing opposite a short, chubby-looking individual, whose hard, flinty, grey eyes seemed to belie the humorous lines about the corner of his mouth. Philip had not the slightest notion to whom he was talking, nor did the individual in question condescend to give his name.

“Yes,” the grey-eyed man said crisply. “I have a fair idea of why you are here, and, if you take my advice, you will just say, ‘Good afternoon’ and go about your business. I may tell you that this is a department where nobody knows anything. Worse than the Circumlocution Office that Dickens wrote about.”

“But you don’t seem to understand,” Philip protested. “Here am I, a police officer, with the authority of Scotland Yard behind me, asking for information which may lead to the conviction of the Mansfield street murderer. I suppose even your department might have heard something about that crime.”

The humorous mouth trembled slightly, but there was no sign of amusement in those flinty grey eyes.

“We admit nothing,” the official said. “And we deny nothing. Tell me your story, if you like.”

For the second time, Philip went over the information that he had at his command. He finished up by saying that he was personally acquainted with some of the workings of the Secret Service.

“Quite an interesting story,” the listener said drily. “But I can assure you, my dear fellow, that we know nothing about Colonel Heaton or his movements, nor how that German gold found its way into the Colonel’s possession. Nobody knows, and nobody ever will know. Tell me, about how much money is there, and whether Colonel Heaton left any representatives behind him.”

Philip explained that the gold was worth about £20,000, and that Heaton had left one daughter behind him. The flinty-eyed official rose from his chair, and, taking Philip in quite a friendly arm, led him as far as the door.

“My congratulations to Miss Heaton,” he said. “A charming girl, I have no doubt. Yes, I can see that you think so. In these hard times £20,000 is not to be sneezed at.”

## Chapter XIII

MARY an heiress, Mary, a young and beautiful woman with an independent income and, so far beyond the reach of a mere unit more or less connected with the C.I.D. Mary with a fortune thrown into her lap, so that she could turn her back upon those little rooms in Norfolk street, Strand, and go back again, if she so pleased, to the country life that she loved. There was no doubt whatever that, sooner or later, all that gold in the Martin lane safe would be hers, to do as she liked with. Philip knew quite enough about the ways and methods of the Secret Service to realise that the treasure would never be claimed.

These rather melancholy thoughts occurred to him over and over again as he made his way slowly along Whitehall once more in the direction of Scotland Yard. It seemed to him that, as far as the interviews at the Foreign Office were concerned, he had been more or less wasting his time. Who the individual was he had interviewed last he had not the slightest idea, neither did it matter much. At any rate, the man, though known by number only, was evidently one who spoke with authority, and his word would have to be accepted as final. All this Philip presently confided to Klein, who listened with a sort of smiling sympathy.

“Just what I expected,” he said. “I knew you would do no good by your visit to the Foreign Office, and I could have told you before you started—in fact, I did tell you—that you would learn exactly as much as you have done. Bit of a blow for you, Lashbrook, isn’t it?”

“In what way?” Lashbrook asked.

“I am not talking about your professional investigations now. I mean as far as the young lady is concerned.”

“Yes, I see what you mean,” Philip said. “It does make a difference. I don’t even know where I stand. I don’t mind telling you, my dear Klein, as between friends, that I am more than interested in a certain lady who shall be nameless. A few days ago, I should not have considered myself in any way barred from speaking my mind, but now that the object of our conversation is an heiress, it is a different thing altogether.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Klein said with a smile. “After all, £20,000 is not a fortune, as things go nowadays. And a detective-sergeant at Scotland Yard, who happens to be a man who has held His Majesty’s commission and has a brilliant career before him, is entitled to regard himself as good enough for any woman.”

“Do you actually mean that?” Philip exclaimed.

“That you are a detective-sergeant under my personal supervision? Yes, certainly you are. Some people might call it a disgraceful job, but between ourselves, I have wangled it all right. On your past record, my boy. Now you are

here with the rank I have just mentioned, there is no reason why you shouldn't go to the top."

Philip expressed his gratitude more or less coherently, but Klein waved that on one side.

"There is no room for sentiment here," he said. "What you have got to do, in fact, what you must do, is to get to the bottom of the Mansfield street murder. There are one or two other officers working on different clues, but there is no reason why they should get in your way. Besides, I have a strong suspicion that you have something to work on that is known to nobody else."

"I have," Philip said, in a confident tone of voice, "I certainly have. And if you like, I'll tell—"

"Don't you do anything of the kind," Klein interrupted. "Keep it to yourself. But if you like to tell me, generally, on what lines you are working, then I shall be glad to listen."

On that, Philip began to speak with regard to what he had heard from the lips of Molly's dramatic assistant.

"That is rather singular," Klein said. "It may not lead to anything, but I should certainly follow it up if I were you. And now, if you have nothing more to say—"

Philip took the hint and vanished. It was a day later before he called again at the typewriting establishment in Norfolk street, where he discovered that Mary was out on some business or another, though Miss Waller seemed delighted to see him.

"Well, have you found that story!" he asked.

"Oh, yes," Miss Waller exclaimed. "I have the carbon copy here so that you can read it, if you like. Do you know, Mr. Lashbrook, it is really remarkable how the story resembles the Mansfield street murder. Here is a man found dead in a London street, very late at night, and he is discovered by one who, apparently, has no connection whatever with him. A gentleman in evening dress who is on the way back to his club. He calls a policeman and, together, they view the body. Nobody would possibly guess that the finder was the actual murderer, and the truth would never have been discovered but for an ingenious clue, which is the undoing of the criminal. In the case in question, the victim was shot with a revolver and the weapon hidden in a drain close by. But read it for yourself. It is an excellent story, as I think you will be prepared to admit."

With this invitation, Philip lost no time in reading the story and, when he had finished, he looked up in the eager face of Miss Waller and smiled in a non-committal way.

"Well, what do you think of it?" she gurgled.

"Certainly there is an amazing resemblance between this piece of fiction and the Mansfield street crime," he admitted. "But you are not going to suggest that I should immediately arrest Mr. Selby Crafton on the strength of it? It may be nothing more than a remarkable coincidence and besides, there is nothing to connect Mr. Crafton with the writer of the story. By the way, I see that the writer's name is Douglas Hume. Now, who is Douglas Hume?"

Miss Waller shook her head regretfully.

"I have not the slightest idea," she said. "I typed that story, as I told you before, and it came to us in the ordinary way of business. I thought, at first, that that it

had been brought to us by the writer himself. But when I came to turn up the records, I found that it came by post, accompanied by a postal order which covered the cost of typing. Then it was sent back to the author in the ordinary way—"

"Yes, that is all very well," Phil interrupted. "But if there is anything in this clue—and I am going to follow it up to the end—then I must know the address of the author."

"Ah, that I can't give you," Miss Waller said. "It is two years since the story was written, and I have forgotten all the circumstances. I have not the remotest idea of the address to which we were to send the typed story."

"And you don't even know if it was published or not?"

"Oh, it was published all right. I know that, because I happened to see the title in a magazine a few months later. But I can't tell you what the magazine was. All I remember is the title, because it struck me as being so original and so mysterious."

"Well, there are ways and means of finding that out," Lashbrook said. "Am I to understand that the author never came to you again? Rather strange that, if he managed to find an editor who would pay him for his yarn."

"Well, anyway, we never had another commission from him. And that is all I can tell you. But don't you think that the whole thing is very mysterious and striking?"

"You would jump to that conclusion," Phil said. "But don't forget that there are thousands of short stories written every year, and hundreds of crimes which may transpire to be much on the same lines as these figments of an author's invention."

Philip remained a few minutes longer chatting with the romantic young woman and then went apparently aimlessly on his way, as if he had put the matter entirely out of his mind.

But he had done nothing of the sort. On the contrary, he was very much impressed with what he had heard and read, so that presently he turned his steps in the direction of the British Museum. There, in the reading-room, he had a conversation with an assistant librarian, at the same time disclosing his Scotland Yard rank.

"Just a routine matter," he said. "The verification of a bit of information which may, or may not, lead to important results. Now, if you will be good enough to show me into a private room where I can make a thorough search of all the British magazines published during the last two years, I shall be more than obliged."

"That is quite an easy matter," the librarian said. "If you will come this way, I will give you every assistance."

For the next three or four hours Philip plodded wearily through a pile of magazines large enough to fill a good-sized truck. It was getting dusk before his patience was rewarded.

There, at length, in the September number of the West End Magazine of two years ago, he found the story entitled 'The Man Who Knew,' under the signature of Douglas Hume. With this in his possession, he went back to his rooms, and, on the following morning, went as far as Farringdon street, whence, from a certain big publishing establishment there, the West End Magazine was issued.

The editor, no doubt, moved by Philip's professional card, saw him without delay, and few minutes later the two were seated opposite one another in the editor's sanctum.

"Anything I can do for you," the latter said. "Of course, if it is a criminal affair—"

"It may be," Philip said cautiously. "Now do you know anything about an author called Douglas Hume? He had a story in your September issue two years ago."

## Chapter XIV

THE editor of the West End magazine sat up promptly, and a sudden light flashed into his somewhat tired eyes.

"Ah, that blackguard!" he said. "If you can give me any information about him that will put me on his track, I shall be infinitely obliged. Because, about two and a half years ago, he did me, or my firm, rather, out of fifteen guineas, and landed me in no end of trouble besides. After that, he vanished, leaving no trace behind him, and we had to let it go at that."

"Then you knew the man?" Philip asked.

"Never saw him in my life," the editor said. "My dear fellow, we hardly ever do see our contributors. Of course, the bigger men come and go—I mean the writers who are responsible for our serials. Men one meets on friendly terms and exchanges gossip with at the Savage Club, and places like that. But the casual contributor sends his work in by post, and it goes back to him, or is published, as the case may be. If a yarn is published, then he has his cheque in the course of time, and there is an end of the matter."

"Then I take it that this particular contributor, Douglas Hume, was one of those passing writers?"

"Exactly. The story came to me in the ordinary course of business, and I read and approved of it, because I thought it jolly good. Moreover, I still think so. I was so pleased with it that I sent a cheque almost at once, and asked the writer if he had anything else he could send me to read."

"And did he?" Philip asked.

"Not a line," the editor said. "Nothing. As a matter of fact, he never wrote the first story even. He lifted it bodily from an American magazine, published a year or two before, and put his name to it. This name, of course, was a pseudonym. The mere fact that he called himself Douglas Hume points to that distinctly."

"Rather a smart dodge, that," Philip commented.

"Yes," the editor snapped. "And a very old one. That trick has been played upon editors more than once, and, no doubt, will be again. I didn't know it until I got a lawyer's letter from New York claiming all sorts of penalties for breach of contract, and it was a bit of good luck for me that those people over there were content with a humble apology and a paragraph in my magazine, explaining exactly how I had been duped."

"I see. But why didn't you prosecute?"

“Now, isn’t that rather a simple question for a detective to ask?” the editor demanded. “You don’t suppose the lowdown smarties who work that trick ever use their own names, or even the address where they can be found. No, my dear sir, they write under a nom-de-plume, and the address they give is generally an accommodation one. A little tobacconist’s or news shop, in some obscure part of the town.”

“I am obliged to you for that hint,” Philip said. “Though I ought to have suspected something of the kind. Now, Mr. Edmunds, let us come down to business. I dare say you have been wondering all this time why I have been so interested in the individual who foisted that story off on you. I suppose you can give me this address, or, at least, the address to which the cheque was sent.”

“Yes, I think I can do that,” the editor said. “It is not in my department, but downstairs in the cashier’s office they are pretty sure to be able to trace the particular cheque for that story and the address to which it was sent. Yes, they would make a note of the address in case the cheque happened to be lost or stolen. If you are not in a particular hurry, I will get one of my assistants to run down to the cashier’s office and inquire.”

It was rather a long job, but, at the end of a quarter of an hour, the assistant returned to the editor’s office, with a slip of paper which he handed to his chief.

“Here you are, Mr. Lashbrook,” the latter said. “The address is 199, Victoria Place, Camberwell. And if you can succeed in laying your hands on our friend, Douglas Hume, then I shall feel under a personal obligation, I suppose it is no use asking what he has done?”

“Well, as a matter of fact, I don’t quite know myself,” Philip smiled. “But you may rest assured that I shall do my best to obtain an interview with Mr. Douglas Hume, and I shan’t be happy until I do so. You shall know all in good time, the more so because it is probable that I shall want you, later on, as a police witness.”

“With all the pleasure in life,” Edmunds said grimly. “I would give a month’s pay cheerfully, to find myself in the witness box with Mr. Douglas Hume in the dock opposite me.”

With this information in his possession, Philip was presently on his way to Camberwell. He had been quite prepared to hear that the story in question had been sent with a view to publication anonymously, and also from an accommodation address. But the idea of lifting stories from foreign magazines and planting them on English editors was knowledge to him. He jumped off the ‘bus presently and threaded his way through a number of more or less mean streets until he came, at length, to Victoria Place.

In spite of its high sounding name, it was little more than a slum, made up of tenement houses, and one or two wretched shops, so small and ill-stocked that it was a wonder how the keepers thereof contrived to extract a bare living from them. No. 199 itself was a shade more respectable than the rest, with a small window on each side of the door, one filled with cheap sweets, and the other with newspapers and tobacco. A big, over-blown female with a dirty face and watery eye, regarded Philip suspiciously as he made his way into the shop and asked to see the proprietor.

“Mr. Heron on the premises?’” he queried.

"No, 'e ain't," the woman snapped. "And, wot's more, 'e won't be back for two or three days. Gorn dahn inter the country 'e 'as."

"Quite sure of that?" Philip demanded.

"Nah, look 'ere, guv'nor," the woman shrilled. "Don't you come 'ere bullyin' me like that. I'm a respectable woman, I am, and me an' 'Eron 'as bin 'ere the last 16 years. An' 'oo may you be, if I may make so bold to arsk? Comin' inter my shop and arskin' all sort of questions. Answer me that, Nosey Parker."

By way of reply, Philip laid his official card on the counter. At the mere sight of it the big woman wilted, and all the fight went out of her. It was as if she had been a balloon suddenly pricked, so completely did she collapse across the counter.

"I am sure I beg your pardon, sir," she said. "But I bin that worried lately, I don't know whether I stand on my 'ead or my 'eels."

"I am sorry to hear it," Philip said abruptly. "But answer my question, please. Where is your husband, and where can I see him?"

"Well, in a manner of speakin', you can see 'im at any time and in a manner of speakin' you can't see 'im at all," the woman said. "Becos' 'Eron, you see, 'e's in Wandsworth Gaol."

"Wandsworth Gaol, eh?" Philip asked. "Convicted, or under remand, which? And what's the charge?"

The woman explained that the partner of her joys and sorrows was on remand in the prison in question, charged with being concerned with two other men in connection with a robbery of silver plate from a country house somewhere in Sussex.

"Ah, in that case, I think I had better go and see him," Philip said. "Now look here, my good woman, I happen to know that you have been in the habit of receiving letters here for different individuals who are too modest to use their own addresses. You know what I mean. This sort of thing has been going on for a long time and, no doubt, on more than one occasion, robberies have been planned by this means."

"We do 'ave letters sometimes," the woman confessed, "an' we charges two-pence apiece for the accommodation. But, lor' bless yer, sir, we never knows wot those letters contains. It ain't no business of ours wotever."

"No," Philip agreed. "Perhaps not. Now, I want you to cast your mind back a year or two. Do you happen to remember letters coming here for a man called Douglas Hume? Now, don't be in a hurry to answer and don't try to lie to me. Because it is just possible, if you are amenable to reason, that I might be able to make things a bit easier for your husband, if you are disposed to assist me."

Philip had seen plainly enough that the woman had been on the verge of prevarication, but when he spoke about her husband, she changed her mind and almost smiled.

"Well, sir," she said. "Somehow or another, the name sounds familiar. Let me think a bit. There was a gentleman as come down 'ere and arsks us to take letters for him. The first time 'e come was about a year before the War. Come reglur, 'e did for some months, and then we never seed 'im again. Leastwise, not till 'bout two years ago, when 'e sends my old man 'arf a crown and tells us to forward letters as we got addressed 'ere to another place in the West End. Which we did for two or three weeks and then there come no more letters and none 'as come since."

“Did you make a note of that West End address?”

“I dare say we did at the time, but it is so long ago that there ain’t no trace of it left. It’s no use, sir, I can’t for the life of me think where them letters was to be sent to.”

That the woman was speaking the truth, Philip felt sure. Then another idea flashed into his brain.

“You were speaking just now about what happened before the War,” he said. “I suppose from time to time, you have had a good many people whose letters were addressed here. Any Germans amongst them?”

“That’s a funny thing, sir,” the woman said. “But we noticed as there was quite a lot of Germans using the ‘ouse for their letters. And a queer lot they was.”

# Chapter XV

IT seemed to Lashbrook when he turned his back upon the shabby little shop in Camberwell that he had, by accident, hit upon one of the German mediums by which certain individuals, more or less connected with the Berlin Secret Service had communicated with their headquarters prior to the war. At least, that is what Heron’s wife had intimated when she had been brought to reason and forced to speak more or less plainly. Perhaps, if this was followed up, it would be possible to unravel the tangled skein of mystery that surrounded the death of Andrew Millar. There would be a lot to do yet before it was possible to lay the actual criminal by the heels.

Up to a certain point there were indications that Selby Crafton might be the murderer himself. And yet, on the other hand, there was nothing very definite to go upon, even with the evidence of that magazine story before him. To begin with, he had, as yet, not the slightest evidence that the story had been written by Crafton, though he was practically certain that, whoever it was who had played that trick on the editor of the West End Magazine, was using a pseudonym to conceal his identity.

At the same time, it was just possible that the man, who at that moment was languishing in Wandsworth Prison, might be able to speak more definitely. If he could be induced to open his mouth on the promise to make things easier for him at the forthcoming trial, then another piece of the puzzle might be fitted into its proper place. At any rate there was no hurry, and Lashbrook decided to move in another direction before obtaining permission from the authorities to call upon Heron in Wandsworth Gaol.

In the first place, he wanted to see Molly and tell her something about the safe in Martin-lane, and what its contents meant to her. So far he had not had an opportunity of mentioning the key which he had found in the handle of the automatic. Indeed, there was no reason why he should, because, when he had made that discovery through Rothbarth, he had not dreamt that the key might turn out to be one of the most important pieces of evidence in the series of clues, leading to the identity of Andrew Millar’s murderer. So Philip made a few inquiries

in another direction altogether, and it was not until the end of the week that he went round to the offices in Norfolk street once more. That was on a Saturday morning, when he found Molly had returned and was now clearing up for the week with the idea of going off presently for an all too brief holiday.

"It seems to me I have come just in time," Lashbrook said. "What do you generally do with yourself at week-ends?"

Molly replied that it depended more or less upon the weather. If it was fine, as this particular weekend appeared likely to be, then she usually attended a matinee with an evening show to follow, and, on the Sunday, a day with some friend or other not too far away from London, in some spot that was not too popular. By which she meant overcrowded with sightseers and trippers.

"Then you have no definite arrangements?" Philip asked.

"None whatever," Molly smiled.

"Then, perhaps, you will allow me to plan out a campaign for you," Philip suggested. "You can pick your own theatres or places of entertainment, and to-morrow we can go off somewhere for the day in a car. No, it isn't my car, but one that belongs to a friend of mine, who lends it to me when he is not using it himself. He is in Paris just now, so that I am free to borrow it. How does the idea strike you?"

"I should love it," Molly said enthusiastically.

"Very well. I am more or less at a loose end till Monday morning, though I have one or two little things to do which will occupy my time till about half-past 2. Then I can come round to your rooms and pick you up, and we will spend the rest of the day in London just as you please. Then, to-morrow, we will go to Hindhead, or some place like that, and take our own provisions. I'll leave you to get them. Just a simple lunch and a thermos flask, so that we can get a cup of tea in the afternoon far away from the madding crowd. After that, back again in the evening at our leisure."

"Lovely," Mollie cried enthusiastically. "It will be just like old times to have you all to myself once more."

She looked up into his face with a smile that set his heart beating a little faster, and caused him to stammer something more or less incoherent in reply. He was her devoted slave now, and ready to obey her slightest whim, though it only seemed the other day that the positions had been entirely reversed. Strange that the passing of a few years should have made all that difference.

So they passed the afternoon watching the comedy that Molly had selected, and after that, another theatre followed. Then the Sunday morning dawned, bright and clear, with a promise of a perfect day. So it comes about that, some time in the afternoon the two were seated on an open space, not far from the Hindhead Golf Links, where it seemed as if they had the whole world to themselves. They talked about various intimate things until, presently, the conversation veered round to the Mansfield street murder.

"No, I can't say that I have made any very definite progress," Philip said in reply to a question from Molly. "I feel pretty sure that I am on the right track, but, for the present, the path ends more or less in a blind alley."

"Won't you tell me something about it?" Molly asked. "Or perhaps you would rather not talk State secrets even to me."

"I ought not to," Philip said. "But I am going to do so, all the same. My dear girl, do you know I honestly believe that you have been, indirectly, the cause of the first direct thread. I am alluding to the story Miss Waller told me with regard to 'The Man Who Knew'."

Molly opened her eyes very widely.

"'The Man Who Knew'," she echoed. "That suggests all sorts of possibilities. It might even mean the man who knew all about the Mansfield street murder."

"I think that is more than probable. Now, let me tell you a few things. You remember my telling you about the way in which the automatic, which undoubtedly killed Andrew Millar, came into my hands."

"Of course I do," Molly exclaimed.

"Very well, then. That automatic is a very peculiar one. It was manufactured in Germany for the use of the Secret Service there, and abandoned during the war because—at least I think because—one of them fell into English hands. I know as a fact that a weapon of this type belonged to your father."

"To my father!" Molly echoed. "My father?"

"Yes, to your father. He had it once, and I presume it remained in his possession for a considerable time. And then he either lost it or handed it over to someone for some purpose which I have yet to ascertain. Any rate, he had it."

"But how on earth do you know that?"

Whereupon, Philip went on to explain how he had taken his old friend and college companion, Rothbarth, into his confidence, and thus the key to the safe had come into his hands.

"Yes, that is all very well," Molly said. "But how do you know that that key belonged to my father?"

"Well, I knew that, because the key was that belonging to a safe in a deposit in Martin-lane. In fact, the name of the safe deposit was stamped on the bow of the key. And then, to my astonishment, when I came to make inquiries in Martin-lane, I discovered that the key belonged to Colonel Heaton. After that, it was our positive duty to have the safe opened, and to examine the contents. I took the precaution of asking Inspector Klein to accompany me and, together, we explored the safe. But you will never guess what we found inside."

"Oh, do go on," Molly cried excited. "You don't know to what extent you are arousing my curiosity."

"Well, there was nothing inside, except a number of paper bags, each containing a lot of gold coins. We estimated that those coins are worth at least £20,000."

"It sounds incredible," Molly murmured. "Why, my dear old dad never had that much money in his life. When he died, there was practically nothing, except a thousand, with which I was enabled to train myself and buy my business. And now you tell me that all that money was found in a safe in Martin-lane."

"Yes, where it has been for years," Philip interrupted. "And, if I am not greatly mistaken, a lot more besides, at one time."

"But why? For what object? He never gave me the slightest hint that he was a comparatively rich man."

"He wasn't," Philip replied drily. "You see, that money didn't belong to him at all. It wasn't English gold. It consisted entirely of German gold marks, and, so far as

we know, there is not a coin amongst them which was not minted prior to the war. Don't you see what that means, Molly?"

"No, I don't," Molly said wondering.

"Well, it was like this. Your father was a member of the Secret Service. If you didn't know that definitely before he died you knew it when you got that cold, official intimation that he had perished in the service of his country. Now, my interpretation of the whole thing is this. Colonel Heaton was trusted implicitly by his superiors, who gave him the handling of considerable sums of money wherewith to purchase military and other information."

"Yes, I begin to understand that," Molly said. "Then you think the money in the safe formed part of the fund? I suppose the Government will claim that?"

# Chapter XVI

"NO, I don't think they will," Philip smiled. "In fact, I know they won't. I made it my business to go to the Foreign Office, where I saw two of the big, brass hats, both of whom treated me with scant ceremony. I told them what we had found and I intimated pretty plainly that it must be part of a fund that had been entrusted to Colonel Heaton for Secret Service purposes. They declined all knowledge of any Colonel Heaton, indeed, they declined all knowledge of any kind. They told me that they had nothing to do with the money in the safe, and gave me a pretty broad hint that they didn't care what became of it. One of these mandarins went so far as to congratulate Colonel Heaton's daughter on the fact that she was the mistress of £20,000. And that is absolutely a fact, Molly. If you were to take that money in your two hands and offer it to the people at the Foreign Office, they wouldn't look at it. They would either give you in charge or hand you over to the police as a wandering lunatic."

Molly turned her eyes upon her companion with undisguised amazement. She was trying to grasp something which, for the time being, was utterly beyond her comprehension.

"My dear Philip," she gasped. "What utter nonsense. That money does not belong to me, and I cannot accept it."

"Then what is to become of it?" Phil asked. "It was deposited by your father in that safe which he rented long before the War and, so far as I can see, nobody is in the least likely to claim it. The brass hat I subsequently interviewed told me quite plainly not to come bothering him any more; yes he even told me that when I informed him that a little candour on his part might lead to the arrest of the Mansfield street murderer. Even that didn't move him. Now, look here, Molly, don't you be quixotic. Your father died in the services of his country without the expectation of fee or reward. He did his duty like the fine fellow that he was, and gave his life unselfishly, with no regret, except that he was leaving you, practically unprovided for. In cold-blooded English, he was shot somewhere or another behind the enemy lines as a spy. We know how different people regard a spy. At any rate, he died and, by an extraordinary combination of circumstances, a large

sum of money, placed at his disposal by his own government, was left unspent. No doubt, at some time or another, he asked somebody in authority to provide him with a large sum in German gold and, doubtless through a mysterious channel, this was done. I have a feeling that, originally, this German gold amounted to a very large sum indeed. You can see why it was handed over to your father. The big people behind him didn't want to be bothered from time to time with the trouble of obtaining gold marks—oh well, you see what I mean. At any rate, I am pretty sure that the man I interviewed finally knew all about it. When I told him what amount of money we had found he merely shrugged his shoulders. Now, if we had discovered five times as much, he would probably have displayed some sort of feeling. I rather gathered from his expression, and I watched him very carefully, that he was perfectly aware of the fact that your father had disposed of far the greater part of the sum allotted to him. And now, Molly, what are you going to do about it?"

"What can I do about it?" Molly asked hopelessly.

A little of the astonishment gradually died out of Molly's eyes, and a quick, eager expression took its place.

"£20,000," she whispered. "That means £1000 a year, Philip. All my very own if I must take it. Why, I shall dispose of my business to Linda Waller, who will be only too glad to have the chance of buying it, and go back to the old place in Kent where I was born. I know that the house we lived in has been in the market for nearly three years because the present owners can't sell it, and I would so gladly take it off their hands. Oh, Phil, fancy being back there again, taking up the life I liked so well, and knowing that I should have no further anxiety about money."

"Yes, quite the heiress," Philip laughed none too steadily. "A wealthy young woman with plenty of friends. Well, no one will grudge you your good fortune. But, you won't altogether forget the humble policeman in London who—"

"Forget!" Molly cried. "The very idea. Forget the man who has brought me this amazing fortune! But for you, I should never have had it. And as if I could forget you, Phil, in any case. You always came first, and you always will. Don't you remember those early days when I used to follow you about like a little dog, those days when you were a big schoolboy and were so kind and considerate to me. Besides, you are not a common policeman. You are a Detective-Sergeant at Scotland Yard."

"Yes," Philip said a little ruefully. "A detective-sergeant, with an income of £6 a week. It won't be my fault if it isn't a good deal more, one of these early days."

"Of course it will be a good deal more," Molly cried. "You are certain to end up as a commissioner, or something of that sort. It's no fault of yours that you have been waiting all this time for your chance. But, if you like to give it up and look for something in the country, then, perhaps—"

"Don't tempt me," Philip groaned. "I should like to be with you always, Molly. It was going to tell you so after Klein had informed me of my promotion. But this fortune of yours makes all the difference. Something that has come between us."

Molly turned her glowing eyes on his face.

"Now, look here, Phil," she said. "Look at me and dare to tell me, if you can, that anything that has happened is likely to make the least difference to us. What does

it matter what you are? What would it matter if I were worth a million? If you care the least bit for me, and I believe that you do—"

"More than that," Philip groaned. "I have never forgotten you, Molly, no, not even during those years of my life when the war came between us, and I didn't know whether I should ever see my little playmate again. And then Fate threw us across one another's path, as if determined that it was to be, and I found that that dear little engaging child had grown into a beautiful woman."

"As beautiful as all that?" Molly laughed unsteadily.

"Yes, my dear, as beautiful as all that. And then I began to dream dreams. I began to wonder if it was possible for a detective-sergeant at Scotland Yard to—"

Philip broke off abruptly, conscious of the fact that the warmth of his feelings was running away with him. But Molly, with her eyes bravely on his face, took up the tale.

"To ask a struggling typist to share his humble lot. Really, my dear Phil, you are far too modest. Don't you know that there is nobody but yourself. Don't you believe that a small girl is as capable of loving a man as well as a big one? And now, as we have come together again, there is no one else in the way—"

"There never has been anybody else in the way," Philip said unsteadily. "I have had no time for that sort of thing. There was always some sport or another in the good old days to keep my mind off the opposite sex, and then came the War. No time there again for anything, but what we had to go through. And, after that, finding oneself more or less derelict in London, trying to persuade oneself that one was back again in a land fit for heroes to live in. By a fortunate chance, after I had been living for a long time very near the starvation point, I decided to join the police force, and they were glad of me. That is my history in brief, little girl, and I am not altogether ashamed of it."

"Ashamed of it, my dear boy. Of course not, why should you be? If you hadn't done that, goodness knows what would have happened. Certainly we shouldn't have been sitting here together this lovely afternoon, with me listening to a fairy story all about treasure galore and—well, making indirect love to a man who is so blind that he is unable to do so for himself. A nice state of affairs for a man who calls himself a detective-sergeant at Scotland Yard!"

Molly ended on a laugh, but Phil could see that there were traces of tears in her eyes, and that her red lips were very unsteady. And then, almost before he knew what had happened, Molly was smiling and crying in his arms, and he was covering her face with kisses.

"Well, you have been stupid," she said presently. "Fancy you sitting here all this time waiting for me to propose to you when you ought to have taken the initiative long ago. So different from the schoolboy who used to order me about when I wore socks."

"Ah, well, I suppose time makes strange changes," Phil said, with a fine originality. "But, look here, darling, let's be sensible for a moment. You are no longer a struggling typist, but a well-born and accomplished young woman who has £1000 a year in her own right. Mind you, I have every sympathy with your desire to go back to the old home and take up the old life. But what about me? I am not going to live on my wife's income. I can assure you. Don't forget, I have got my ambition and now that my foot is firmly planted on the ladder, I don't want to

take it off again. Besides, I have got to prove my metal. That Mansfield street business is practically in my hands and my future depends upon its success or failure."

"You won't fail," Molly declared. "You are going through with it and I'm going to help you."

## Chapter XVII

THE shadows were beginning to lengthen and the sun to sink in the golden west before Lashbrook came reluctantly back to earth again, and suggested that it was time to move.

"Yes, I suppose it is," Molly said, with a little sigh. "But there is one thing that we haven't settled on, Phil. You don't want to give up your profession, and I should be sorry for you to do so, though it would be nice to be always together."

"What's in the back of your mind?" Phil asked.

"Well, something like this," Molly replied. "Supposing that we don't make any very definite arrangements for the early future. Suppose I don't buy the old house—at least, not yet. But there is no reason why we shouldn't have a little flat in town and a cottage in the country."

"That's not a bad idea. However, there is plenty of time to talk about that. We must get back now."

So, for the time being, the two returned to London, and the business that lay before them. Morning brought Lashbrook to a realisation of the fact that he was, more or less, at a dead end so far as the Mansfield street murder case was concerned, and, until the problem was successfully solved, then he would see no great hopes for the future. He had his own ideas, of course, and it seemed to him that it would be no very difficult matter to place his hand upon the shoulder of the actual criminal. But confronting the miscreant with his crime and proving it in a court of law was an entirely different matter. And if he moved precipitately, then he might scare his quarry and the whole scheme would fall into ruin. If only he could find some clue leading up to the safe key which had been discovered in the handle of the automatic, then he could advance more boldly. But it seemed impossible to believe that the man who had shot down Andrew Millar knew that the key lay snugly hidden in the weapon with which the crime was committed. Nor could he see, as far as he had gone, any particular reason for the crime at all.

There was nothing for it, therefore, but to plod doggedly on with the off-chance of something definite turning up. At any rate, to follow up his inquiries at the Wanderlust Club as to the movements of Selby Crafton both before and after the war. And with this uppermost in his mind he made his way on Monday morning as far as the Wanderlust Club and there he managed to obtain a quiet interview with the secretary, Clift, in his office.

"I dare say you know why I am here," Phil said.

"Well, I can give a pretty good guess," Clift smiled. "You want to know all about Mr. Selby Crafton. Am I to take it definitely that you regard him as the culprit?"

“Nothing of the sort,” Phil said, crisply. “It is my business to suspect everybody, but if you ask me if I have anything definite against Crafton, I have to tell you that you are absolutely and entirely wrong. Of course, it is a bit of a coincidence that Crafton and Millar both belong to your club, and more than strange that one member should find another murdered. But that doesn’t prove anything. Still, for the sake of argument, we will admit that Mr. Crafton is under suspicion. You will remember what I asked you to do the last time I was here.”

“Oh, I have not forgotten,” Clift said. “I have made discreet inquiries in every direction, and I can’t find a single member of my staff who can recollect seeing those two men together. I can’t even ascertain that they ever interchanged a word.”

“Yes, I rather suspected that,” Lashbrook said. “But what about the other point I put to you? The dates when Millar and Crafton came and went. For years back.”

From a desk in his writing table, Clift produced a slip of paper which he consulted carefully.

“Here you are,” he said. “Up to 1913 both the men we are speaking about were here pretty regularly. Just coming and going at intervals, but never for very long. Then, in the summer of 1914—at the beginning of August to be exact—they both vanished and I didn’t see either of them again for nearly two years. Then they began returning at longish intervals and so on till the end of the war. Do these facts help you at all?”

“To a certain extent,” Philip admitted. “It proves that they either joined the Forces or they were engaged upon work of a secret nature. I shall be greatly surprised if it doesn’t ultimately transpire that they were abroad in some capacity or another. Possibly working for the Government and possibly working against it. So far as my investigations have proved, neither of them has reason to be particularly proud of his past. And I should gather that the same remark applies to many other of your members.”

“You are about right there,” Clift agreed. “Of course, we have a good many members whose reputations are a credit to the club, but then on the other hand, there are those of whom the less said the better. We lost a great many members during the war—”

“Yes, mostly foreigners,” Philip suggested.

“Quite right, Mr. Lashbrook, Germans. Scores of them never came back, but quite a sprinkling of them did, though they were not particularly welcome at first. But all that sort of feeling has died down in the course of time, and there is no resentment felt to-day against the presence of any German member.”

“Then you really haven’t got anything to tell me?” Philip asked

“I am afraid not,” Clift said. “All I have been able to ascertain is that somewhere about the end of the war Andrew Millar was detained by the Italian authorities and thrown into gaol. But how long he was kept there, and what the charge was, I have no notion whatever. I got that information from a brother of Millar’s. But, of course, you were present when he told me.”

“Of course I was,” Phil exclaimed. “But I had forgotten all about it. I have no doubt that, sooner or later, I shall be able to turn this information to advantage.”

There was no occasion to stay chatting with Clift any longer, so that Phil went back to his headquarters where he was soon busy making inquiries at to the antecedents of the man, Heron, and the reason why he was being detained in

Wandsworth Prison. When the facts were laid before him, he gathered that it was rather a complicated case, in which several men were implicated in connection with a rather sensational robbery of valuable jewels somewhere in Surrey.

So far as Philip gathered, the whole thing had been carefully planned out by some master crook, who was still at large. But a small clue had led to the arrest of Heron, and this had been brought about by carelessness on his part with regard to finger prints. The thieves had got away with their booty, and, so far, no trace of it had been found. But with his knowledge of such matters, Philip was fairly confident that Heron and his fellow burglars were no more than mere pawns in the case. They had actually carried out the work of breaking into the house and getting away with the valuables according to plan. But these had been handed over, no doubt, to the mastermind behind the robbery, and, in all probability the others had received only a comparatively small reward for the risks they had taken. This was more or less theory on Philip's part, but quite good enough to go on with when he found himself later in the same afternoon in the cell where Heron was confined.

The unfortunate individual looked up sullenly as he sat on his stool with his head in his hands, and confronted Lashbrook, who regarded him with a pleasant smile on his face.

"Now then," he said. "I want to have a little chat with you."

"Oh, you do, do you?" the prisoner said sulkily. "And wot may your name be, mister?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, my name is Lashbrook, and I am a detective-sergeant from Scotland Yard. Now, listen to me. You can give me certain information if you like, or, on the other hand, you may refuse it. But if you like to speak freely, then it is just possible that I can do you a good turn later on, when it is time for your appearance in the Central Criminal Court."

The sullen scowl lifted from the man's face, and he confronted Lashbrook squarely for the first time. Then he rose to his feet, clicked his heels together, and saluted.

"Oh, it's like that, is it, Heron?" Philip smiled.

"Yes—it's like that," Heron grinned. "I was in the army during the war, and I knows an officer when I sees 'im. You may be a detective-sergeant now, but I wouldn't mind betting 'arf a dollar as you was wearing a Sam Brown a few years ago."

"Quite correct, Heron," Philip smiled. "I did hold His Majesty's commission—in fact, I do still. Now, do you happen to have heard anything in connection with a certain crime that took place in Mansfield street a few days ago?"

"Well, I did read something about it in one of the papers they let us see here," Heron said. "But, look 'ere, guv'nor, you ain't goin' to infer as I 'ad anythink to do with that, are you?"

"Not for a moment," Philip said. "But, at the same time, you might be able to give me some information—indirectly, I mean. Do you happen to know if the name of Crafton is familiar to you?"

"Crafton!—Crafton!" Heron repeated slowly. "No, guv'nor, I never 'eard that name afore. But, then, that don't signify nothing. The sort of people I does business with go by all sorts o' names and the one as they uses least is real."

"Yes, I understand that," Phil said. "But the man I am looking for is an individual who used to have letters addressed to him from time to time at Victoria Place, Camberwell."

# Chapter XVIII

HERON shot a suspicions glance at the speaker.

"Wot do you 'appen to know about that, mister?" he asked.

"Well, I will tell you," Lashbrook went on. "From information received I called at your address in Camberwell and had a talk with your wife. She wasn't very communicative at first, but when she found out who I was, she spoke more freely. Now, I know that for years your shop has been a sort of clearing house—not exactly for stolen goods, but for something like it. In fact, just before the war, you came very near to being in your present position."

Heron smiled, and then laughed outright.

"You're about correct there, guv'nor," he said. "There was me and Bill Baines and Snuffy 'Awkins, all of us expectin' to be arrested at any moment. Then the war broke out, and we 'listed in a body. There was nobody to ask questions, and the recruiting sergeant was only too glad to get 'old of us. And that's 'ow we got away from England, and we stayed where we was put till the war was over. But only two of us came back. 'Owever, when we did, everything 'ad blown over nicely, and you can believe it or not, mister, but a year or two afterwards we was absolutely on the square. And a fat lot of good that was. 'Arf starvin' most of the time, and me living on the little bit wot the missus and myself makes out of the shop. So we goes back to the old life again, and 'ere I am. And 'ere I shouldn't be but for one man—Got rot 'is soul!—'oo double-crossed me an' left me an' my mate to face the music. An' I don't mind telling you, guv'nor, straight, that when I am once more free, I am going after that blighter, and, if I 'ave to swing for 'im, I shall."

"What's his name," Phil asked innocently.

"Oh no, you don't guv 'nor, oh no, you don't," Heron said, with a wag of his head. "That's my secret. A gent 'e calls 'isself, and a gent by birth I believe 'e is. One o' them sneerin', drawlin' sort o' swine, as you see in some o' them West End bars. Speaks in a voice as seems to come from the top of 'is 'ead. Very dossy clothes, but not so new as they might be. The broken down type o' swell, as is to be met with on any racecourse. Swagger as much as you like, and a big black moustache as 'e was very proud of. Lord bless yer, I should know 'im if I met 'im in the dark, and with me eyes shut."

"Well, never mind him for the moment. I want you to try and remember the appearance of a man who used your shop two years ago for certain letters. He called himself Douglas Hume."

Heron jumped half across his cell.

"Why, that's the perishing blighter I mean," he said, betraying himself in the excitement of the moment. "Douglas 'Ume, eh? Don't I know 'im? Do you suppose I should be 'ere now if I 'adn't? Only let me get my hands on 'im—"

Heron broke off suddenly.

"I suppose he is not the same man, by any chance, who had a hand in the jewel robbery which led to your arrest on the present charge?" Lashbrook asked. "If he is—"

"Now you're goin' too far, guv'nor," Heron interrupted. "I'd walk round the world barefooted to see Hume laid by the 'eels, but there's others 'oo are walking about outside to-day as I should 'ave to implicate at the same time. But all you want to know about this 'ere Douglas 'Ume I am willin' to tell you."

"Go on, then," Philip said encouragingly.

But it was very little that Heron had to say which was likely to be of any use in connection with the Mansfield street crime. All Phil gathered was that the individual who called himself Douglas Hume was a man of something more than respectable family, and that he had been cast out by his relatives long before. A man who lived entirely by his wits, and who was ready, at all times, to exploit a new type of criminal to gain his own ends.

"And this is all you have to tell me?" Phil queried at length. "I don't suppose you happen to know what this man, Hume, was doing during the war. I suppose you never met him?"

"No, sir, not so long as the fighting was going on. But I did come in contact with 'im before I was demobbed, and that was when I were in Paris. You see, for the last year of the fighting, my division was on the Italian front, and when the war was over a lot of us found ourselves in Paris, waitin' to get back to England. And one night in a sort of pub—wot they calls an estaminet—I looks up from my glass and there I see 'is lordship, as large as life. He was dressed in a sort of uniform as wasn't English and wasn't altogether, French. An' quite the toff, I assure you. An officer of some sort, because a lot of them pollus jumps to their feet an' salutes 'im. Then 'e gives me the wink an' we goes outside an' 'as a few words. Wanted to know when I was goin' 'ome an' all that. Also where 'e could see me when we both gets back to England. Says as he might be able to put a good job or two in my way, an' so I tips 'im my address. But the name 'e gives me there wasn't 'Ume or anything like it. It didn't worry me much becos I knew my man and I knew, with any luck we should meet again."

"And did you meet again?" Philip asked.

"Course we did, a year or so later. And that's when I was told to call 'im Douglas 'Ume. 'E used my shop as an address where letters could be left for 'im and sometimes 'e come to fetch them 'imself and sometimes they was sent on to 'im to a place in the West End."

"You can't remember the address, I suppose?" Philip asked.

"No, I can't," Heron said, definitely enough. "But I must have jotted it down somewhere. If I get out o' this mess, then I'll 'ave a good look round and see if I can find it. It must be in the shop somewhere. But then, 'ere I am, and 'ere I am likely to be for some time to come. It's no good, guv'nor."

"I'm not so sure of that," Philip said. "Now, I am not going to ask you to give your pals away, but if you can help us in any way to recover the historic part of those treasures stolen, then it is just possible that the charge against you may be withdrawn. Think it over, Heron, and I will come and see you another day."

On the whole, a rather unsatisfactory interview, Philip thought, as he left the prison. Still, he had not entirely wasted his time. If things went as he hoped they would, then perhaps, a little later on, he might find an exceedingly useful tool in James Heron. Certainly, that individual had no reason to love the man, whom he knew as Douglas Hume, and, of an equal certainty, this so-called Douglas Hume was the so-called author of the plot which culminated in the comedy that hung around the story called 'The Man Who Knew.' And the finger of suspicion was pointing strongly to the truth that Douglas Hume and Selby Crafton were one and the same, which meant, in other words, that Philip practically had his hand upon the murderer of Andrew Millar.

But between mental certainty and absolute conviction a wide gulf still yawned. It was all very well to maintain that Linda Waller's narrative practically put the rope round Crafton's neck, but no jury would so far commit themselves unless there was something far more definite to go on than that. And the more Philip thought it over, the more sure he was that the ultimate solution of the mystery lay somewhere between the Wanderlust Club and the mean little shop in Victoria Place, Camberwell.

It was towards evening on the same day that an idea occurred to him which he proceeded to put into operation without delay. Shortly before 7 o'clock, he found himself at Rothbarth's lodgings, asking for that individual, and being told that he had just come in and would be having his dinner in the course of a few minutes, without further ceremony, Phil entered the sitting-room.

Rothbarth was standing by the fireplace, reading a letter and smoking a cigarette, prior to his meal.

"Hello, my friend," he exclaimed. "Here again. More or less on the same errand, I take it?"

"Well, indirectly," Phil said. "I can't tell you too much at present because my lips are more or less sealed. But with any luck, you will be able to read all about it in the papers before very long. I came here to-night because I had an idea that you might be able to afford me a little more information regarding the murder in Mansfield street. What you told me about the revolver has been exceedingly useful, and the key that you found in the handle thereof has opened more doors than one."

"Anything I can do, of course," Rothbarth murmured.

"Thanks very much. I am going to ask you to be candid with me. Of course, anything you say will be treated as absolutely confidential. Now, you told me a day or two ago that, before the War, you were a German officer. Also that you were in England in those days with a view to picking up certain information."

"In other words, a spy," Rothbarth smiled. "I am not going to deny it. There were scores of us, dotted about all over England, though we were not known to each other. My dear chap, I suppose I must have written fifty letters containing information about your ships and dockyards and fortifications. Why, your authorities were simply asking for it."

"Yes, I know all that now," Philip said. "But it must have been rather a dangerous game. You didn't write those letters directly from your address and you didn't get replies from headquarters sent to it. Now, give me the name of your post office. I mean the innocent establishment from which letters came and went."

“Let me see,” Rothbarth said carefully. “It’s so long ago I have almost forgotten. Yes, it’s beginning to come back to me now. Some place, somewhere. Oh, yes, that’s right. Number 199 Victoria Place, Camberwell. Yes, that’s right.”

# Chapter XIX

ROTHBARTH’S natural curiosity with regard to the house in Victoria Place was met by Philip with a smile.

“Later on, old chap,” he said. “It’s all part of the problem connected with that automatic and the subsequent murder of Andrew Millar. You will have to wait a day or two, and I can promise that you will be one of the first to know.”

All this time Klein had been discreetly obliterating himself, knowing well enough that, when the proper moment arrived, Lashbrook would take him into his confidence. And this more or less happened a day or so later, when Lashbrook sought out his superior with the idea of gaining his assistance.

“Yes,” Klein said. “I thought you would come to me, sooner or later. Now, tell me how far you have gone, and if I can be of any use to you, I shall be delighted.”

“Well, as a matter of fact,” Lashbrook said, “I have gone quite a long way, but I don’t think you want to hear the story that is half finished. To be perfectly candid, I am up against a snag, and I am going to ask you if you can see your way to assist me in removing that same. Let us go back for a minute or so to events that happened previous to the Great War. Now, I have made a discovery, and more than that, I have confirmed it, by a conversation I have been having with a German friend of mine. I think I told you about Rothbarth.”

“Rothbarth? Rothbarth?” Klein said thoughtfully. “Oh, yes, of course, I remember now. He was that German officer chap who was engaged more or less in some city business. Back again in England now.”

“Yes, of course. He tells me that he was quite useful to his country in 1913 and ‘14. Not that he forwarded information directly, or received letters in reply addressed to his lodgings.”

Klein smiled drily.

“No, I suppose not. I suppose you mean that he had an accommodation address in some obscure locality?”

“Precisely. And that accommodation address I have noted down in my pocket book. Unless I am absolutely out in my calculations, the house in question is mixed up with the murder of Andrew Millar. More than that, I suspect that this little shop in an obscure quarter of the town was one of the chosen houses from which a good deal of information trickled across the Channel. I mean that not only Rothbarth used it, but a good many others besides. What I want you to do is to put me in touch with somebody who had that house under observation before the War. I am confident that it was being watched.”

“I have not the slightest doubt of it,” Klein said. “‘Precious few of those places were not known to us. Although the Secret Service people kept severely aloof from Scotland Yard, there were occasions when we were useful to them, and then they

didn't hesitate, through one of their mysterious channels, to seek our assistance. Certain people would be watched and all that sort of thing. Houses to be searched on the pretence that they were being used for gambling purposes, and all that camouflage. The man you want to see is Inspector McBride. He had that branch entirely in his hands, and I think you will find him exceedingly useful."

It was some little time before Lashbrook could get hold of the inspector in question, but when he did so, he found that the inspector was a perfect mine of information.

"Only too glad to help you," he said. "You have come to the right shop for what you want. For quite a long time before the war I had certain aliens under observation, and when those people at the top realised, as they did, months before hostilities broke out, that trouble was inevitable, I had a pretty broad hint to increase my activities. Not to arrest any of those people, if that is what you are thinking about, but to find out exactly what they were doing and who their correspondents were. Especially who their correspondents were. And this means that their letters were secretly opened by the Post Office authorities, and the contents copied and passed over to me. Of course, this applied equally to letters going out and coming in. And, by carefully sifting these communications it was not a very difficult matter to find out certain addresses in the obscure East End of London through which correspondence passed, and to note down the shop or house which we had reason to suspect. But, mind you, you must not jump to the conclusion that these small shopkeepers themselves knew the use that was being made of their premises. A good many of them don't know to this day what was going on and how carefully, during the war, they were being shadowed."

"Yes, I suppose that is so," Philip said.

"Well, by this means we knew a great deal about the workings of the German spy system in England. And when the proper time came, we laid them all by the heels. It was a pretty clean sweep, carried out in different parts of the country within a few hours, and, though one or two people we were very anxious to meet managed to slip through the net, we were satisfied with our haul."

"In other words, you got the lot, I suppose?"

"No, I can 't go quite so far as to say that. You see, a good many of these chaps were German officers, and by some means or another, they managed to get the tip whilst international negotiations were still going on, and slipped out of the country. Is it any particular one you are looking for?"

"That's right," Philip admitted.

"Very well, then. In that case, I, will turn out my papers and you can go through them for yourself, You can understand why I have carefully kept all those records, because you never can be quite sure when they are likely to be useful. I know that there are at least half-a-dozen of those ex-German officers back in London again who would carry on the same game to-morrow if necessity called for it. Not that I am worrying much about that, when we are on friendly terms with Germany again; but then, you never know. However, I will just hand over those papers. You can stay here as long as you like going through them. You won't interrupt me, because you can work at another desk."

For the next two or three hours, Philip was patiently wading through a whole mass of letters and correspondence, the greater part of which was absolutely

useless to him. Then, to his great delight, he came across the name of Douglas Hume. He laid the letter in which Hume's name was mentioned on McBride's desk.

"Do you know anything about this chap?" he asked crisply.

By way of reply, McBride went across to a file cabinet, and after going through certain papers there, informed Philip that he remembered the matter perfectly well now.

"Yes, there were some striking features in connection with this man," he said. "An Englishman, of course."

"And a traitor, presumably, eh?"

"I don't think so. Let me think a minute. Yes, that's right. Hume was a man of good family who met with misfortunes entirely due to his own indiscretion. In fact, he was a bit of a bad lot. I never believed that Hume was his proper name, and possibly I could give you his real name if I had a little time."

Lashbrook could have done that himself, but it was not judicious to mention it at that particular moment.

"Never mind about that," he said. "What I want to know is how he got mixed up with this spy business."

"Well, as far as the records go, it seems that he offered his services. He came to us and gave us quite a lot of useful information about an alien who had a very nice place on the East Coast—an alien who passed for an Englishman because he spoke our language perfectly. He was understood by his neighbour to be a retired Australian farmer, whose hobby it was to keep motor boats and do a great deal of fishing. Hume told us about this man, so that in due course we were able to arrest him. Then we discovered that Hume could speak two or three languages fluently, and when he asked us if we could give him work in the same direction, we were only too glad to avail ourselves of his services. So we gave him more or less a free hand, and he posed, in certain quarters, as an intensely patriotic German. Lots of good stuff he brought to us. And then, just after the war broke out, he disappeared. I have never seen or heard of him since. If you ask me what I think as to the cause of this vanishing trick, I should say that he made a slip and was found out. Murdered, probably."

"Very possibly," Philip murmured. "But rather strange that he should have vanished just at the moment he was likely to be most useful, wasn't it? I suppose it never occurred to you that he might have double-crossed the authorities?"

The suggestion did not seem to surprise McBride particularly.

"Just as likely as not," he admitted. "It's not a pretty thought, but every country has its traitors, and England was no exception to the rule. I could tell you, if I liked, of more than one man who vanished from the ken of his wife and family and was never heard of again. Perhaps Douglas Hume was one of the same kidney. Anyhow, it doesn't matter now."

After a little further desultory conversation, Lashbrook went his way, and, at the earliest opportunity, sought out his friend and patron, Inspector Klein.

"Well?" the latter asked. "Any good?"

"Oh, yes," Philip said. "I know a great deal more than I did when I got up this morning. I am really beginning to see my way at last. One more little thing, and I don't think that I shall have occasion to bother you any further."

# Chapter XX

"AND what is that," Klein asked.

"Well, you remember what I said to you with regard to that man, Heron? He is under remand at the present moment in connection with a serious burglary charge. And, by a strange coincidence he keeps that little news shop in Camberwell, which was used by certain German agents before the war as a clearing and despatching house for letters, to and from the Continent. But, perhaps, I had better tell you all about that."

Whereupon Philip gave Klein a digest of the conversation he had been recently holding with McBride.

"And now you will see what I am driving at," he went on. "Also, you can see where my suspicions lie."

"Yes, I think that is pretty obvious," Klein murmured.

"Very well, then. Heron knows Douglas Hume, and we know him, too, though under another name. I have got a little scheme which is likely to lead to big results if I can only stage it properly. And this I can do with your assistance. At some time or another, this Douglas Hume, as we will continue to call him, played a pretty low down trick on Heron. And Heron is so bitter about it that, if the two men meet, it is fairly certain that murder will happen. Not that I care twopence whether Heron murders Hume or not. But, at any rate, this must not happen until I have worked that little stunt I talked about just now. I want those two men to meet."

"Yes, but if what you say is correct, the last thing in the world Hume will do is to give Heron a chance to meet him."

"No, you haven't quite got it right. As far as I can make out from the talk I have had with Heron, Hume has not the slightest suspicion that the other man has guessed at the identity of the rascal who has double-crossed him. At least, so I think. But I am going to make sure before I move another step."

"Quite right," Klein said approvingly. "But tell me, where do I come in? And how are those two going to meet? It's long odds, from what I know already, that Heron is booked for a term of penal servitude, in which case, where are you?"

"AH, that I have gone into carefully," Philip said. "I have looked over the depositions in the case, and it seems to me that the charge against Heron is very weak. He was in that jewel robbery, of course, because his finger prints proved it. But those finger prints were not taken in the house from which the stuff was stolen, but on a car used by the burglars. And, moreover, that car was a stolen one. It looks to me as if Heron's defence will be that he was an innocent party, who consented to drive the car under the impression that the burglars were actually on their way to their own house. He will probably say that they put up a story about their chauffeur being hurt, or something of that sort, and, if Heron is defended by a smart counsel, as he probably will be, it is even betting that he will be acquitted. But why proceed with the charge against him at all?"

"My dear fellow," Klein protested.

“Oh, yes, I know it sounds rather eccentric,” Lashbrook smiled. “But I know what I am talking about. If you can manage this for me, I think I can make you a promise that within a week or so we shall lay hands on Andrew Millar’s murderer.”

It was apparent that Klein was particularly impressed by this very definite statement.

“Well,” he said. “I will see what I can do. Heron is to come up under remand again to-morrow, and the case will be further adjourned. And, if I can see my way to it, I will suggest that at to-morrow’s hearing the charge against Heron should be dropped, as the prosecution is not prepared to go on with that part of the case. Will that suit you?”

Philip responded that it would suit him admirably and, later in the afternoon, he was in a position to call at Wandsworth Prison and inform Heron that, within a few hours, he would find himself once more at liberty.

“But, mind you, Heron,” he said. “No nonsense. If the prosecution had gone on you would probably have found yourself in penal servitude for the next five years. And you mustn’t go away with the impression that I have taken all this trouble merely because I have fallen in love with that very prepossessing countenance of yours. You are going to do exactly as I tell you, when and where I tell you, and ask no questions.”

“Blimey, guv’nor,” Heron said, with almost passionate gratitude. “But you ain’t ‘arf a toff. Strike me pink, but I’d do anything for you. Only say the word and—”

“There, that will do,” Lashbrook said. “When you get out of here in the morning, go straight home and stay there. Then search about until you find that address in the West End where you can get in communication with Mr. Douglas Hume. And, when that is done, write the gentleman a letter.”

A lurid light crept into Heron’s eyes again, and, for a moment, a passion of rage convulsed him.

“Write to ‘im,” he snarled. “Write to ‘im. If I meet ‘im I’ll wring ‘is blinkin’ neck.”

“No, you won’t,” Lashbrook said firmly. “You’ll do nothing of the sort. I think you told me that Mr. Hume is quite ignorant of the fact that you owe him a deep grudge.”

“Aye, that’s right,” Heron chuckled. “‘E don’ know as I’ve tumbled to ‘is little gime.”

“Yes, that is exactly what I thought. And he must not know either, at least, not just yet. You just write that letter in a friendly sort of way and ask Hume to come down to Camberwell and see you. Drop him a mysterious hint to the effect that there is trouble in the air for both of you, and that, unless you can have a chat together, it may spell disaster to both.”

“Oh, orl right, sir, orl right,” Heron said. “That little business ‘ll keep. But when I’ve found that address, and made an appointment along o’ ‘Ume at my little plice, wot’s to be the next move in the gime? And wot am I goin’ ter say?”

“That is exactly what I am here to tell you,” Philip said. “Now, listen to me carefully.”

For the next few moments, Lashbrook spoke under his breath, and Heron followed with rapt attention. Then gradually, a broad grin broke out on his face, and he expressed his approval in a manner that was both lurid and convincing.

"So that's the little gime, is it, sir?" he said. "Well, I'm on. You give me the tip when to move, and I'll call you up on the telephone."

More than satisfied with this interview, Lashbrook turned his back on the prison and, being at a loose end for the next few hours, he repaired to his rooms where he lay down, and had a refreshing sleep, of which he stood in considerable need. It was past 4 o'clock when he woke, and, snatching a hasty tea, he went to his desk and took from it the section of the photograph which he had found in the tin box belonging to Andrew Millar.

This he had almost forgotten in his various activities during the last few days, and now it seemed that the time had come to make some use of what he was bound to regard as a definite clue. He turned the piece of pasteboard over and pondered, not for the first time, upon the odd letters made by the blue India rubber stamp—letters that read LES.

What on earth did this signify? It was evidently the name of a place, but what place could possibly end in letters like those? And then it suddenly flashed upon him. Why, Bruxelles, of course, spelt as the Belgians themselves spell it. A photograph taken in Brussels, beyond the shadow of a doubt, and taken, moreover, by someone who was either not very professional, or had been in a hurry. Otherwise, there would have been no India-rubber stamp on the back but a properly printed name and address of the photographer. Or, possibly, the photograph was a police one.

But, be that as it might, it was going to be Lashbrook's business to find out who took that photograph, and when and in what circumstances. That might easily be managed if the photograph was handed over to the proper authorities at Scotland Yard who would, in due course, communicate with the Brussels police. It might take some time to trace the picture to its source, especially as it had been taken so long ago, but that he would eventually be able to pick up the information he desired, Lashbrook did not doubt for a moment.

He went off presently, and, shortly after 5 o'clock, turned into the little offices in Norfolk street, Strand, where he found Molly just packing up for the evening.

"Why, Philip," she exclaimed. "I didn't expect to see you here at this time of the evening. Has anything happened?"

"Nothing particularly," Lashbrook explained. "I only want you to look at this section of a photograph I have here. I want you to see if it in any way resembles the similar type of man who called so mysteriously on your father some time before the war. You remember, the man you found having breakfast with him one morning."

Molly carefully examined the photograph, and then, picking up a pencil from the table, she laid the sharpened point on a certain part of the picture and smiled.

"There," she said. "That's the only trace of similarity I can see, but it is a striking one."

## Chapter XXI

LASHBROOK smiled quietly to himself. In effect, Molly had confirmed a suspicion that had been crystallising in his mind for some time, though he was too much of the official to enlarge upon that, even to the woman of his heart. All that would come in good time. A week, perhaps, or less.

"My dear girl," he said. "You have spotted exactly the same thing that I discovered for myself. But isn't there something about that photograph that puzzles you?"

"I wonder how you guessed that. The photograph bears a very striking likeness to the mysterious man who called upon my father that night after I had gone to bed. The profile is very striking. But where is the black moustache? This individual, whoever he may be, seems to have a light brown moustache, or perhaps it might be a mousey colour, and not very much of that."

"In fact it is just the toothbrush type that was so popular in the army. I suppose it puzzles you to understand how a man can have a heavy black moustache one day and a trifling affair of a different colour the next. But I don't think we need worry about that. And now, Molly, I want you to forget this little talk of ours for the next day or two."

Lashbrook put the section of the photograph back in his pocket and began to talk about something else. Then, after seeing Molly home and making arrangements with her for another meeting at an early date, he returned to his bed-sitting-room to find two or three letters awaiting him there. One of these, with an Italian stamp, he seized on eagerly and tore open.

It was written on the official note paper of the Rome Police Bureau and addressed to him personally by some official there who had inscribed the letter in his own handwriting and not typed it, as if the contents were confidential, which they were.

"Amico Lashbrook," (it ran)—

"Ah, my friend, it is so good to hear from you again after all this long time, yes? And it is good to know that you have decided to place those so remarkable talents of yours at the disposal of your country. For, you see, I have not forgotten those days when we worked together in the interests of civilisation and humanity, and did our best for the common cause. You will remember how we came together, after the disaster at Caporetto. Ah, that was a dreadful time, a terrible time when the fate of Italy hung in the balance, and ruin and desolation stared us in the face.

"And none understood that better than yourself. It was you, with others of your countrymen, who took your lives in your hands after Caporetto, and went beyond the Austrian lines to find out for us the information that we so sorely needed. And you find it, and it was largely due to you and one more of your compatriots, that we were able to turn that information to account.

"But you will say I am wasting my time in recalling these memories, but I do so because I can never forget.

"But you want to know all about the man, Andrew Millar, who so long was a prisoner in Rome. You want to know why we arrested him and why we detained him so long.

"Well, we did that because we thought he was a traitor, not only to you and your friends, but to Italy as well. He was attached to the person of Colonel Heaton. Perhaps you may not know that. Perhaps you may not know the name of Colonel

Heaton at all. But he was a great man—a man of the most amazing courage and audacity, and with a mind gigantic. He was with us after Caporetto, because he was sent down to help us from one of your headquarters in France. And the work he did and the information he sent us from the other side of the Austrian lines was worth its weight in gold a million times over. But, alas, he fell into the hands of the foe, not because he made a mistake himself—for he never made a mistake—but because he was betrayed by an Englishman whom he trusted. And that Englishman was called Douglas Hume."

Lashbrook paused as he reached this point in the letter and allowed his mind to wander slightly. He had expected certain useful information, but a piece of news like this was utterly beyond his anticipation. He took up the letter again.

"Of course, we did not find that out till long afterwards. This Douglas Hume was a man of good education and family, who had fallen very low and was prepared to do anything for money. But one of good address and exceptional ability who, moreover, had served at one time in the British Army. How he got into the confidence of those who employed him on Secret Service work we never knew, but he was trusted and it was he who betrayed Colonel Heaton into the hands of the Austrians. A double-dyed traitor, at one time working on our side and perhaps the next day working on the other. Anyway, Colonel Heaton was shot as a spy, but, before his execution, he managed to smuggle a letter or two through to us at Italian headquarters, and one of those letters he addressed to his daughter. And that letter was lost. There was another letter which seemed to imply that this Andrew Millar had been mainly instrumental in betraying Colonel Heaton to his enemies. That letter might, or might not, have been a forgery, but as to that I can't say definitely, because everything was in confusion about that time, and we did not know what to do for the best. At any rate, Andrew Millar was arrested and thrown into gaol, where he was forgotten.

"You know how slow things are with us, and what a long time it takes before we bring criminals to justice. So different from your system. Anyway, Millar lay in prison for two or three years and then somebody seemed to discover there was a charge of some sort against him. But the War was over, Italy had struggled to her feet again and we were too busy with other matters. So Andrew Millar was allowed to go, and that is all I can tell you about him. I don't think he was a traitor myself. I think that that scoundrel, Hume, had cunningly contrived to throw the onus of his treachery upon Millar, so that if anything arose later, Hume would have been able to bluff the matter out, because he was that sort of man, and Millar had fallen into such drunken habits that nobody would have taken his word for anything.

"And that, my dear friend, is about all I can tell you. I dare say that you would very much like to know what happened to the letter that Colonel Heaton addressed to his daughter, just previous to his execution, but what became of it I don't know. It was lying in the office here for some days after it arrived, and, during that time, both Hume and Millar were in and out, making reports, or drawing money for further expeditions. I should think it is exceedingly probable that one of them stole it, but which one I can't say. I only hope that you will solve that problem.

"And now, my dear Lashbrook, if there is anything more I can tell you, please let me know. Write to me at the above address at any time, with the assurance that at

all times I shall be only too happy to meet with your wishes.—In all friendship. Yours fraternally,—Carlo Montini."

For a long time Lashbrook pondered over this letter. To a certain extent, it merely confirmed his own suspicions, though, from a practical point of view, it did not get him much further. He had known before, of course, that the man called Douglas Hume was a thorough-paced scoundrel, but, so far, he could see nothing whatever in the way of legal evidence to connect Hume with Selby Crafton. That there really was some connection between the pair he felt certain, but certainly it was not much good unless he had some really reliable evidence to go upon. And even if he could find a common link between the two names, it did not prove that Crafton had had any hand in the murder of Millar. It was just possible that Millar had been murdered by another person altogether. Still, the letter from Rome helped, and, as Philip sat there trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together, he began to see dimly that there was a way out of the impasse.

There was no reason, so far as he could see, why he should not make a call at the Wanderlust Club and ask Crafton a few questions. Crafton had been the man who had found the body and, therefore, would not be placed upon his guard when he found himself called upon to answer a few questions in connection with the crime. He had given evidence at the first inquest hearing and had been told by the Coroner to hold himself in readiness to appear again if necessary at the adjourned inquiry. That, however, had been put off for some considerable time, entirely for the convenience of the authorities.

The more Philip thought over this plan, the better it seemed to him. He would go down to the Wanderlust Club the following morning and see Crafton. He might, or he might not, induce the latter to make a compromising statement, though he had not much hope of that, because he knew that he was dealing with an exceedingly cunning and clever scoundrel. But before that, he would call in at Scotland Yard and place that photograph in the hands of the proper people who inquired into such matters. It was spade work of the simplest kind and, no doubt, somebody at Scotland Yard would be able to find out, through the Brussels police, where, and in what circumstances, the photograph had been taken.

This having been accomplished in due course, Philip walked as far as the Wanderlust Club on the following morning, and asked if he could see Mr. Crafton. He was informed that Crafton was at breakfast. "Could the waiter take a message?"

# Chapter XXII

A FEW minutes later, Crafton strolled into the waiting room in his most superior and aloof manner, and demanded to know what the police officer wanted with him.

"I hope to goodness you won't detain me long," he said. "I am rather pressed for time, because I am going out of town within half an hour for the week-end. In fact, I have already ordered my taxi, and it will be here in twenty minutes."

“That will be quite long enough for my purpose,” Lashbrook said curtly. “I merely want to ask you a few questions.”

“Fire away,” Crafton said. “By the way, haven’t I seen you before? Your face is rather familiar.”

“Well, you see,” Philip explained. “I was the policeman who was on duty in Mansfield street that night when you stumbled on the body of your club-mate, Mr. Millar. I was in uniform then, which probably accounts for the difference.”

“But you are not a detective,” Crafton said.

“I am,” Philip replied. “New to the work, perhaps, but I have had a good deal of experience in one way and another, most of it during the war. Like yourself, sir, I was in a way, attached to the British Secret Service.”

“What the deuce do you mean?” Crafton asked. “Are you insinuating that I had anything to do with the Service?”

“Lie number one,” Phil thought to himself, though his face was an absolute blank as Crafton spoke.

“Oh, very well, sir,” he said. “If you deny my suggestion then I must, of course, take your word for it.”

“Of course you must,” Crafton said rather uneasily. “But get to the point, please.”

“Oh, certainly. Am I to understand, Mr. Crafton that though the murdered man was a member of this club, you never knew him or even spoke to him?”

“My dear sir, there are scores and scores of members of this club that I don’t know, even by name. I see them in the reading room, and the smoking room, and so on, but I have no curiosity to know who they are. You seem to forget the fact that this club numbers upwards at a thousand members.”

“Yes, perhaps I had overlooked that fact. So you have no sort of knowledge of Mr. Millar, beyond the fact that he was a member of this club? Now, look at this, Mr. Crafton. Did you ever happen to see a weapon like it before?”

As he spoke, Philip drew the fatal automatic from his pocket, and handed it over to his companion. Crafton turned it over idly, and passed it back again.

“Never,” he said. “New type to me altogether. But what has that pistol to do with our case?”

“Well, that remains to be proved,” Philip said. “I merely remark that it was this automatic with which Mr. Millar was killed.”

“How are you going to prove that?” Crafton asked swiftly.

“Well, I think the inference is pretty plain. The revolver was found in a drain within a few feet of the spot, not many hours after the murder was committed. By a strange coincidence, the weapon was passed on to me by the workmen who found it. That is how I know I am holding in my hand the weapon that was responsible for a dastardly crime.”

Crafton shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

“Very likely,” he said. “These things do turn up unexpectedly sometimes. But why do you show me this?”

Philip pressed his hand on the spring on the top of the handle, and disclosed the hollow space inside.

"That is why," he said. "A most ingenious arrangement for hiding documents or articles of value. I may tell you, Mr. Crafton, that inside that space I found the key of a safe which, when opened, disclosed a sum of money amounting to £20,000."

Without warning, a burst of lurid profanity broke from Crafton's lips. It was only for a few seconds he so far forgot himself and then he was as coolly indolent as ever.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I am subject to that sort of thing. Shell shock, you know, comes on me at all sorts of unexpected times."

"In that case," Phil said politely. "Perhaps I had better not worry you any further. Another day when you are more yourself. Besides, you must be wanting to get away."

Crafton undoubtedly was, for he looked at his watch and hurried out of the room without a word of apology. Philip, hanging about as if time were no particular object, had the satisfaction, a few moments later, of seeing Crafton, with a small suitcase in his hand, jump into a taxi and heard him order the driver to take him to Paddington station.

At any rate, Philip decided, here was no indication of any desire on Crafton's part to make an escape. No doubt he really was going into the country for the week-end, which was a fortunate chance which Philip had no intention of losing. Once the taxi had disappeared, he turned to the waiter and asked to speak to the manager immediately.

Clift came without delay and professed himself to be entirely at the service of his visitor.

"No new developments, I suppose?" Philip asked.

"Not since you were here last, Mr. Lashbrook," Clift said. "Of course, I have not been unmindful of your instructions and a pretty close watch has been kept on Mr. Crafton. Are you still under the impression—"

"I am under no impressions at all," Philip interrupted. "I never said I suspected Mr. Crafton of having any hand in that crime, and, if I were to go into a Court of Law to-morrow I could not produce a scrap of evidence against him. What I really said was that it is the business of the police to suspect everybody."

"I am sure I am very sorry," Clift said. "Now, I have made still further inquiries from the different servants we employ, most of whom have been with us for years, and I can't find a single trace of anybody ever seeing Crafton and Millar together, or exchanging a word. And if you have no evidence against Mr. Crafton, why are you here this morning?"

"A very fair question," Philip replied, "I came, in the first instance, to see Mr. Crafton himself, and on the whole, without going into details, I may say that the inquiry was eminently satisfactory."

"Then you don't want anything more, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, I do. Remember that we suspect everybody. We suspect certain people, even when the evidence is dead against our convictions. And that is why I propose, this morning, to take advantage of Mr. Crafton's absence to make a thorough search of that gentleman's bedroom. No objection, I suppose?"

"It wouldn't matter if I had," Clift said.

"Not a bit. Probably the door of the room is locked, but of course, you have a duplicate key. If you haven't I must 'phone to Scotland Yard for one of our experts to come and open the door for me."

"No occasion," Clift smiled. "We have a duplicate key to all the rooms. I suppose, Mr. Lashbrook, this little burglary of ours is to be a profound secret."

"Well, I think that goes without saying," Lashbrook replied. "I want you to come with me, in case we discover anything of importance, in which event you will be a witness."

"Very well," Clift said resignedly. "Though, mind you I don't like it. Come this way."

The two were in Crafton's bedroom in a few moments, and Lashbrook looked around him. It was a large and pleasant room, looking out on to the street, and furnished with a bed and a lounge, together with a wardrobe, a couple of arm chairs, and an old oak bureau, in front of which was another chair.

"A very handsome piece of furniture, that," Lashbrook said. "The property of the club, I presume?"

"No, sir," Clift explained. "That is Mr. Crafton's own property. It's been here for years."

"Um—the drawers all unlocked, I see," Philip mused, as he tried them, one after the other. "Evidently a very confiding person, Mr. Crafton. What have we here? A certain amount of private correspondence, a whole lot of maps and plans which, no doubt were of service during the war, and quite a heap of fishing tackle. Beyond that, I can see nothing. But then, you never know with these old-fashioned pieces of furniture. Do you happen to have a foot-rule in the place, Mr. Clift?"

Clift came back in a few moments with an ordinary boxwood foot-rule in his hand. With this, Lashbrook proceeded to measure the depth of the drawers and, after he had done that, the depth of the bureau itself. As he did so, he smiled.

"Ah, just as I thought," he said. "Behind that middle drawer there is a space of about eight inches unaccounted for. A secret recess, of course. Now, let's see if we can find the spring or knob that opens it."

A moment later, he pulled back a small square of wood, from behind which he took a letter in a heavily sealed envelope. He glanced at it and a sudden light flashed into his eyes.

For the envelope was in a handwriting which he had no difficulty in recognising. It was the handwriting of Colonel Heaton and addressed to Molly, at the old house in Kent. There was no shadow of a doubt about that.

## Chapter XXIII

THE manager of The Wanderlust regarded Lashbrook with frank admiration. Much as if he had been a conjurer who had performed some new and wonderful trick.

"That was very smart of you," he said. "Have you found something that you were looking for?"

“I was looking for nothing in particular,” Philip admitted quite candidly. “Though I did expect that my search here would not be exactly a waste of time. Anyhow, there is a lot of spade work yet before I lay my hand on Mr. Millar’s murderer. All I ask is that you say nothing to a soul as to this matter. A chance word may mean the ruin of my work.”

Philip went on his way presently with the letter in his pocket. At the first opportunity he examined it minutely with the aid of a strong magnifying glass. He had more than suspected that the big red seal on the back of the envelope had been tampered with, and this suspicion was speedily confirmed. Beyond doubt the letter had been opened and sealed again very carefully. But certain rough edges, and a break in the seal, betrayed the work of the culprit. But why had the thief who had stolen the letter been so anxious not to betray the fact that he had tampered with it? That was what Philip had to discover.

But, be that as it may, the letter belonged to Molly, and to her Philip repaired accordingly. Alone with her in her office, the letter was laid on the table.

“Where did you find it?” Molly asked.

“Never mind,” Philip said. “I can’t tell even you yet. Let us say in the course of my investigations. Of course, you recognise the handwriting on the envelope?”

“My poor dear father’s,” Mollie almost whispered. “I suppose that you guessed that.”

“I was sure of it,” Philip said. “And now didn’t you think you had better open it? No, no, not that way. Slit the flap of the envelope with a paper-knife. It may be necessary later on to prove that the seal on the flap has been tampered with.”

Mollie proceeded to carry out his instructions, and the letter lay before her. There was no address, but a date some time during the year 1918. The letter ran:—

My dearest child,

I am writing this in the hope that with good fortune, it will reach your hands. It is a long chance, but I have to take it. I think you know, or have guessed, what my occupation has been during the Great War. I cannot be more definite than that because this letter may fall, probably will fall, into the hands of my enemies.

I am somewhere where I ought not to be, and I have been found out. Betrayed beyond the shadow of a doubt. It is a horrible thought that this treachery comes from the hand of one of my own fellow countrymen, whom I had trusted, and who is a traitor for the sake of money, the worst type of creature. The name I cannot mention, but think of a time, long ago, when you came down to breakfast in the old house and found me in company with one who was not a guest when you went to bed the night before.

Mollie broke off and looked at Philip. “The man with the black moustache!” she cried.

“Precisely,” Philip said dryly. “Go on.”

Let us hope you have remembered, my child. I had nearly finished my work before this disaster overcame me. A few hours more and I should have been across the danger line. There were two men with me—the betrayer, and another, less daring and bold, who is the weak reed I am relying on to smuggle this letter to you. If he succeeds, he will hand over certain belongings of mine and a certain

weapon which has never left me since I started on this, the last and most perilous journey of my career. Keep it for my sake and handle it carefully.

In a few hours I shall be dead. Shot. You guess what this means. My very dearest child…

There was much more to the same effect. There were tears in Mollie's eyes before she had finished. Then she looked up quickly as one of the last lines in the letter struck her.

"Look at this, Phil," she cried. "The words, 'Do you remember our old pastime?'"

"What does that mean?" Philip asked.

"A sort of game we used to play. Cyphers. Picking out letters in a piece of prose so as to form words. Not very original, but likely to pass observation by anyone not 'expert in' such matters. Hold the paper up to the light, Phil. Place it against the pane of glass in the window. If you do, I am sure you will find lots of minute holes in the paper, as if pricked slightly with a pin. I am absolutely certain of it."

"By jove, you are right," Philip said after a test. "I will hold the sheet of paper against the light, and whilst I read out the pricked letters, you take them down."

When this was finished, Mollie proceeded to translate the individual letters into words.

"I told you so, Phil," she cried, "I told you so. There is a secret hiding place in the handle of the revolver and in it is a key to a safe where money is deposited. You see—"

"Well, we know all that already," Philip interrupted. "We have secured the key and the money."

"Thanks to you, dear," Mollie smiled. "My darling Dad goes on to speak of it here in the pricket words which I have compiled from the chosen letters. The man who betrayed him was Douglas Hume, and the man chosen to smuggle the letter through was the murdered man, Andrew Millar. How ghastly! But why did not Millar bring the letter direct to me?"

"Because he probably knew all about the money in the safe and the temptation was too strong for him," Philip suggested. "But one thing he did not know was where the key of the safe was concealed. He trusted to luck to find it later on. He must have found out by some means or other that the Colonel was handling large sums of German gold behind the enemy's lines and probably knew something concerning the way in which, from time to time, your father replenishes his store of cash. So did that scoundrel, Douglas Hume, for that matter. Both those men were more or less working together in the Secret Service. Then, when Hume's plans were ripe, he betrayed your father and hoped to get away with the balance of the German gold, knowing full well that the big men behind the Service would never acknowledge to outsiders, as we are, that they knew anything of the fund in the safe. The interview I had at the Foreign Office proved that. Then, after Hume had played the double-dyed traitor, he missed his mark over the key, and when he came back to London when the war was over he hunted high and low for Millar, whom he suspected of having the key of the safe. Millar did have it, as a matter of fact, since it was hidden in the handle of the automatic, but that was a thing of which he had no knowledge. All Millar had was this letter to you, and he opened it and no doubt studied it hundreds of times, in the hope of stumbling on a clue to the key. That's why he hid that letter all these years. Doubtless Millar was fully

aware of all your movements, Mollie, and when he realised that you were compelled to work for your living he came to the logical conclusion that you were in utter ignorance of the safe and its contents. But he still stuck to the letter. After the war he went abroad for a long time, and finally came back not long since, and took up his old Quarters at the Wanderlust Club."

"Where Douglas Hume found him," Mollie suggested.

"No doubt. Hoping to lay hands on the spoil, despite the fact that so many years had elapsed."

"And murdered Millar," Mollie whispered. "I wonder why?"

"That is what I suggest," Philip said. "As to motive, who can tell? But doubtless something connected with the money in that safe. You may be sure all this long time Hume has been secretly on the track of his victim. He may have thought that Millar at long last had solved the problem and killed him with the idea, later on, of finding the clue. We know that Hume was always hard up, indeed, that trick he played on the editor of The West End Magazine proves that. We know beyond the shadow of a doubt that Hume was with your father, together with Millar, behind the Italian lines when the colonel was betrayed into the hands of the foe. So far we have solved the problem."

"But Hume?" Mollie, asked. "What of him? And how are you going to prove the crime against him? Anyway, he seems to have vanished. Perhaps dead."

"I don't think so," Philip said. "A man doesn't commit a murder and die within the limit of a few days. At least, it would be a strange coincidence if he did."

"But who is he? Where has he got to?"

"That question will be answered before long," Philip said with a smile. "Patience, my dear. When the hour strikes, you are going to help. Does the idea surprise you? Yes, I think that you will have a hand in the arrest of the murderer."

## Chapter XXIV

MOLLIE lost a little of her wonderful colouring.

"I hope not directly," she said. "But I suppose that you mean in the way of giving evidence, Phil?"

"That was my idea," Philip said. "Do you remember the section of a photograph I showed you recently? But of course you do. The man with the black moustache who came so mysteriously to your house before the war."

"You mean the man without the black moustache, Phil?"

"In the photograph, yes. Just a little military one. But you saw a certain point of resemblance, didn't you?"

"A very striking point of resemblance," Mollie declared. "You are going to suggest—"

"Nothing for the moment, Mollie. This is the stage where I have to consult my very good friend, Inspector Klein. But you shall know afterwards. Within four and twenty hours, I hope."

Inspector Klein welcomed his junior with his usual friendliness and cordiality.

“Well, my boy,” he said. “I can see by your expression that you have news of grave import to tell. Mean to say that you have solved the problem of the Mansfield street murder?”

“Practically,” Philip said. “There is still a certain amount of spade work to be done, but that I hope to finish on Monday, with the man, Heron’s, assistance. But before I go any further I want you to look at this letter. I found it not so long ago in a secret drawer of an old bureau in Selby Crafton’s bedroom at the Wanderlust Club. Read it, inspector.”

“Very interesting,” Klein said at length. “But it does not seem to get us very much further.”

Philip proceeded to explain the cypher, and at the same time handed Klein Mollie’s translation of the prickmarks. A low smile dawned on the Inspector’s face.

“Ah, now I begin to understand,” he said. “But I don’t see exactly where Heron comes in.”

Philip handed the section of photograph to the other, and began to explain at some length.

“There!” he said at last. “Now you understand the connection between Crafton and Hume. And so does Heron. That’s why I wanted the latter released. Because Hume ployed Heron a very dirty trick, some long time ago, and Heron found it out, after a lapse of time, and is now thirsting for Hume’s blood. Hume does not know this yet, though he will on Monday, when the two meet. It was I who arranged the meeting which takes place at Heron’s shop in Victoria Place, and I shall be there. In a place where I can listen without being seen. Understand?”

And Klein declared emphatically that he did.

It was shortly after 2 o’clock on Monday afternoon that Philip made his way in the direction of Victoria Place, Camberwell, with a view to keeping his appointment. He dismissed his taxi at the corner of the street and very cautiously covered the ground to his destination. His coat collar was pulled up, and his hat drawn over his eyes. Heron, lounging at the shop door, was waiting for him. Together they passed into a dingy little room at the back of the shop, that gave on to a sort of a tank which evidently served as a scullery and washplace to the establishment. And there for half an hour Philip lay perdu.

Then voices, and the scent of a cigarette of quality which the newcomer was smoking. It was not in the least difficult to recognise the voice of the speaker.

“Well, here I am, Heron,” came the patronising tones. “Most infernally inconvenient, but, for the sake of old times, I decided to answer your note in person. But you must understand that there can be no further business dealings between us.”

“I see,” Heron muttered. “Times ‘ave changed evidently. No further use for my little plice for yer letters, eh? An’ no little plants with John ‘Eron to pull the chestnuts out o’ the fire, an’ be fobbed off with 5 per cent. of the plunder.”

“My good man,” the drawling, insolent voice responded, “you and your kind always talk like that. Where would you be without education and brains behind you? If you tried to pull off some plant, however simple it looked, you would be laid by the heels before a day had passed over your head. We do all the head work and the scheming. Sometimes, when a big coup is decided on, it may take weeks, or even months, before we can move with safety. And money, too. That Carton

case cost a certain person five hundred in ready money before we made our swoop."

"Yus, and I made the swoop, cully."

"You got the stuff away in a fast car, and all you had to do was to enter the crib when it was a dead snip, and nobody into a position to interfere. About as much danger as fetching a sack of potatoes from a field. And what did you get for your trouble? Fifty pounds. One night's work."

"That's orl very well, Mr. Blinkin' Hume—"

"Don't you dare to address me like that," the other man said. "Don't dare to quarrel with me. Mr. Hume, please."

"Mr. Crafton, if yer like," Heron said sullenly.

Philip, in his hiding place, heard the sudden gasp that broke from the lips of the visitor as Heron spoke.

"What—what do you mean by Crafton?" came the question.

"Ah, I ain't such a fool as yer make out," Heron jeered. "I knows orl about yer. Yus, I knows as yer got more than one address. I cud a wrote yer at that there swell club of yours, if I'd a mind. But wif orl yer swank and you-be-damned airs, yer 'ad to come down 'ere when I sent for yer because yer dared not make an enemy of John 'Eron. And if I tell yer as I'm in need of a few 'undred quids you'll 'ave to find 'em."

"Blackmail, eh? Trying a new line?"

"Yer white-livered scoundrel, yer double-crossing scamp, yer yellow dog," Heron burst out. "Who put Snippy Calligan away? An' the Lurcher and me?"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

There was astonishment in the tone of the speaker, but there was also a note of fear behind it. Philip, waiting there for his time to come, did not fail to notice it.

"Well, I'll tell yer," Heron replied, in a menacing tone that caused the other to shrink back. "I just come out of prison. A close shave of gettin' a five stretch. But the cops 'ad other uses fer me, and they let me go. But under remand and in the exercise yard one day who should I meet but Flash Alf. No cause ter ask if yer knows him, cos yer do. And he told me things. Told me orl about that Clapham Common wot I got two year fer back in '94. Now, you skunk, wot abaht it?"

There was murder in that voice, and Philip recognised it as he crouched there in the damp scullery. If Heron broke all the bounds of restraint, then he would have to disclose himself, a thing he did not want to do just yet.

"You think I betrayed you?" Hume asked.

"I don't think nothin' abaht it," Heron responded, in the same savage tones. "I knows. But I couldn't prove it until 'ad me talk wif Flash Alf. Now Mr. Crafton."

"Be careful," the other said. "Don't use that name any more than you can help. Lord knows who is listening."

"The perlice, per'aps," Heron said, with a suggestion of humour that naturally his visitor failed to understand. "But as says, afore, wot abaht it?"

"It's a mistake, all a mistake. Only give me time to explain and I can put everything right. And, if you want money, you can have it, lots of money. Listen to me, Heron. I am on the track of a fortune. Over £20,000. The easiest money you ever heard of. Just lying about ready for anybody to pick up, and nobody to claim

it. The stuff is almost in my hands, and when I finger it a thousand is yours. Come!"

"Lor, wot a liar the man is!" Heron said, with a sort of jeering admiration. "Ought ter be a member o' Parlyment. Orl that money is waitin' in the gutter, I don't think. And you wif abaht a bob to yer nime. Quite the toff, o' course, wif all yer swell clobber. But yer don't get away wif it like that. When I sent for yer this mornin' I meant to cut yer throat, even if I 'ad to swing fer yer. But yer ain't worf it, Mr. Crafton. And if I let yer go now never will I see yer again nor your thousand pahnds. Turn out yer pockets, put all the posh yer got 'on the tyble there. That flash ring on yer finger and the gold watch and chine. Sort o' security fer good behaviour."

From his hiding place Philip could hear the rustle of notes and the rattle of coin, together with the clank of the watch on the table. Then he stepped forth.

The eyes of the two men met. Crafton staggered and turned pale. That he recognised Philip as the constable whom he had encountered on the night of Millar's murder was beyond question.

"A plant," he murmured feebly.

"Call it that if you like," Philip said quietly. "Mr. Selby Crafton, alias Douglas Hume, I hold a warrant for your arrest on a charge of murder. The murder of Andrew Millar."

## Chapter XXV

A BITTER smile crossed Crafton's face. He looked straight into the eyes of his accuser, and the shrug of his shoulders was suggestive of surrender to superior force.

"Ah, a neat little plot," he sneered. "The price of Mr. John Heron's liberty. Also the saving of much trouble in connecting Douglas Hume and Selby Crafton. Sir Policeman, my very best congratulations. I little thought when we met, that dramatic night in Mansfield street, that I was face to face with one of the shining lights of the Scotland Yard division."

It was all very well done. The bean idea attitude of the man of nerve and courage, who is prepared to take any risk to attain his ends, and is equally ready to face the desperate consequences should he fail. A pity, thought Philip, that one so brave should be such an abandoned scoundrel.

But it was only for a moment that Crafton maintained his attitude or indifferent aloofness. Suddenly his whole body stiffened and, with every muscle keyed up to concert pitch, he sprang forward and swung a blow at Philip which just missed his jaw and landed on his throat. But it served to send Philip staggering backwards, whilst, with one bound, Crafton was outside the kitchen door and into the street. Before Philip could recover his balance and set off in pursuit, Crafton was running down the street with a good twenty yards start.

He darted across the road at a right angle, blind to aught but safety. There was a shout and a yell, and almost before Phil realised what had happened Crafton

was lying in the centre of a narrow street, and a passing motor lorry pulled up with a grind of brakes and a skid on to the pavement.

As if by magic a crowd of people had gathered round the still form lying there, and a white-faced driver was protesting to heaven that he was not in the least to blame.

"Bolted like a mad dog across the road, he did," the man almost blubbered. "Seemed arf crazy like. Did it a purpose, I shouldn't wonder."

A constable shouldered his way through the press.

"Here, what's all this?" he asked. "Now, then, some of you, keep back, there. Give him air."

By this time Philip had reached the scene of the accident. He flashed his official card in the constable's face. The latter fell back and touched his helmet.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said. "I didn't know."

"Man escaping from custody," Philip panted. "Blundered right into the lorry as he raced headlong across the road. It was no fault of the driver. Call up assistance and send a cry for the ambulance. I'll take charge here."

Half an hour later Philip was listening to what one of the house surgeons at St. Angela's Hospital had to say.

"Pretty bad," he explained. "Injury to the spine, and I think, internal injuries as well."

"Likely to be a long business?" Philip asked.

"Permanent, if you ask me," the surgeon declared. "What the papers call fatal. Might drag on for a few days, but no longer. No pain to speak of, poor chap, but none the less serious for that. Conscious already and likely to remain so until the end. His own fault, he says. See him if you like, but I should wait until we give you the tip."

There was nothing for it now but to get back to headquarters and report to the authorities there. It was some time before Philip could obtain an interview with Inspector Klein, but the latter was free at length, and he welcomed Philip warmly, seeing that he had something important to tell.

"Well," he asked. "Anything doing?"

"Meaning with regard to the Mansfield business, sir? I got my man all right, in a way."

"What do you mean, 'in a way'?"

Philip proceeded to explain. He laid all the facts before his superior, who listened in grim silence until the whole story was finished. Then he permitted himself to indulge in a smile of congratulation.

"You have done exceedingly well," he said.

"I have been exceedingly lucky," Philip said modestly.

"Of course, you have, my dear boy," Klein agreed, "but my experience is that good luck always follows sound, hard work. Luck, as you call it, is always the policeman's friend. The biggest thing I ever pulled off was the Wanstead murder case. Puzzled the Yard for eighteen months. No clue. Then when I was put on to a piffling affair down at the Docks, connected with cigar smuggling I hit, by the merest chance, on a clue that in the end hanged three men. Well, you won't hang your man, and you won't get any publicity or blaze of glory out of this stunt, the more especially as the Foreign Office will stand between you and the gratification

of public curiosity, but I will see to it that recognition will be the most good and that is here under this roof."

"That's very kind of you," Phillip said gratefully.

"Not at all, my boy, not at all. What a good man you are I learnt during the war, and if you had come to me sooner and I should have had no hesitation in backing you. And now you have made good off your own bat, and solved a puzzle that would have been a credit to any of us here."

Philip left the office of his superior a little later with the feeling that the world was treating him very well indeed. Not that he was taking much credit to himself because he recognised how luck had played into his hands. Not to mention what he owed to Mollie, and her help in running the criminal to earth. And Mollie must be the first to know all about it.

But it was not until the end of the week that Philip found an opportunity of carrying out this intention. There were many interviews with the great ones at the Yard, embracing Deputy Commissioners, and the like, and many reports to make before it was possible to arrange an interview with Mollie.

Then, of course, the Foreign Office took a hand in the game. Nothing must transpire that involves in any way the connection between the mandarins there and the Secret Service. If Crafton died, as seemed inevitable, then the whole thing must be relegated to oblivion. And if, before the end, he volunteered a statement, the same would have to be carefully censored before it was made public property. And, meanwhile, there Crafton was lying, save the bald statement that he was in extremis and could not possibly recover. He was conscious and by no means ungrateful for the care and attention which was bestowed on him, but in manner he was sullen and reserved, and declined to speak of his friends. These, he said, had long looked on him as dead, and therefore it was as well to leave them happy in this belief. He had never been a credit to them, and he had no wish to drag them painfully into the limelight.

And so the end of the week came before Philip found himself once more alone with Mollie. It was after the luncheon hour, at a quiet little place on the river, when, in the seclusion of a wood, that Phil proceeded to unfold his tale.

"I did read something of it in the papers," Mollie said as Philip opened the subject which was so near to the minds of them both. "About a man called Crafton who was terribly hurt when trying to escape arrest. Of course, I felt quite sure that he was the Crafton we are interested in."

"Quite right," Phil agreed. "As a matter of fact I was the officer who was deputed to make the arrest. Crafton made a bolt for it, and, in his blind hurry, ran right into a motor lorry. I suppose that is all the papers told?"

"Every word," Mollie said. "There were no details. I have been terribly curious to hear the rest."

"There can't be much you don't know," Phil observed. "My job was definitely to establish the identity of Crafton with that man Hume, whose name we stumbled on originally, owing to the fine, retentive memory of Miss Waller in connection with her love of detective stories, and that I did with the aid of Heron."

Mollie looked at Philip with a puzzled frown.

“Heron, Heron,” she murmured. “Oh, yes. The man who kept the little shop where Hume had his letters sent to, when he was cheating editors over his stolen stories.”

“That’s the man, Mollie mine. But don’t you think that I had better tell the story in my own way?”

With a little smile of apology, Mollie settled down to hear what Philip had to say. It was rather a long narrative, but by the time he had finished there were no more questions to ask. “So there you are,” Philip said finally. “All I hope is that Crafton will make a clean breast of it before he goes. I want to know the inner history of that secret fund, and how Crafton got to know about it, and in what way he betrayed your father. And how he came to the conclusion that Millar held the clue.”

“Does it really much matter?” Mollie asked. “What most matters now is what your superiors think of you, Phil.”

“That is going to be all right, darling,” Philip said. “My friend, Klein, says so. We are going to be quite happy, Mollie.”

## Chapter XXVI

MOLLIE snuggled up a little closer to her lover. She could see no cloud on her horizon now.

“Isn’t it perfect?” she sighed happily. “Just you and me, Phil, darling, with all the world before us. And there has never been anyone but you always—at least since I began to realise what love is. And now you are going to be famous, and I shall be rich. Well, comparatively, anyway.”

“Seeing me in your mind’s eye Chief Commissioner at Scotland Yard,” Philip laughed. “Nothing less, Mollie mine.”

“And why not?” Mollie demanded. “With prospects like yours, Phil, we are going to have that lovely flat in London and that country cottage. We shall be able to afford both with your income and mine. And I know the very place. Then a small car to run up and down…”

So they built their rosy castle in the air until it began to grow late. It was time to come back to earth again and face the realities of life. A very happy and contented detective officer returned to his lodgings at length, only to find that a telegram awaited him there.

It was brief, but pregnant enough, from St. Angela’s Hospital, with the information that Crafton was sinking fast and would like to see Philip before the end. Ten minutes later he was seated by Crafton’s bedside.

“I am glad you are not too late. No, I am not in pain, thank you. It may strike you as a strange request on the part of dying man, but I should like to know how you managed to guess my secret. First of all there is something to be done. Get writing materials and ask one of the doctors to come here, I want to make a statement.”

A few minutes and Crafton’s wishes were complied with.

“Now take down what I say,” he told Philip. “The last dying speech and confession of Selby Crafton, though that is not the name I was born to. What that is nobody will ever know. Nor does it matter in the least. Are you ready? Well, I murdered Andrew Millar because he had in his possession, or I thought he had, that which would have enabled me to lay hands on a fortune which was for the moment beyond my reach. My idea was to locate that information, and get Millar out of the way, because he was doing his best to secure the money for himself. In effect he was as great a rascal as I am myself. So I tracked him down and shot him with an automatic. Living under the same roof as he, that was not a difficult matter, all the easier because we never spoke to one another, though we were friendly enough at one time. I shot him with his own automatic which I stole from his bedroom in his absence, and safely disposed of the weapon. Then I stood by the body in the darkness of Mansfield street and called the attention of a policeman to the corpse, it was a fine piece of bluff that very nearly succeeded, but not quite. Have you got all that down? It is all that is necessary and that is all I have to say on the matter. Give me the pen to sign.”

The all too brief, but absolutely complete confession was signed and safely deposited in Philip’s pocket after being witnessed, and then he was alone with Crafton. The dying man spoke eagerly to the man by his bedside.

“You are the fellow I really wanted to see,” he said. “Now how did you work it? How on earth did you get on to me? That bluff was foolproof. And do you know everything? What I was after, for instance?”

“Meaning the money in the safe?” Phil inquired.

“Yes. I am going to tell you. Only there is no reason why the world at large should know. There is a girl, the daughter of a certain Colonel Heaton, who ought to have a lot of money her father earned, though in strict equity he had no claim to it. But seeing that he died in the service of his country—”

“At your hand practically,” Philip interrupted.

“Well, it was either he or me,” Crafton said quite coolly. “Being shot is a nasty business. But, as you were one of us during the war, I need not enlarge on the point. I found that out by making inquiries about you, when I realised that you were casting suspicious glances in my direction. Anyhow, though we were at work together behind the Austrian lines, Heaton never trusted me. He preferred to confide in Millar, who, as a matter of fact, was as big a rotter as I am. But I managed to get Millar shoved into an Italian gaol, which meant that he might rot there years before he was brought to trial. Meanwhile, knowing all about that money in German gold marks deposited in a safe in London, I came back after the Colonel’s death to get it.”

“Without the key to the safe.”

“Precisely. When Millar was released and came back to the Wanderlust Club, where I was located, I began to realise that he knew something. Of course, he was after the money himself. And I imagined he had the key, or some clue to it, hidden away in his bedroom. I did find in that bedroom a letter addressed by the colonel to his daughter, and the old man’s pet automatic, and it was with this stolen weapon that I killed Millar.”

“I know,” Philip said. “But there was another clue which I found in a tin box in Millar’s bedroom—half of a torn photograph which bore a strong resemblance to

you. This was taken in Brussels during the German occupation, and traced. And the left ear showed a cauliflower injury exactly the same as the one I see at this moment on your head—that malformation I saw on the night of the murder, and made a note of."

"Yes, I suppose you would," Crafton gasped. "But, after all, that didn't exactly prove anything."

"Well, you denied all knowledge of Millar. Strange that he should have a portion of a photograph of you in his box—the same box from which you stole the letter from Colonel Heaton to his daughter. I have that letter also."

Crafton smiled faintly.

"Oh, you got that as well," he muttered. "From the old desk in my bedroom. The letter I couldn't make out."

"That is so," Philip admitted. "The letter you stole from Millar and held back, hoping that, if the worst came to the worst, you could deliver it to Miss Heaton eventually with some clever story of having found it, and after that strike some bargain with the young lady over the money in the safe. Well, that letter covered a secret cypher arranged between father and daughter for use in a crisis, and she translated it for my benefit."

A long regretful sigh escaped the listener.

"Like that, was it?" he asked. "But how did you get on to the main idea? I mean my bluff."

"You gave yourself away over that. And there again Miss Heaton played an unconscious part. Of course, you knew that she was the owner of a typing business. You must have known that."

"I did," Crafton admitted. "Go on."

"A business she bought, where she took over an assistant who had been engaged there for years. A romantic sort of assistant who revelled in detective stories. She remembered one she had typed long ago for a man called Douglas Hume—"

"In other words, my alter ego," Crafton whispered.

"Exactly. A carbon copy of the story was produced, and the editor of the swindled West End magazine interviewed. The address to which the cheque for the borrowed story was sent was traced, and that is how I found John Heron. I found him in gaol, and, for a consideration, obtained his release. Then he sent for you and you deemed it prudent to respond. And, because I was more or less present at that interview, I established the connection between Crafton and Hume."

Crafton asked no more questions. His eyes closed and he lay rigid. He had spoken his last word.

Back at Scotland Yard Philip laid the confession, and all the details he had not hitherto disclosed, before Klein. Then he was piloted into the office of a great man, who listened to all he had to say until he was familiar with the minutest points. He regarded Philip with frank approval.

"Very good indeed, my excellent officer," he said. "The inspector here has given me your war record. I will see to it that you are not forgotten. Good night."

"Praise from Sir Hubert Stanley," Klein grinned, when once more his office was reached. "Oh, fortunate youth!"

"I am indeed," Philip said modestly.