THE WOMAN IN 919

JOHN PAUL SEABROOKE

The Woman in 919

BY

John Paul Seabrooke

At the Winsonia Hotel, where she occupied room 919, she was known as Mrs. Harlowe Green. Her husband's mother did not approve of her and offered her fifty thousand dollars to get a divorce. But Mrs. Harlowe Green knew something about the weak-minded young scion of wealth whom she had married—something that would bring him a penitentiary sentence—and she held out for a much larger sum.

The woman had other enemies besides the husband and mother-in-law on whom she was trying to levy blackmail. There was Vincent Solari, the man she had sent to prison, and there were others.

When she was found dead in her room, Inspector Nash had a complicated problem on his hands, but he solved it in his characteristic masterly fashion—not by superdetective methods, but by the application of common sense and sound logic, which after all is the detective method that actually solves most crimes in real life.

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A Detective Story

BY

JOHN PAUL SEABROOKE

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CHAPTER I

A GRAVE CHARGE

IT was about two o'clock, and, as Mrs. Green entered the lounge of the Winsonia Hotel from the restaurant, Mrs. Gray entered it from the street.

Both women were dark haired, dark eyed, under medium height, and slender; both had a noticeable air of assurance, and both were young and good looking. There the likeness between them ended. Mrs. Green was without a hat and was fashionably gowned in black velvet, with a string of large pearls around her neck and large pearls in her ears. Mrs. Gray wore a dark, tailored suit and a small dark hat, and carried a small, businesslike, black valise. She earned her living as a hairdresser, masseuse, and manicure. Mrs. Green was a guest of the hotel.

As the two approached each other from a distance, Mrs. Gray, who had happened to notice Mrs. Green and was looking at her, suddenly stopped with an involuntary gasp of astonishment.

A young man had come out of the restaurant and joined Mrs. Green, and it was evidently the sight of him that had startled Mrs. Gray. Not that there was, to an ordinary observer, anything startling in the young man's appearance. He was, in fact, decidedly insignificant looking, below medium height and thin, with sandy hair, a sallow face, a receding chin, and a peevish expression. He had on an over-

coat and carried his hat and was apparently going out. Apparently, too, he and Mrs. Green were not on the best of terms at the moment.

They walked down the lounge together, straight toward Mrs. Gray, and the latter stepped out of sight behind a clump of artificial palms. Opening her valise, she pretended to search for something in it, first casting a glance about to make sure she was not observed; then, with her face averted, she waited, listening for any words that might fall from the lips of the approaching couple as they passed. And the following is what she heard:

Mrs. Green: "Now don't you come back here again without money, you hear me? I'm tired of this."

The young man: "Well, you're not the only one that's tired."

Mrs. Green: "Then why don't you do something about it? You make her do the right thing, you hear? You make her!"

The young man: "Make her? What are you talking about? You make me sick. You know as well as I do——"

What Mrs. Green was alleged to know was lost on the eavesdropper, for the passers-by had got out of earshot, and a minute later the young man left the hotel, without so much as a backward glance at his companion, who now retraced her steps across the lounge and entered an elevator car that chanced to be on the point of ascending. And into the car walked Mrs. Gray, also.

Her existence did not appear to register itself on the consciousness of Mrs. Green, who stood gazing frowningly at the reflection of her own handsome

features in the mirrors that lined the car. At the ninth floor she got out, and the elevator man, as he clanged the door to behind her, looked around at Mrs. Gray, now his sole remaining passenger.

"What's your floor?" he asked in an easy tone of familiarity.

Mrs. Gray answered with a question of her own. "Who's that woman?"

"That? Her name's Green—Mrs. Green."

"Green?" repeated Mrs. Gray. "What room's she in?"

"919." The elevator man grinned. "Looking for trade?" he inquired.

Mrs. Gray nodded. "Her hair needs washing."

"Better tell her so," advised the man, laughing.

"I'm thinking of it," replied Mrs. Gray. "Did you say 'Mrs.?' "

"Sure. She's married. Her husband's with her."

"How long have they been stopping here?"

"Oh, I dont know—couple of weeks or so."

"What's he look like?"

"Him? He don't look like much of anything, if you ask me. A lightweight with his chin in his collar. Got a grouch on all the time. Guess he wishes he'd changed his mind before the wedding instead of after it." The speaker laughed again in appreciation of his own wit.

"Think I saw him with her downstairs, coming out from lunch."

"Sure you did. She never lets him out of her sight for long. Afraid she'll never see him again, I guess."

"Let me out. I think I'll just go and see if there's anything doing for me," she said abruptly.

The elevator man opened the door. "Wish you the best of luck," he said.

Mrs. Gray smiled and walked off down the hall.

Room No. 919 she found to be on the north side of the house, on the main corridor. The key was still in the door, and a knock brought an immediate response.

"Excuse me," began Mrs. Gray in a quiet, professional voice, "I am a hairdresser and manicure. If you are in need of any one of that kind, I'd be very glad to have you give me a trial. I also do facial massage. I can refer you to a number of ladies in the hotel, and I'm sure I can give satisfaction. And"—she continued in a politely hesitant tone—"if you'll excuse my saying so, your skin looks a little dry and neglected. A facial would tone it up and make you feel worlds better. It's a shame to neglect beautiful skin like yours. Just give me a chance to show you what I can do," she ended with an ingratiating smile.

Mrs. Green, who had frowned irritably during the first part of her visitor's speech, looked humanly impressed by the latter half. Involuntarily, she raised one hand to her face as if in alarm.

"It's a shame," repeated the wily Mrs. Gray, her dark eyes on the handsome diamond solitaire the other wore, "for a woman to neglect her appearance, and fine skin like yours should look like satin—just like satin."

The frown returned to the brow of the other woman. "What do you charge?" she asked.

"Oh, there'll be no trouble about that," said Mrs. Gray lightly. "I only charge a dollar for a facial,

and if you take them regularly you can pay by the week—or month."

"Well—all right—come in." Mrs. Green stood back to make way for Mrs. Gray to enter; then another thought caused her to hesitate. "How long does it take? I'm expecting my husband back soon, and I want to be through by the time he gets here," she said.

"In that case, I can give you a short treatment today and make it up the next time."

"All right. We'd better go into the bedroom," said Mrs. Green, leading the way.

The masseuse looked attentively about the sitting room. It was in no respect different from others of the Winsonia. Impossible to learn from it anything about its occupants, for they had added nothing to its stereotyped hotel furnishings. A few magazines and a box of candy were on a table, and through a half open closet door could be seen clothes hanging, but these were the only signs of occupancy the room revealed. The Greens were plainly transients.

Through the bathroom into the bedroom Mrs. Gray followed her new client and there proceeded to take from her black valise the cold-cream jars and lotion bottles required for the facial massage, while Mrs. Green took off her pearls and her dress. And had Mrs. Green been as interested in the masseuse as the latter was in her, she would have noticed that Mrs. Gray fixed her dark eyes with a sharp stare on the pearls the instant they were laid on the bureau.

"I was lucky to see you just now downstairs, coming out from lunch," she remarked in the easy, gossipy tone that she used with her customers, lonely

women in hotels who usually were glad of a chance to talk familiarly to another woman. "Guess you've just come, haven't you? I never noticed you before."

"We've been here nearly three weeks," said Mrs. Green, and added as if unable to resist the opportunity to express her pent-up feelings, "and it seems like three years."

"Don't you like the Winsonia?" asked Mrs. Gray in a tone of surprise.

"Oh, the place is all right, but——" Mrs. Green checked herself. "Do you steam the face first?" she asked.

The masseuse brought hot, wet towels from the bathroom, and the treatment began. Her patient's face covered with a towel, Mrs. Gray was able to look about her unobserved, and her quick, dark eyes seemed to take in everything within their range. However, as in the sitting room, there was little to claim a second glance. Two trunks, several pieces of feminine apparel, and the toilet articles on bureau and chiffonier, were the Greens' visible possessions, and of these it was only the things on the chiffonier that arrested Mrs. Gray's attention. And they were on the other side of the room, too far away for a satisfactory inspection.

But the young woman was resourceful.

"Don't mind, do you, if I take off my shoe a minute while your face is steaming? Guess my stocking's twisted, and the seam's rubbing. There! It was the seam. Now I can't get my shoe on again." She gave a little laugh. "Have you got a shoehorn?"

"There's one on the chiffonier—my husband's."

Mrs. Gray limped across the room, and, while she kept up a flow of talk about her feet, her eyes examined Mr. Green's toilet articles. They were handsome, of ebony with an intertwined "H" and "G" inlaid upon their backs in ivory. That they were not new was evident from scratches and other marks of usage.

Her shoe on, Mrs. Gray returned to the bureau and removed the wet towels from the face and throat of her patient. And as she began to apply the cold cream she resumed the conversation.

"You've got a beautiful neck, Mrs. Green," she remarked admiringly. And indeed the praise was deserved. Mrs. Green's neck was of the swanlike proportions found oftener in poems and pictures than in life. The line from ear to shoulder was a poem in itself. And despite her dark hair and eyes, her skin was fair.

However, the compliment did not excite her. It appeared, rather, to have a depressing effect.

"Much good it does me, stuck away in this hole," she replied sullenly.

"You ought to go into the movies," said Mrs. Gray.

"Not for mine! I'm married now, and it's my husband's place to give me what's coming to me," was the curt response.

This declaration brought an amused gleam into the eyes of its hearer, which was immediately banished as she caught it reflected in the mirror.

"It's a wonder you didn't marry a millionaire," she said dryly, "with your looks."

Whether Mrs. Green had noted the quickly veiled smile and the faint mockery in the final speech, or

whether she became suddenly aware that she was revealing more of her private affairs than was desirable, she now altered her demeanor.

"I wish you'd talk less and work more," she snapped. "My husband will be here, and you won't be half through."

There was a pause, during which the face of the masseuse underwent a curious change. Her jaw closed, her lips tightened, and her black eyes glittered.

"I'm through now," she said quietly and began to wipe her greasy hands on a towel.

"Through?" echoed Mrs. Green, who had been staring at herself in the glass and had not observed that anything was happening to the other woman. "Why, you've not been here ten minutes."

"It's ten minutes more than I'll ever be here again," rejoined Mrs. Gray. "I don't want women of your kind for customers, and I don't take them if I know it. And—here's a tip for you—neither does this hotel."

"What?" Mrs. Green had started to her feet. Her face, shining with the cold cream that covered it, had turned an angry and indignant crimson. She faced her insulter squarely. "What?" she repeated in a louder voice.

"I guess you know what I mean," said the masseuse. "Unless you want everybody in the hotel to know it, too, you'd better not talk so loud."

"What?" said Mrs. Green again. She seemed incapable of uttering more than the one syllable.

"Say, you don't really think you're married, do you?" Mrs. Gray stared at the other woman with a puzzled expression.

"I am married!"

"Well"—Mrs. Gray smiled a little—"maybe you are—to somebody. But you're not married to the man I saw you with downstairs—the one I heard you tell not to come back without money."

"I am. I was married to him six months ago—out in Kansas City."

"Kansas City? Say, are you telling the truth? Did he really marry you?"

"Of course he did!"

"Then all I can say is that he's committed bigamy. And I don't believe even he's fool enough for that."

"Big——" Mrs. Green's jaw drooped open. She looked stupefied with astonishment. Mrs. Gray continued:

"He was married two years ago here in New York—to a friend of mine, and he never got a divorce, unless he got it in Reno without serving any papers on her, which wouldn't be legal. Did he say he was divorced?"

Mrs. Green made no reply to the question. She stared stupidly at Mrs. Gray.

"Oh, you needn't worry," said the latter, who was putting her belongings back into her valise. "I guess my friend won't make any trouble for you. She had all she wanted of him, I guess. But she can't get a divorce because her religion won't let her."

"Who is she? What's her name?" demanded Mrs. Green suddenly.

"Don't believe me, do you?" Mrs. Gray retorted. "Well, all you got to do to satisfy yourself is to ask him if he ever knew a girl named Nora Murray."

"Nora Murray?" repeated Mrs. Green as if mechanically. "Where is she now?"

"Oh—she's in New York—working for her living."

"Working for her living? Why, doesn't——" Mrs. Green checked her question. She looked thoroughly mystified. "Are you sure you're not mistaken about—about this?" she faltered after a pause. "It must have been some other man."

"No, it wasn't Mrs. Gray was emphatic. "I thought it might be, though I recognized him the minute I laid eyes on him, and I recognized his voice, too. And what's more, I remember those things over there." She pointed to the toilet articles on the chiffonier. "He had those two years ago. I remember them as if it was yesterday that I saw them the last time."

"That you saw them? His toilet articles?"

Mrs. Gray's face changed swiftly. And as though conscious of the fact, she lowered her head over her valise.

"I told you I was a friend of his wife's," she said shortly. "I was in their room lots of times and saw the things there." She closed her valise with a snap and picked it up from the chair it was standing on. "I guess," she said with the air of one on the point of departure, "you and he'd be more comfortable somewhere else than this hotel. I come here every day or two, and we're likely to run into each other —he and I. So I guess you'd better get him to leave here as soon as possible."

She waited where she stood when she had finished as if for an assurance that her wishes would be heeded, but by now Mrs. Green seemed to have recovered from the shock she had received sufficiently for her mind to function.

"What are you talking about, anyhow?" she burst out. "Are you crazy? I don't believe a word you've said."

"All right. Ask him about Nora Murray; that's all you have to do," said Mrs. Gray. "And," she added pointedly, moving toward the outer door of the bedroom, "I guess we won't be seeing each other again."

"No—I guess not," returned Mrs. Green mechanically.

Mrs. Gray turned the doorknob, but the door did not give. It was locked. She glanced down for the key.

"You'll have to go out the way you came," said Mrs. Green. "My husband——" She paused after the word and started for the sitting room. "He's got the key to that door," she muttered.

At the sitting-room door Mrs. Gray looked back. A smile parted her lips for a moment.

"I told you," she said, "that what you need for your skin is facial treatment, but what you really need is sleep. Losing sleep is the worst thing a woman can do for her complexion, and anybody can see that's what you've been doing."

An angry flush mounted in Mrs. Green's cheeks, but she said nothing. She pressed her lips together as though afraid she might say something. And Mrs. Gray turned and tripped briskly down the hall.

CHAPTER II

IN JEOPARDY

LEFT standing at the bureau, Mrs. Green's first move when she was alone was to turn and examine her face anxiously in the mirror. Her visitor's parting shot had gone home, and the shadows about her eyes, visible even under the layer of cold cream, brought a troubled frown between her dark brows.

The telephone bell in the sitting room rang now, and she went to answer it.

"Mr. Wainwright calling," piped the operator in a fine treble.

"Wainwright?"

"Yes, that's right—Wainwright."

Mrs. Green frowned thoughtfully, then she smiled to herself. "All right. He can come up," she said.

Returning to the bedroom, she wiped off the cream and put on her dress and her pearls. Though she did not hurry, she was dressed when the expected knock came at the sitting-room door. She did not answer it at once, but remained before her mirror retouching her lips with red salve and dusting her face again with powder. Three times her caller was forced to knock before she finally admitted him.

He was a man in late middle age, with hair almost white, a long, pale face, deep-set, blue eyes, and a tall, lean figure. He inclined his head in an unsmiling greeting.

"I am Mrs. Amos Green's attorney," he said. "It

is at her request I am here—to seek some satisfactory adjustment of the present situation."

"A lawyer, eh? Well, you look the part, I'll say that much for you," replied the young woman, deliberately insolent.

"May I sit down?" was the frigid rejoinder.

"Certainly." She indicated a chair, and he waited in front of it until she had selected one for herself and taken it. Seated, he contemplated her for a moment in silence, then spoke again.

"You are, of course, fully aware of Mrs. Green's irreconcilable attitude toward you, and—if you are not, it is my first duty to make that fundamental fact of the situation clear to you."

His hostess laughed. "I should worry about her attitude," she replied, stressing the two pronouns heavily.

The lawyer frowned his disapproval of her flippancy and disrespect. "Allow me to remind you," he said with greater sharpness than he had yet shown, "that Mrs. Amos Green's attitude is not a matter that you can afford to disregard. Her son is entirely dependent on her, and he is not, as you must know, the sort of young man to sacrifice money to sentiment. I may add—since you make it necessary—that he has agreed to his mother's conditions, and that you will—probably—not see him again."

"What?" She straightened sharply in her seat.

"When he left you this afternoon it was—for good."

The woman made no reply. She sat upright in her chair, her dark eyes fixed on her caller, a grim expression about her mouth. She drew a long

breath. "And where do I come in?" she asked sharply. "Where do I come in?"

"Mrs. Green is prepared to offer you excellent terms—if you agree to her conditions."

"What conditions?"

"You are to go—at once—to Reno, with a view to establishing residence there and as soon as possible instituting a suit for absolute divorce from your husband. When the divorce has become a fact, you will be paid the sum—the very generous sum—of—of forty thousand dollars."

"Forty thousand?" She threw back her head and laughed aloud. "Say, you'll have to excuse me," she went on, "but that's the funniest thing I've heard since I've been in New York. Forty thousand!" She laughed again.

The man looked intensely annoyed and outraged, but his business in life had taught him self-control, and he merely tightened his lips and waited for her hilarity to cease.

"It is a most liberal offer," he replied, "under the circumstances. But it is possible that—providing you employ discretion and dispatch in securing the divorce—Mrs. Green might increase the amount offered to—well, perhaps even to fifty thousand."

"Fifty thousand, you say?"

"I do not make the offer as a positive assertion. I say that she might do so."

"Might, eh? Well, I might accept it, too—there's no knowing." She got up. "First, though, I've got to see Harlowe again."

"That is impossible," declared Wainwright, also rising.

"I've got to see him, and I've got to see him quick. Get that?" She glared at the lawyer defiantly.

"He promised his mother not to see you again."

"When?"

"To-day. He was to see you once more and say good-by."

"Well, he didn't say it. Didn't have the nerve, I guess. So he'd better come back and do it. That's all I ask. I just wanted to see him once more—just once more. Then I'll decide what I'm going to do about the rest."

"Very well." Mr. Wainwright bowed his white head submissively. "I will communicate your request to his mother. I shall advise her to grant it."

"Oh, she'll grant it, I guess, without that," retorted the young woman rudely. "I want to see him right away, understand. Not to-morrow or next day, but this afternoon."

Wainwright, who had moved to the door, inclined his head again and took his leave.

Alone once more, the woman began to pace the room, absorbed in frowning thought. Once or twice her dark eyes gleamed as if at some very pleasing prospect that her imagination had evoked, but her face for the most part was grimly serious.

And now, as before, the telephone cut short her meditations. The sudden noise brought her to herself with a start, and she glanced at the wrist watch she wore. Only ten minutes had passed since the departure of Wainwright. Was this he again to report that Mrs. Amos Green refused the request for her to see her husband? With a determined face, the

young woman took up the telephone instrument from the writing table.

"Well?" she said curtly.

"A gentleman calling, Mrs. Green."

"Who is he?"

"Why—he says his name don't matter."

"What?"

"He says to say he's an old friend."

"Is he right there?"

"Yes."

"Well, let me speak to him."

There was a short wait, then a man's voice came over the wire: "Hello, there, Rosa! Know my voice?"

"What do you mean by——" She checked herself. "Yes," she snapped.

"Got something partic'lar to tell you—very partic'lar."

"What is it? Wait——" She thought a moment, then: "Come on up."

"What's the room?"

"919." And she hung up.

With a brow of thunder, she waited for her second caller, pacing the floor again, an angry flush in her cheeks, an angry light in her eyes. At his light tap she flung the door open and glared at him as he entered.

"The idea of your coming here. What do you want?" she demanded furiously.

The newcomer was a large man of very agreeable appearance. He might even have passed for a gentleman so long as he refrained from speech.

He did not appear to resent his hostile reception.

Calmly he ignored it, looked about the sitting room with an interested and inquiring smile and brought up finally at his hostess, who was watching him with a frown.

"You're lookin' fine, Rosa. How's things goin' with you?"

"None of your business," she snapped. "Didn't I tell you to keep away from me—didn't I? What do you mean by coming here after I told you to keep away?"

"I come for your own good," replied the young man. "I got somethin' to tell you. Somethin' you'll be glad to hear—I don't think." He grinned cheerfully. "Listen. Vince is out."

"Out?" Her face had gone suddenly white. "I don't believe it," she declared the next moment. "How can he be?"

Her caller sat down, pulled up his trousers carefully, leaned back, and crossed his legs; then he smiled up at her.

"He got extra time off for good behavior. You must have miscalculated."

The young woman continued to stare dumbly as if waiting for further information, for something she knew was coming.

"He's here—in New York—lookin' for you."

She turned away. What she had expected to hear, she had heard, and her breath came in short gasps.

"What you goin' to do?" inquired her visitor.

"Does he know where I am?"

"Not yet." The man grinned.

She looked around sharply. "What do you mean by that?"

"Not yet. That's what I mean—not *yet.*" Another cheerful grin accompanied the reply.

"You mean——"

"I mean it won't be hard to locate an important person like Mrs. Harlowe Green. If you want my tip, you better shake this stiff you're with. They're trying to get rid of you, anyhow, ain't they?"

She frowned quickly. "Why do you say that?"

"Well, ain't they?"

She was silent.

"How much have they offered you to get a divorce?"

"There ain't any question of a divorce, and if there is, it will be me that names the figure. Get that?"

He looked hard at her, deeply interested. "What you mean?"

"I've got something on him—something that will send him where I sent Vince." Her black eyes gleamed viciously.

"You mean that?" He rose, his eyes suddenly bright and eager.

She nodded, and he studied her face. It appeared to carry conviction, for he uttered a profane exclamation of envy. Then his expression changed, and he smiled maliciously.

"What about Vince?" he asked.

"I'm not afraid of him." She had recovered from her fright, apparently.

"Oh, you're not?" There was a hint of ill nature in his sneer.

She laughed. "Leave him to me," she said and added, as if struck by a new idea: "Say, maybe I will get a divorce, and then me and Vince can get

married and live on my alimony. It will be big alimony, I promise you that."

"Alimony ain't paid after you marry again."

"Mine will be."

"Say, Rosa," the young man leaned forward with a confidential air, "what is it you've got on him?"

"Think I'd be fool enough to tell you?"

"Oh, all right." He turned as if to go. "Say," he said the next moment, "lend me a hundred, will you?"

"Why should I?" she answered.

"Vince will, I guess, to know where you're at."

She laughed at the threat implied by his words. "Tell him if you want to. I should worry. I can manage him."

"All right. I got nothin' more to say."

"Very well. Then beat it."

He opened the door and looked around. "You'll be sorry, that's all," he repeated with a malignant glare and banged the door as he departed.

CHAPTER III

A THREAT TO KILL

LESS than an hour later, Harlowe Green stopped at the sitting-room door of his suite at the Winsonia and, finding it locked, was about to go on to the bedroom door, to which he had a key, when he heard a step in the sitting room. He paused, hesitated, then tapped at the door.

"So his mamma let him come, did she?" was the sneer that welcomed him.

He accepted the taunt in silence, but his small, gray-green eyes were full of feeble rage.

"You're to kiss me good-by and run right back to her, I suppose?"

"Oh, what do you want?" demanded the man peevishly.

"I don't know yet," she answered quietly. "I haven't made up my mind. I might take the fifty thousand. I don't know. Maybe it would be the best thing I could do."

"Well, you won't get any more than that by holding out. Fifty thousand's the limit. I can tell you that."

"Just what will happen if I don't take it?" she inquired.

He gave a short laugh. "That's easy to answer. You'll have to leave here without your trunk. We owe for nearly three weeks, and I've got no money to pay."

"Oh, I guess I could manage—if I thought it was to my advantage to hold out." She fingered her string of pearls suggestively.

"By hocking those?" He laughed again. "Try it!"

"You mean they're—imitations?" Her face changed expression.

"Of course they are. Where do you think I could have got the money for real ones?" He rose and strolled to the window and looked out over the expanse of roofs that lay several stories below. "You may as well be sensible, Rosa. Fifty thousand is a lot of money."

"Is this how you got rid of Nora Murray?" she asked quietly.

He gave a start, and the cigarette he was about to put to his lips dropped from his hand to the floor. Involuntarily, he bent to pick it up, fumbled it, dropped it again, stooped again to recover it.

"I don't know what you're talking about," muttered Green without turning.

"Don't you?" She laughed. "Your memory's bad. It was soon after we got married. You made me promise I'd never tell your mother. She didn't know, you said, and she'd be mad about it. Don't you remember that, either?"

"No, I don't." He faced her. "Say, where did you get this from—about Nora Murray?"

"From you."

"No, you didn't. Who's been——" He checked himself. "You are dreaming," he said, turning back to the window.

"Who's been talking to me—is that what you were going to say? I'll tell you." He turned. "Oh, you'd really like to know, would you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," he mumbled, turning away.

"Well, I'll tell you what I'm talking about, Harlowe Green. Turn around, and I'll tell you." Her tone was sharp and commanding, and she waited until he turned his head and looked at her. "Here's my proposition to Mrs. Amos Green. For one million dollars I will go to Reno and divorce you—one million. Get that?"

"Are you crazy?" he exclaimed, staring at her. "I never heard of a woman named Nora Murray."

His companion laughed derisively. "Yes, you look that way," she taunted. "You're the picture of innocence."

"Where did you—hear this foolish story?" he faltered.

"That's my business. Yours is to go and tell your mother that she'd better raise the ante or she'll have a son in the penitentiary. You'd both like that, I guess."

"I—don't know what you're talking about," spluttered her victim weakly.

"Well, go and think it over, my dear, and maybe it'll get through that thick skull of yours." She laughed loudly. "Gee, I knew you were a fool, but I didn't think you were such a fool as that. Bigamy!"

"I thought she was dead," he muttered.

"Well, she ain't."

"Rosa, you won't give me away!" His small supply of nerve was now quite gone. He made no further pretense of ignorance or innocence. He merely whined for mercy.

"I won't if I'm given my rights," she answered. "You and your mother thought you could treat me

like dirt under your feet, didn't you? Well, I'll show her. And I'll show you. She'll give me a million or I'll put you where you belong."

"Rosa!" He caught at her arm, imploring her frantically. "You don't mean that. Say you wouldn't!"

"Sure I mean it. I was never more serious in my life."

"If you try it, I'll kill you!" He thrust his chinless jaw at her, and there was an insane wildness in his greenish eyes.

"Then you'll get something worse than the pen. You'll get the electric chair." She laughed a little and closed her eyes. "I can see you sitting in it right now—just as plain," she said. "Gee, you look right green, you're so scared, and your hair is standing right up straight."

A violent shudder ran through her victim. His whole frail body shook with imagined terror. His face had already begun to twitch a little, and now he seemed to lose all control of it, like one afflicted with St. Vitus' dance. It was grotesque and pitiful, but his torturer seemed immensely amused. Her black eyes snapped with suppressed laughter.

"I can see people standing around you—the warden, of course, just waiting for the signal to put on the electricity. But first they ask you something—if you have anything to say. That's what they always ask—the last thing. And you can't say a word, you're so scared."

A choking shriek of terror stopped her. Her victim dropped to the floor unconscious. She did not move from her chair, but with the toe of her shoe she dug into his leg that lay within reach, to

bring him to. Her efforts succeeded. In a minute or so he stirred and opened his eyes.

"Get up, I tell you. What a man! You're just an excuse for a human being, that's all you are. You kill anybody!" She broke into a scornful laugh. "Say, that's funny, that is. It's the funniest thing I've heard since that lawyer of your mother's offered me fifty thousand dollars. Get up!" she commanded again. "Go and wash your face; you're a sight."

This had the effect desired. Apparently, she knew it would have, knew that another weakness of his was an absurd vanity and niceness about his personal appearance. He went into the bathroom to put himself in order, and she awaited his return with a grim face.

"Now take your hat and go," she said curtly when he reappeared. "And see you're back here by six and not a minute later with some money—enough for the hotel bill and a hundred or so over—for me. I'm leaving here. I'll pack while you're gone, and as soon as you come back I'm going to leave here."

He glowered at her, his eyes still a little red from his weeping, his expression resentful for the torture she had put him to. But his sandy hair was carefully brushed, and he had straightened his tie and otherwise put himself in order.

"What's that for?" he asked in a peevish tone. "What's your hurry? Maybe I won't be able to see my mother before six o'clock. She may be out somewhere. And, anyhow, she may not give me the money. I can't make her, can I?"

"That's up to you," she told him. "You're to be

back before six, remember," she added. "If you're not, our next meeting will be in court—the criminal court."

"I ought to kill you!" he muttered viciously and went out.

She laughed and locked the door after him.

CHAPTER IV

"SPARRING FOR TIME"

I FEAR that something is wrong in the room 919. Will you so kindly send up to discover?"

The voice on the telephone wire, a man's, had a foreign intonation and was entirely unfamiliar to Evans, the night clerk of the Winsonia Hotel.

"Something wrong?" the latter echoed.

"I fear it. I heard a woman—groaning." There was a pause before the "groaning," as though the speaker either had to search a limited English vocabulary for a word to express his meaning, or was in doubt as to the exact nature of the sound he had heard.

"Groaning? Sure it wasn't snoring?"

"Oh, no!" This was emphatic. "I fear something is wrong."

"All right, I'll attend to it. What room did you say?"

"919."

"919?" Evans seemed suddenly interested.

"Yes. I knocked, but—no answer. And the door is locked on the inside, and there is a light. I fear something has——"

"All right, I'll see to it."

"At once, if you please," urged the man at the other end of the telephone wire, plainly anxious.

Without replying, the clerk hung up the telephone

receiver, waited a moment or two, then took it off the hook.

"Morrison," he said when the operator's voice responded. Funny, he thought; only the night before he and Morrison, the house detective, had been talking about that Mrs. Green, and both had expressed a conviction that she and her husband were at odds.

"Want to speak to Mr. Morrison?" inquired the operator.

"No. Want him here."

In half a minute the detective walked nonchalantly toward the desk, his glance sweeping the whole of the visible space. He was a lean young man with a slouching gait, and had his hands hooked idly in his trousers pockets. When he reached the desk, he lounged against it.

"Know that Mrs. Green?" Evans' voice was very low, but Morrison heard and nodded an assent.

"Somebody's just phoned down that he heard her groaning and thinks there's something wrong. Said he knocked and got no answer, but there's a light in the room, and the door's locked on the inside. Better investigate, hadn't you? 919."

The detective again inclined his head. "Who was it phoned?" he asked.

"Why——" Evans stopped with a chagrined expression. He knew what a stickler Morrison was for details, and was annoyed with himself for having forgotten it. Without pausing to confess his fault, he hastened to correct it, and a moment later he was able to inform the detective, on the authority of the switchboard operator, that the call in question had been made from room No. 940.

"Who's the occupant?"

With an impatient frown Evans consulted the room chart. What possible difference, he thought, did it make who had reported the matter?

"Got an Italian name—Solari."

"Don't know him."

"Neither do I. He only registered this afternoon."

"Where from?"

Evans looked up this point. Solari, he found, had registered from Kansas City.

"I wonder," mused Morrison unhurriedly, his blue, speculative eyes fixed on his hearer, "what Signor Solari of Kansas City was doing around room 919. He doesn't have to pass it from the elevator to his room."

Morrison went to the ninth floor in the service elevator and walked noiselessly down the carpeted hall toward his destination. The transoms above the doors that he passed were nearly all dark, for it was close to midnight, and the Winsonia, though large, was a quiet hotel, almost residential in character. And he heard no unusual sounds of any kind, nothing indeed except snores and the street noises that are never quite eliminated anywhere in New York.

At the door of room No. 919 he stopped and listened, pressing his ear against the crack. He heard nothing. But there was a light in the room, and the key was in the door, on the inside, all as reported. And the door was locked, as he found when he cautiously turned the knob.

He thought of knocking, but hesitated; his excuse for doing so seemed inadequate. Besides, he might wake up some of the neighboring sleepers. And the thing chiefly to be avoided was a disturbance of any kind.

"I guess," he said to himself, "I'll go around first and find out exactly what that Signor Solari has to say." But as he turned he remembered that in the talk he and Evans had had the night before about the couple calling themselves Mr. and Mrs. Harlowe Green, the clerk had mentioned that they were occupying a suite, in which case, No. 919 was their sitting room, and No. 917, which was a smaller room opening onto the transverse hall, the bedroom.

But No. 917 was dark, he found when he went around to look, and like its neighbor it was also locked on the inside, Which settled one thing; some one must be inside, in one room or the other.

"I guess," Morrison said to himself again, "I'll go and talk to that Signor Solari before I do anything else."

But now, as he turned, he was checked by a faint sound at his feet and, looking down, saw that the toe of his shoe had struck against a small object, a piece of jewelry. He picked the jewelry up and found that it was a pearl earring such as he had noticed Mrs. Green wearing a number of times.

Could she have pulled the thing from her hand bag in taking out her key? Very likely. But no matter. His finding it gave him the pretext he wanted for knocking at her door. Accordingly, he did so, very quietly, first at that door, then at the other. But he received no response at either. He must try a different method of attracting the attention of the occupants.

He went therefore to a closet at the rear of the house where the maids' cleaning outfits were kept and where there was a telephone, and gave an order to the switchboard operator downstairs.

"Wait half a minute," he said, "then ring 917 and 919. Understand?"

Then he returned to No. 917 and had just taken his stand at the door when the telephone bell within began to ring. He could hear its intermittent peal very distinctly, despite the fact that the transom above the door was closed. But the ringing, like the knocking, was vain, both in the bedroom and in the sitting room. Neither while it was going on nor after it had stopped could he detect any signs of life within either room.

The story of the groaning woman became suddenly less fantastic, for it was evident that somebody was in one room or the other, and that something must be wrong.

"I'll have to force the door. I might get the housekeeper to give me her passkey, but that would let her in on this. Best to see for myself first. It's the only way," he thought. "I can't pound on the door and wake up the whole house."

Aware that he had already wasted time reconnoitering, he lost none now in summoning to his aid the night porter, who was running the service elevator. And the latter, having satisfied himself, by personal inspection, that both doors were locked from within, drove his two hundred pounds of bone and muscle against that of room No. 919 with a mighty impact. The lock yielded, and the brightly lighted sitting room was revealed.

But it in turn revealed nothing—no occupant, at least, and nothing of what might remain to be discovered in the adjoining room, the door to which was closed.

He led the way to the inner door, listened there

briefly, knocked, and resolutely turned the knob. The door led into the bathroom of the suite, which was also lighted and empty. Crossing it, Morrison opened the door into the bedroom, then recoiled with a sharp gasp. By the light that streamed into the dark bedroom through the open doorway, a gruesome object became visible.

"For the love o' Hiven!" breathed Harahan involuntarily.

On the floor, beside the bed, which had not been slept in, lay a dead woman. She lay on her back, her dark eyes open wide and staring straight up at the ceiling. Through a slit in her black velvet dress, blood had oozed, making a great stain over her heart and dripping onto the bright red carpet on which she lay. Close to her right hand lay a bone-handled knife, its long blade wet. Her beautiful, swanlike throat looked like that of a marble figure, so pale was it and so perfect.

"Wonder what under the sun made her do a thing like that?" murmured Morrison.

"A queer thing for a woman the like of her," agreed Harahan. Then, the next instant, both men wheeled toward the sitting roon at the sound of a knock from that direction. There, at the hall door, which Morrison now remembered he had carelessly left open, stood a man, looking in, a young man with dark hair and eyes, and a pale, anxious face.

"Something is wrong?" he questioned in a foreign-sounding voice, his dark eyes gazing past the men he addressed as if trying to see into the room beyond.

Morrison pushed his way past Harahan and answered:

"What do you want here?" he demanded curtly.

The stranger recoiled slightly and regarded the detective for a moment in silence, then he repeated his previous question:

"Something is wrong?"

"Oh," said Morrison, noting the inquirer's foreign accent. "You're the man who telephoned downstairs?"

"Yes, I——"

"Wait a minute." Morrison went over and closed the outer door, annoyed at himself for having left it open, and as he did so he noticed that two men passed in the hall, a fact he was destined to remember later. Meanwhile, Harahan closed the door into the bedroom.

"Now," resumed Morrison when the three were secure from observation, "I understand you heard sounds in this room?"

"Yes, I did so," was the answer. "I heard—groans, and I——"

"Wait a minute, please. What's your name?"

"Solari," said the stranger. "I am come here, only to-day. And I was to-night passing——"

"Wait—which room do you occupy?"

"My room? 940. I——"

"940? Then how did you happen to hear groans in this room?"

"I was passing."

"Passing? How did you happen to be passing here?"

The Italian stared at his questioner as if unable to fathom the purpose of his inquiries.

"What reason had you for passing here?" Morrison asked. "You don't have to pass here to reach your room from the elevator!"

"No, that is as you say." Solari shrugged his shoulders, which were unusually broad for his height. "I went wrongly—by mistake. I am come here only to-day. I am not yet well acquaint——"

"I see. Turned the wrong way when you got off the elevator, I suppose? Well, go on. You heard groans, you say—in this room—this one?"

"Yes—a woman. I stopped and listened—naturally. At first I was not sure if it was this room or another. Then I came close to the door. It was this room, I am sure. What is it?" he asked. "What has happened to the poor lady?"

"She has killed herself."

"Killed herself!" Solari repeated, as if with horror, and closed his eyes. "Poor, unhappy one!" he murmured.

"Want to see her?" asked Morrison.

"No, no—if you please, no." A quick, negative gesture accompanied the words, and the speaker turned to go.

"We'll have to notify the police," said Morrison, "and you'll probably be questioned, so you had better not go to bed."

"I understand. Certainly." Solari had reached the door and was about to open it.

"Oh, wait a minute!" A thought had come to Morrison, and he continued to stare at the Italian for several seconds after the latter had turned, so struck was he by his new notion. "You said you heard the groans in this room, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Sure about that, are you?"

"Yes, certainly—in this room."

"I see. Then she must have gone into the other

room, closed the door, and stabbed herself in the dark, for the other room was dark when we found the body. Strange thing for a woman to do, wasn't it?"

Solari was silent, apparently considering the question. "I cannot say," he replied with his heavy shrug. "People who do such things are not—how do you call it in English?"

"Not sane, you mean—not normal?"

The Italian nodded.

"No, that's true, I guess," Morrison agreed. Then his tone changed, and his glance narrowed. "By the way," he went on, "you reported to the office that the door of this room was locked, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did so," was the answer. "And it was locked. I assure you that it was."

"I know it was," said Morrison. "But how did you know it?"

That the question took the Italian by surprise, his face plainly showed; a swift change of expression was noticeable that did not escape Morrison; and there was a pause before an answer came.

"I—I must explain," faltered Solari. "I was so —distressed by the painful sounds in the room that —I thought the lady might be in need of assistance. I thought that—perhaps she had had an accident and could not respond to my knocking, so I—thought I would just open the door and see if—if something was wrong."

"You thought she might have had an accident?" repeated Morrison. "Did her groans sound as if she had hurt herself? You said just now they sounded unhappy. Unhappy was what you said before, wasn't it?"

The Italian gave his shrug. "It is so difficult, in such a case, to know what a sound means," he replied.

"But you said unhappy," insisted Morrison. "And you certainly wouldn't have walked into a strange woman's room just because you thought she was unhappy?"

"Naturally not. But—I must explain." Solari looked genuinely worried by this cross-examination. "I thought it might be she had done herself an injury and——"

"Done herself an injury? What made you think that?"

"I did not think so. I did not know. I thought it possible."

"I see. And I suppose you came back here just to satisfy your curiosity—to find out if your surmise was correct And"—Morrison paused a moment before continuing—"not because you had any personal reason for wishing to know what was wrong?"

"A personal reason?" Solari echoed as if puzzled by the phrase.

"A personal interest, let us say, in the lady's welfare?"

Solari stared silently, still at a loss, apparently.

"You mean that you don't know Mrs. Green?"

"Mrs. Green?" The Italian looked utterly at sea.

"Mrs. Green is the unfortunate woman who is in the other room dead, whom you have refused to look at."

Solari frowned again. "I have not refused," he said. "You asked me if I wished to do so, and I replied that I did not. I do not like to look at the dead. It is a—how do you say it?—a peculiarity."

"A peculiarity Then you do refuse to look at her?"

"I do not refuse." A flush reddened the Italian's pale face. "I do not wish to do so. I have no—curiosity in such things."

"No curiosity? I see. Then it was not curiosity but some other reason that brought you back here to see what was going on?"

Solari did not speak for a moment, and, watching him, Morrison could not make out whether he was merely annoyed and angered by the heckling or had some profounder reason for being disturbed, for disturbed he very plainly was by the close interrogation to which he had been subjected. When he presently spoke his manner was too quiet to be genuinely so.

"I have wished to do a service," he said, "and I do not comprehend why I am attacked in this strange manner."

"Sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Solari," answered Morrison. "You have done the house a service which we appreciate. I'll let you know if you're wanted when the police come." To which Solari returned a cold word of acknowledgment, and a moment later the door had closed upon him.

With a side glance at Harahan, who had been standing by in silence during the foregoing dialogue, Morrison went to the telephone, which was on a writing table between the two windows of the room. He took up the instrument, asked the operator for the office, then, suddenly, struck by an idea, he set the telephone down, tiptoed swiftly to the hall door, and jerked it open. As he had expected, he found himself looking into the startled black eyes of his late caller, Solari.

The Italian, plainly embarrassed at being caught eavesdropping, nevertheless managed to keep his presence of mind.

"I came back to ask," he said, "if it will be a long time before the police will arrive?"

"No," said Morrison, "I guess not."

"I am in need of sleep. I have been traveling," explained Solari. "If I am needed, will you so kindly send at once?"

"I'll let you know as soon as possible if you're wanted."

"Thank you." The Italian turned on his heel and went down the hall.

"Huh," grunted Morrison and closed the door. "What do you think of that?" he asked the porter as he went back to the telephone. "He hasn't a bit of curiosity; oh, no."

"Do you think he come back to listen?" asked Harahan.

"Of course. And let me tell you something, Harahan—something you can bet your last dollar on any time you feel like it. When a man is asked questions in a case like this and starts all his answers by saying 'I must explain,' he's sparring for time—time to think his answer over. He's not telling a straight story, or he's not telling all he knows—one or the other."

The porter nodded, impressed, and Morrison turned his attention to the telephone.

"That you, Evans?" he said over the wire. "This is Morrison in room 919. Had to force the door. The woman's dead."

"Dead!" gasped the night clerk.

"Suicide. Is Mr. Wendell in, do you know?" Wendell was the manager of the Winsonia.

"No, he's out," replied Evans. "Went to the theater and to supper afterward, I guess."

"Well, we can't wait for him," declared Morrison in a tone of authority. "The police have to be notified at once. I'll stay here. I'll keep Harahan, too, till they come to take charge. Hang up, will you?"

Evans hung up the receiver, and Morrison recalled the operator.

"Get me police headquarters," he said.

CHAPTER V

EVIDENCE OF MURDER

THE police notified, Morrison began to examine the Greens' room in detail. He loved detail. He put his faith as a detective in little things, in the trifles that others were almost certain to overlook. However, as he turned from the telephone and looked about the room, he saw very few items that struck him as interesting, and none that seemed to possess the slightest importance.

On the writing table, which promised most, there was only some hotel stationery and the regulation hotel blotting pad. Not a letter; not even a bill. The drawers and pigeonholes were all empty.

In the sitting-room closet a man's wearing apparel was hanging, a very respectable assortment of coats and trousers; and Morrison would have liked to go through the pockets, but knew he had no justification for doing so. The bathroom had the regulation array of toilet articles, a man's bath robe on a hook, and that was all.

Returning to the bedroom, Morrison stood for a moment looking at the dead woman. What could have driven a woman like her to such a desperate act? It was the very last thing in the world he would have expected her to do. She had always seemed so full of herself, so confident of her own beauty and importance. She had seemed in good health, too, so her suicide must have been due to one

of three causes: disappointment in love, money troubles, or insanity.

Then where was Green? That was another question. Had she, in an insane fit, driven him off? Or had he left her and so driven her insane?

"Was it married she was?" asked the porter.

"Well, you know as much about that as I do. She's been living here as the wife of a young fellow calling himself Green."

"She's wearin' no wedding ring."

"What?" Morrison was taken by surprise and showed it plainly. He followed Harahan's glance to the left hand of the dead woman and saw that it was without rings of any kind. Stupid of him to have overlooked such a thing.

"She has no jewelry on at all," added the porter.

This was also true, and to have the fact pointed out to him caused the detective much chagrin, which he was careful to conceal. In looking for little things, he had failed to notice big ones—a not infrequent happening with him, as he was painfully aware.

He took the earring from his pocket. "If she pulled this out of her hand bag in taking out her door key, the mate of it must be in the bag still," he remarked. "See any bag about?"

"Not a sight of one," said Harahan.

The fact that Mrs. Green was without jewelry on her person puzzled Morrison. He could not recall ever having seen her without rings and earrings and chains on. Had she taken them off for some reason before ending her life? What reason?

Perhaps she had put them away in her trunk with her clothes. Since there were no clothes in the closet,

they must be in the trunk and the suit case. Had she packed her things to go away and then changed her mind? If so, why? She must have intended to go away. It was not likely that she had packed her belongings merely to have things in order when the body was discovered. It was possible, of course, but not probable.

The telephone bell rang in the sitting room, and Morrison hurried in to answer it. The voice of the night clerk spoke.

"The police are here—just went up in the elevator."

"All right. Thanks, old man," said Morrison.

"Wendell's with them—just got back."

"I see."

"I told them what I knew—about Solari's call and all that."

"All right."

"Just thought you'd like to know they were on the way."

"Thanks," and Morrison hung up.

Unconsciously now he assumed a pose of authority and importance. For five years he had been a professional detective, serving hotels in that capacity, but his work had had to do with petty robberies for the most part. This was his first opportunity to get into the newspapers. He would handle the police very carefully; they would, of course, try to disregard him, but he would get his innings with the reporters. After all, it was he who had discovered the body. He couldn't be left out of the newspaper accounts of the affair. "Findley Morrison, private detective of the Winsonia." It would look well in print.

He opened the door and glanced down the hall. Three silent figures were approaching from the elevator, that of Wendell, the hotel manager, slightly in advance of the other two. Morrison stepped back and waited. "They're coming," he said to Harahan, and the porter straightened his big body expectantly.

Wendell entered the room as silently as he had approached it. He was a heavy-set, middle-aged man of the quiet, even-tempered sort, who seem designed by fate to cope with the thousand and one harassing details of hotel management, the sort of man who never borrowed trouble, knowing he would always have it on hand. This was not the first situation of the kind in his experience, and to him it appeared merely an incident, an annoying incident.

The men from the police station were Sergeants Smith and Mooney, two businesslike individuals in plain clothes. Wendell introduced Morrison, who told his story of the finding of he body, taking care that it lost nothing in the telling. Sergeant Smith blinked a pair of very pale blue eyes at the body, while he listened, and Mooney chewed gum industriously and waited for orders. When paired with Smith, he used his feet and Smith his head, a division of labor highly satisfactory to both.

"Simple case of suicide," declared the house detective in concluding his account. "The woman was tired of life or temporarily insane—it doesn't matter which—and killed herself. Her husband will doubtless be able to throw light on the case when he returns."

"Where is he?" asked Smith, blinking his blue

eyes at the pearl earring which Morrison had given him.

"I have no idea," said Morrison.

"Were they having trouble?"

"Not that I know of."

"Who are they? Know anything about them?"

"They are registered as Mr. and Mrs. Harlowe Green, of Kansas City."

"Been here long?"

"About three weeks."

"Been paying regular?"

Morrison looked at the manager of the hotel, who had stood by, a silent listener, and it was the latter who answered the question.

"No," he said. "They have paid nothing since they have been here, and when I took the matter up with young Green a few days ago he told me a little about himself. And I wired for confirmation to Kansas City. He is heir to a very large fortune from his mother, Mrs. Amos Green, who is the only daughter of John Harlowe, who was one of the richest men in Kansas when he died a few years ago."

"Call up the medical examiner, Bill," said Smith to Mooney, who jumped to obey, as if glad of something to do. Smith then turned his attention to the earring he held.

"Found this in the hall, you say?" he inquired of Morrison.

"Yes; I'll show you exactly where."

As he spoke, the detective crossed to the door leading from the bedroom into the hall, unlocked and opened it. The light from the room was sufficient for the narrow passage, and only a glance was

needed to convince the sergeant that no more earrings lay scattered about. Nevertheless, he remained there looking around.

The transverse hall was only half as wide as the main one, and its length was only that of the Greens' bedroom. At the outer end was a window, and opposite the Greens' door was the door of another room, the transom of which was dark.

"Who occupies that room?" Smith asked.

No one answered for a moment, then Wendell said: "I can find out, if you wish. It's probably unoccupied."

"Never mind," said Smith, and stepped back into the bedroom and closed the door. "Now," he went on to Morrison, "you expressed the opinion that Mrs. Green must have pulled the earring from her bag in taking out her key."

Morrison nodded.

"Where is the bag?" asked the sergeant.

"I don't know. In a drawer, probably. I have, of course, opened nothing."

Smith went to the dresser and opened the drawers of it, one after the other. They were all empty—entirely empty. He went to the chiffonier and opened its drawers. They contained a man's collars, handkerchiefs, underwear, and socks—nothing else. On the top lay a man's toilet articles. The dresser top was empty. Smith picked up the coat lying on the bed, the gloves, and the fur. No bag lay concealed beneath them. The trunks were locked, the closet was empty.

"Sure the bag's not in the other room?"

"No sign of it—I've looked," said Morrison.

"Wonder if she has a pocket in her dress," Smith

remarked, and knelt beside the body. He hesitated a moment, then raised a fold of the black velvet skirt. But he had hardly touched it before he dropped it again and looked hard at his fingers. They were moist and red.

A dead silence had fallen on the room. Every eye was on Smith. Without speaking, he proceeded to investigate his rather startling discovery. He touched the carpet under the velvet skirt and raised his hand again. It was redder than ever.

Morrison stepped forward now. "I didn't touch the body, of course," he said, "or I should have discovered that blood myself. Nothing should be touched until the medical examiner comes."

Smith ignored the unsolicited remarks. He was running his right hand along the carpet as close to the body as he could without moving it. On reaching the arm he stopped, hesitated, then forced his hand under the dead woman's shoulders. He brought it out almost dripping.

A gasp escaped Harahan. Wendell, Mooney, and Morrison were speechless. Smith, his face quite impassive, wiped his hand on the carpet beside him. Then he stood up and looked at Wendell.

"She was stabbed in the back, too," he said quietly, his blue eyes blinking queerly, and he went around the bed to the telephone stand on the other side of it.

"In the back?" echoed the hotel manager in astonishment.

"She was murdered," said Smith.

"How could she have been?" protested Morrison, greatly disconcerted by the unexpected turn in events. "The doors were both locked on the inside, I tried

them myself. So did Harahan. Didn't you, Harahan?" He appealed to the porter for support.

Harahan nodded his head in solemn assent.

"She was stabbed in the back," said Smith in a tone of finality, and took up the telephone receiver. The number he called was that of the precinct police station.

CHAPTER VI

FRAMED SUICIDE

BY one of those fortunate coincidences that sometimes occur at critical moments, Inspector Nash was at the police station when Sergeant Smith reported the affair at the Hotel Winsonia as murder; and, his attention caught by the detail of the locked doors, he had volunteered to look into the case. It had struck him as promising an interesting problem, something out of the ordinary run of his routine work.

He was a man with a reputation, this Inspector Nash. Still under forty, he was already quite bald. Short of stature and heavy set, with bright, dark eyes, a ruddy complexion, and a genial manner, he looked little like the popular idea of a clever detective.

Arriving promptly at the Winsonia, he listened very attentively to everything that everybody wanted to tell him; listening was his long suit, he often said; then he stood for a full minute thoughtfully contemplating the face of the murdered woman.

"There's no doubt, I suppose, that both doors were locked?" he remarked finally, addressing the company at large, his gaze still on the dead face of Mrs. Green.

"None whatever," said Morrison emphatically. "I can testify to that, and so can Harahan."

Nash walked to the bedroom window, drew up the shade, opened the window, and looked out.

"This is the ninth floor," said Morrison, who had followed Nash to the window. "The adjoining roofs are four stories below, and no one could possibly have escaped by that route."

Nash made no comment. Instead, he inspected the window sill, the ledge, and the surrounding brickwork, playing the light of his pocket flash over everything with the closest attention.

Next he turned his attention to the transoms over the two outer doors of the suite. Both were closed, as Morrison eagerly, and unnecessarily, remarked; the inspector, as before, made no comment. He stood silently gazing at the transom over the bedroom door. And Smith and Mooney gazed at it, too, convinced that it must be worth looking at if Inspector Nash found it so.

"I must say, inspector," said Wendell, growing weary of Nash's leisurely progress, "that, personally, I don't see how the woman could have been murdered, unless, of course, she locked herself in after she had been stabbed and her assailant had gone."

"Do you consider that a likely supposition?" inquired Nash, turning politely toward the hotel manager as he put the question.

"No, of course not," said the latter, "and so I don't understand how the case can have been murder. The murderer certainly did not escape by that transom. The opening is too small."

The inspector made no reply, but resumed his contemplation of the transom.

"A very small man might have got out that way, Mr. Wendell," ventured Morrison after a pause.

"Or a very thin one," said Nash. "The case is undoubtedly murder. That, at least, is certain.

Stabbing oneself through the heart from the back is not impossible, but it is an exceedingly unlikely method of suicide. Besides, this woman was stabbed twice. She was murdered. That much we are quite safe in assuming. There are no finger prints. None on the knife handle, none anywhere. Every precaution was apparently taken. The knife handle was wiped, and anything else touched by the murderer was also carefully cleansed."

"And she was robbed," put in Morrison.

"Apparently she was," assented Nash. "At any rate, we find her without even her wedding ring on and no hand bag about. She may have packed her jewelry in her trunk, which is locked, but that is not likely. And certainly she would not have packed her hand bag in her trunk. In any event, not her trunk key."

"Murder for the purpose of robbery. That looks like the answer," said Morrison.

"Well, we mustn't jump at conclusions, Mr. Morrison," replied the inspector. "In such cases, it is usually safer to proceed step by step."

"But how did the murderer make his escape? That's what interests me," said Wendell. "I can't believe it was by the transom."

"Well, we shall settle that in a minute," said Nash. "Here, boys"—to Smith and Mooney—"pull that dresser over to the door. Now, Mr. Wendell, would you like to see for yourself? I have no doubt you'll find that the woodwork of the transom has been carefully dusted, to show no marks of any kind."

Wendell declined the invitation to see for himself and appointed Morrison his subsitute. The detective

mounted the dresser willingly, and the next moment uttered an exclamation:

"By George, you're right, inspector. Not a speck of dust."

Nash smiled his winning smile. "Suppose you examine the transom in the other room now. I have an idea you will find an abundance of dust there."

This prediction was quickly verified. The transom in the sitting room was very dusty. No escaping murderer had recently passed that way.

"He got away by the bedroom transom, that's sure," declared Morrison. "Just stepped from this chair by the bed to the headboard and then worked himself through the transom."

"But how could he have closed it again?" demanded Wendell. "Wasn't it found closed? It was certainly closed when I came into the room. I recall the fact distinctly."

"Yes, it was closed, but not fastened. And it closed itself—just fell to. See?" Morrison climbed to the dresser again and demonstrated the point at issue. "And, of course," he went on, "this explains how the earring happened to be where I found it at the door. It must have dropped from the man's pocket when he was making his get-away by the transom."

"Apparently," said Nash. "It may turn out to be a fortunate accident for us. It may inform us, at least, whether Mrs. Green's valuables were worth all the trouble that was taken for them. How about that, Mr. Wendell? Any opinion on that point?"

"No," said the manager. "Women wear so much imitation stuff nowadays I never think much about it when I see one loaded down with jewelry."

"She had a long string of pearls she wore around

her neck," volunteered Morrison. "Matched her earrings. And she always wore rings, too. Considering who her husband is, I guess her things were pretty valuable. Besides, a person would hardly commit murder for imitation jewelry."

"You've got a whale of a problem, I should say," declared Wendell. "A man trying to make a murder look like a suicide wouldn't have committed robbery. And he wouldn't have stabbed his victim in the back."

"Quite true, sir—quite true," agreed the inspector affably. "The suicide ruse was doubtless an afterthought."

"After the robbery?" said Wendell.

Nash smiled. "That is a very pertinent question," he replied. "You are a close reasoner. The case has certain contradictions—strange contradictions. But let us see now just what facts we may count on as facts."

He looked down at the body again, his bright, dark eyes sparkling with zest. "She was stabbed first in the back, of course," he began presently. "And the second wound, the one in front, was inflicted—if I may venture a guess—after she was dead."

"What?" exclaimed Wendell in astonishment.

"Now, of course," the inspector continued, "the reason for the second wound may have been merely that the assailant wished to make doubly sure that his victim was dead. But—if I may venture another guess—that second blow was part of the suicide ruse."

"I agree with you, inspector," said Morrison.

Nash bowed his acknowledgments and continued.

"The body has been moved from what was plainly its original position on the floor. It was pulled along the floor a few feet from where it fell when the first blow was inflicted, and the purpose of the change was to conceal by the dark skirt the blood that had poured from the wound. Of that there can be no question, but——"

He paused, and his bright glance swept the circle of his listeners. "But," he repeated, "such concealment could not have been counted on for any length of time. The examination of the body would, of course, reveal it. The show of suicide, then, must have been for the purpose of gaining time merely—just a little time—a very little time. And that is certainly very interesting, isn't it?"

He fixed his bright glance on Wendell, and the manager responded to it with a stolid stare.

"He must have known, too," suggested Morrison eagerly, as a new idea came to him, "that she had a husband who was likely to turn up at any moment and find the body. If he could have counted on the body not being discovered until morning, he wouldn't have had to bother about gaining a little time by a suicide bluff."

"Exactly so—exactly so, Mr. Morrison. Very cleverly reasoned," Nash applauded heartily, bringing a flush of pleasure to the detective's cheeks. "The murderer's expectation was undoubtedly, as you say, that the body of his victim would be discovered before morning—much sooner, in fact."

Nash reflected a moment, staring down intently at the dead woman. "She has been dead a very short time," he finally observed. "That is a point to remember."

"Yes; Solari heard her groaning just before he phoned down to the office, so she must have been alive then," said Morrison. "And the groans came from the other room, he said. How do you account for that?"

The question went unanswered. "I must talk to Solari," said the inspector. "What is the number of his room, did you say, Mr. Morrison?"

"Nine-forty," answered the detective. "But I'll bring him here if you like."

"Thank you," said Nash, and Morrison started instantly.

"I think you'll agree with me, inspector," he said as he opened the door, "that Solari knows more about this affair than he has told."

CHAPTER VII

NASH QUESTIONS SOLARI

WHEN the door had closed on Morrison, Nash turned again to stare down at the body of the murdered woman on the floor beside the bed, and every eye in the room followed his. That he was deeply interested in the problem the case presented was evident from his expression.

"That room across the side hall is unoccupied, you think?" he finally asked.

"I don't know," answered Wendell. "I'll find out." And he telephoned down to the office to inquire. The room, he learned, had been occupied for about ten days by a young man registering as George Hines, from Buffalo.

"He is probably out," said Wendell, opening the door into the hall and looking up at the dark transom of the door just opposite. "Shall I knock and make sure?"

"Thanks. Not at present," answered Nash, and Wendell closed the door again. As he did so, the sitting-room door on the main hall was heard opening, and Morrison was seen entering with the dark-haired young man, Solari. Leaving his charge in the sitting room, the detective came alone into the bedroom. He drew Nash aside for a private word.

"Solari doesn't know yet that the woman was murdered—that is, I haven't told him. When I questioned him a while ago, I told him she had killed

herself, because I thought so myself then. Just occurred to me you might spring it on him suddenly that she was murdered and see how he takes it. I'm dead sure he knows something, if you can only get it out of him."

"Thanks. Not a bad suggestion," returned the polite inspector. He looked around at the two detective sergeants. "Just stay here, boys. I'll see him in the other room," he said.

"Any objection to my being present?" asked the hotel manager, and as Nash replied that he had no objection whatever the two followed Morrison into the sitting room.

Solari was standing near the door, apparently on the spot where Morrison had left him. His pale face had a haggard look, and his large, dark, Italian eyes a deep, somber expression.

"Your name, I believe, is Solari?" Nash began after taking out a notebook and fountain pen.

"Yes."

"Your first name?"

"Vincent."

"Vincent Solari," Nash said as he noted the name down in his book. "And you are from—where?"

"Kansas City. I have been in this hotel a few hours only—since this afternoon. My room is number nine-forty."

"Thanks." Nash entered the additional facts in his notebook. "Now, Mr. Solari," he continued genially, "will you be so kind as to tell me whatever you know about this affair?"

"I know nothing. This gentleman"—with a glance toward Morrison—"said the poor lady was dead. I

myself heard her groaning a little before. That is all I know."

"I see. Will you be so good as to tell me in detail just how you happened to hear the groaning you say you heard?"

Solari repeated the account he had previously given Morrison. His eyes looked steadily into the inspector's while he talked.

"How long was it after you reached your room before you telephoned to the office?"

The Italian thought for a moment, then he shrugged his heavy shoulders. "How shall I say? It was not long, I am sure."

"But you did not telephone to the office on reaching your room?"

"Immediately? No. But a short time later."

"How short a time?"

"As to that"—Solari shrugged his shoulders again —"it is not easy to say. I thought first it was no affair of mine and tried to think of something else. But it was not possible for me. In my ears I heard only the poor lady groaning. So then I thought I would do what I could——"

"I quite understand your motive, Mr. Solari," Nash interposed. "The point that interests me just now is to determine how much time elapsed between your leaving this door and your telephoning downstairs. You see the woman you heard groaning was presumably Mrs. Green. This means that she was alive and in this room when you were at the door. But when Mr. Morrison reached here she was in the adjoining room, dead. Her death, therefore, must have taken place in the meantime. Do you understand?"

"Yes, certainly. But how do you know the woman who was groaning was the woman who is dead?"

"We do not know it. It is precisely to arrive at some definite conclusion on that point that I am questioning you so closely. You say it was in this room that you heard the groans?"

"Yes, certainly."

"You are positive as to that?"

"I am. Certainly it was this room."

"And you are sure it was a woman you heard?"

"A woman—yes, certainly."

"It could not have been a man, you think?"

"A man? No, certainly. It was a woman."

"How long, Morrison, were you in reaching this door after Mr. Solari telephoned to the office?"

"Well," answered Morrison, "the night clerk who received the message called me right away, and I answered the call immediately, exchanged a few words with him about the matter, and came straight up—not five minutes all told, I should say."

"And you say, Mr. Solari," continued Nash, "that it may not have been more than five minutes after you heard the groaning here that you telephoned downstairs? Then it must have been in that ten minutes that the murder was committed?"

So quiet and matter of fact was the inspector's tone that he thought, in the pause which followed his question, that Solari had failed to note the new word, "murder," thus suddenly introduced. The young man's face showed no astonishment. He seemed to be thinking. But when he replied it was plain that he had missed nothing.

"I do not understand," he said slowly. "Murder?"

Nash nodded. "She was murdered," he said.

"But I thought"—Solari turned toward Morrison —"that she had killed herself."

"No," said Nash; "she was murdered. There is no question as to that."

"But"—Solari frowned as if puzzled—"how can that be? If both doors were locked on the inside?"

"Were they?" said Nash.

A pause. The Italian's face changed expression just perceptibly. Then he glanced again at Morrison.

"He said so," he answered calmly.

"Oh, no, I didn't!" came in positive denial from the detective. "I said nothing of the sort—to you. You said this door was locked on the inside; you said you tried to get in, thinking the woman might have done herself some injury, and you found the door was locked—on the inside. You reported the fact when you phoned the office. But nothing was said between you and me about the other door—nothing whatever. I can prove it by Harahan. He heard every word we said. I told you she had committed suicide, but I didn't tell you both doors were locked. And if you know it you must have tried both of them yourself."

Another pause while Solari stared steadily at Morrison, as if considering a reply; then Nash asked flatly: "Did you?"

"No, certainly," was the answer. "I know nothing of the other door. He told me it was locked. He is mistaken when he says he did not. He has perhaps forgotten it. But"—the heavy shoulders rose in a shrug—"how else could I know it?"

Here Wendell put in a word. "You're from Kansas City, you said, and so are the Greens."

"That's right," affirmed Morrison. "And," he

went on eagerly to Wendell and Nash, "when I wanted him to look at the dead body he refused."

"No, no, I did not refuse," declared Solari. "I did not wish to look at a dead person, that is all. I have no curiosity in such matters." He looked at Nash. "If it is desired, I will look at the body, certainly."

"Well, since you are from the same town as Mrs. Green, it is possible you may recognize her," said Nash, and led the way into the bedroom.

But the Italian, after one glance at the dead woman, turned away with a shake of his head. "I do not know her," he said.

Then the telephone bell rang, and Wendell, who answered it, announced that a doctor had arrived from the medical examiner's.

"Have him come up," directed Nash, and Wendell repeated the order into the telephone.

"That will do, then," said the inspector to Solari, adding as the latter turned instantly to go: "You will, of course, remain in the hotel."

"Yes, certainly," replied the Italian, and went through the sitting room and so out. The minute the door had closed on him, Morrison spoke his mind.

"He knows something," he declared. "I didn't tell him both doors were locked. Ask Harahan. There wasn't a word said by either of us about the bedroom door being locked. Don't you think," continued Morrison, encouraged to assert himself still further, "that he knows perfectly well how long it was before he phoned downstairs?"

"Undoubtedly," said Nash again.

"He did it immediately, in my opinion," Morrison

declared, "because the body was still quite warm when I found it."

The inspector nodded his agreement to this, also. "Just how long after you discovered the body was it before he appeared?" he questioned.

"Oh, no time at all. Harahan and I forced the sitting-room door, found the room empty and the door into the bathroom closed. We opened that and found the door from the bathroom into this room closed, also. We opened that, and we saw the body, and I had just turned on the light in here when I heard a knock at the hall door of the sitting room. And there, looking in, was Solari. I had left the door open, not knowing, of course, what we might run into. He looked very anxious, and he must have been anxious or he wouldn't have come back to find out what was going on."

"Did he know that some one had been sent up to see if anything was wrong here?"

"No, only that Evans, the night clerk, told him he would have the matter looked into."

"I see." Nash thought a moment. "Now tell me, Mr. Morrison," he presently resumed. "You came up alone to investigate, did you not? And after you had discovered that both of the outer doors were locked on the inside, you went off twice, did you not?"

"Yes. The first time to tell the switchboard operator downstairs to ring the telephone bell in here and in the other room, to see if I could get any response that way, and the second time to ring the bell of the service elevator for Harahan."

"And how long were you gone on those absences?"

"Why, not more than a couple of minutes each time."

"And did you try the doors again after you returned?"

Morrison smiled confidently. "Oh, I see now what you're driving at," he said. "But there's no doubt the doors were both locked on the inside when we broke in. Harahan told you that he tried the sitting-room door before he forced it, and Sergeant Smith can tell you that the bedroom door was locked on the inside when he got here."

"Yes—when I got here," said Smith.

"Well, it hadn't been touched before you came. I can vouch for that, and so can Harahan," retorted Morrison. "Neither of us touched anything. We were here together from the minute we broke in until you came. Everything was left exactly as we found it. I particularly warned Harahan that he was to touch nothing, and I knew enough not to touch anything myself." Having thus disposed of the sergeant, Morrison addressed himself again to the inspector.

"You can depend on it," he said, "that both doors were locked on the inside when we forced our way in, and both doors had keys in them, as they have now. Otherwise, I should certainly never have fallen for the suicide idea as I did. I'd have examined the body more closely and have discovered that the case was murder right off. But the doors were both locked, and so——"

"I understand," interposed Nash. "I accept your word. But I think I hear steps in the hall. It is probably the assistant medical examiner. We can continue this discussion later."

CHAPTER VIII

KANSAS CITY INFORMS

THE physician from the medical examiner's office was a young man who looked as if he had crawled out of a warm bed very reluctantly and was not yet fully awake. But a doctor hardly needed full possession of his faculties to function adequately in such a simple case. The cause of death was plain at a glance. No autopsy was required to determine it, and, for the rest, that was the business of the police. The participation of the medical examiner's office was, under the circumstances, merely a legal technicality. The sleepy young doctor came and went, the law was satisfied, and Nash was free to allow Wendell to have the body of the dead woman removed from the hotel to a near-by undertaking establishment until claimed by her husband or some other authorized person.

The weapon found near the woman was retained by the police, who also took charge of the premises. Mooney was designated by the inspector to remain there, Smith to accompany him. Morrison's offer of his services was politely declined. Nash said that he could coöperate to better advantage by remaining at the hotel and keeping an eye on Solari and a watch out for the return of young Green.

Matters settled thus, Nash was on the point of departure when a sudden thought made him linger. He turned to Morrison.

"That young man—Hines was the name, if I remember correctly—George Hines?"

"The occupant of the room across the hall? Yes, that's his name," said Morrison.

"He doesn't seem to have come in yet. His room is still dark. But perhaps he has slept through all this disturbance."

"Shall I knock and make sure?"

"No. If he hasn't heard the coming and going, he won't hear the knock. I'll see him in the morning. Being so near a neighbor of the Greens, he may be able to tell us something of their habits."

Nash then questioned the elevator man, a young fellow with a crop of red hair that would have earned a handsome weekly stipend for him on the stage if he had only had the foresight to be born a girl. He knew by now, of course, what the excitement was all about and was only too eager to get into the midst of it by having a police inspector ask him questions.

His answers to the questions, however, contained nothing of interest. He had come on duty at six o'clock and had not seen either Mr. or Mrs. Green since then.

"How about a man named Hines? Do you know him?" asked Nash.

"Hines?" The elevator youth looked surprised.

"Yes," said Morrison. "His room is opposite the Greens', and it's dark. Is he out, do you know?"

"Yes, he's out."

"Sure? You know Hines when you see him, do you?"

"Sure, I know him. He's out. He——" The

speaker paused abruptly, as though checking an impulse to add something.

"Well?" prompted Nash. "Go on."

"Nothing," was the rejoinder. "I was just going to say he's been out all evening."

Finding nothing more to detain him at the Winsonia, Nash went to the police station, accompanied by Smith. There his first act was the sending of a telegram to police headquarters at Kansas City, asking for information about the Greens. And while he waited for the reply Nash kept in touch by telephone with the Winsonia and took naps in the interims. It was possible, once the investigation began to move, that he would have little time for sleep.

When the expected telegram finally arrived from Kansas City, it stated that Harlowe Green was the son of Mrs. Amos Green, a wealthy and socially prominent widow of Kansas City. His marriage, about six months before, to a girl named Rosa Barnell, had so displeased his mother that she had cut off his allowance, generally washed her hands of him, and gone to Europe to recover from the shock to her nerves. On her return to America she had taken up her residence in New York, at the Hotel Evremonde, where she still was. Her son and his wife had left Kansas City shortly afterward, presumably for New York, to seek a reconciliation and an income, being at the end of their personal resources. Since then nothing was known about them.

Young Mrs. Green, the telegram said, had been a girl of good reputation, but without money or social standing, having been employed as cashier in a restaurant before her marriage. Her parents were

dead, but she probably had relatives in Kansas City, who could not be immediately located, however.

In conclusion, the message from Kansas City advised the New York police to keep a lookout for one Vincent Solari, an Italian, just released from the Kansas State prison, where he had served a short term for manslaughter. He was said to have threatened vengeance on Rosa Barnell, whose testimony at his trial had been the chief factor in his conviction. His present whereabouts were not known, but any information concerning him that could be obtained would be forwarded later.

A description of Solari was given, which stated that he was twenty-five years old and well educated, and had been born and reared in Italy.

"Solari looks like the best bet, don't he?" commented Sergeant Smith after reading the telegram.

"Does he?" said Nash, thoughtfully contemplating the message.

"Well—everything considered," replied Smith.

"We don't know everything yet," said Nash. "And I think our first move will not be to the Winsonia to interview Solari again, but to the Evremonde, to see what Mrs. Amos Green knows about the whereabouts of her son. I want to take a good look at that young man before I go any further."

The Evremonde, which was unknown to Nash, proved to be an apartment hotel in a fashionable section of New York, a much smaller hotel than the Winsonia; it had an air of elegance and exclusiveness that placed it on an entirely different plane. The entrance was locked at that hour, but the bell was answered promptly by a liveried attendant, who

also replied promptly to questions, once Nash had made clear his right to ask him.

Yes, he said, Mrs. Amos Green was living there; also her son. The latter had taken up his residence under the same roof with his mother on the preceding afternoon. Yes, he was in. And if the inspector insisted, he would, of course, be called.

The inspector did insist, and Green was called. Nash was informed that he was to go upstairs. The elevator was summoned from the basement, appeared promptly with a sleepy-eyed youth in livery at the helm, and in half a minute Nash and Smith found themselves at the door of apartment 6 D. Nash pressed a mother-of-pearl bell button, and in another half minute the door opened.

"Mr. Green?" said Nash to the figure that confronted him.

"Yes."

"I am Inspector Nash from police headquarters."

Green nodded his sleek head, which looked as if he had just brushed it. "That's what they said when they phoned up," he remarked, "but it doesn't say anything to me. What's your business?"

Nash paused a moment, then: "Your wife has been murdered," he answered.

"What?" said the husband, staring at Nash as if he doubted that he had heard him correctly. But Nash did not repeat. He waited, his eyes fixed steadily on the young man. At length the latter spoke again. "What did you say?" he asked.

"You heard me," said Nash quietly. "Hadn't you better ask us in? It's rather late to be having a conversation in the hall."

Green opened the door and stood aside for the

two callers to enter, closed the door behind them, and then said: "What do you mean about my wife being—murdered? I can't believe it."

"Just that. She's been murdered," answered Nash.

"I can't believe it," repeated Green in a strained voice. "It's impossible. When—did it happen?" he faltered.

"It happened shortly before midnight. One of the guests of the hotel passing her room heard groans and reported to the office that something was wrong. The matter was investigated, and she was found lying on the floor beside the bed, dead. She was lying on her back, fully dressed, with a knife in her heart, and it was——"

"Don't!" Green's hand shot out to silence Nash. "Don't talk about it, please; I can see it without that." He sank into a chair, covered his face with his hands, and shuddered.

"I was only going to say," Nash explained after a moment, "that it was thought at first that she had killed herself."

"She must have." Green rose from his chair as he spoke.

"No; she was murdered, Mr. Green," replied Nash. "There's no possible doubt of it. She had been stabbed in the back, but an attempt was made to make the crime look like suicide, because the body had been moved so that her dark skirt covered the stain on the carpet made by the blood from the wound in the——"

"Don't—for Heaven's sake!" exclaimed Green, writhing. "Don't talk about it, I tell you. I can't

stand hearing things like that. I can—I can—see them—as if I were there."

He turned and walked to the window as if to conceal his face. "When did it—happen?" he asked when Nash said nothing more.

"Shortly before midnight."

"Before midnight? Good Lord! And I was dancing then—dancing!" He wheeled about, facing Nash again. "Who did it?" he asked.

"We don't know."

Green then said that as soon as possible he would call up his mother's attorney, Mr. Wainwright, who would take charge of everything. He would call him right away, only he didn't know where he was stopping in New York, and he didn't want to disturb his mother to ask. But Wainwright would see to everything. Every effort would be made to discover who had committed the murder, and to bring the guilty person to justice. No money would be spared to accomplish that end.

All this Green brought out in spasmodic utterances as he moved about the room. That he was genuinely distressed and excited was evident both from his looks and his behavior. His hands trembled, and the muscles of his face jerked involuntarily when he was not talking. He seemed unable to control himself, unable to stand still. Nash's next suggestion, that, if they were not going out, they had better sit down and have a talk, passed unheeded. Green went on striding about, flinging out a sentence every now and then in a nervous, breathless way.

"You see, I had dinner here with my mother. She has an apartment in this hotel, with her maid—spending the winter in New York. And I had din-

ner with her and some friends of ours from Kansas City, Mrs. Phelan and her two daughters. And after dinner the girls wanted to go somewhere, and I said all right I'd take them to the theater, and so I called up Fred Bergson, a friend of mine, and we went to the theater, the four of us, and afterward we went to a cabaret and danced. Then we took the girls home and came back here. Fred's in the other room now, asleep. Fred! Fred!"

He disappeared into the bedroom, shouting his friend's name as he went, and in two minutes he was back with Bergson in tow, a stout youth who stared stupidly, still half asleep.

"Tell him, will you? I can't!" exclaimed Green, and began to walk about again.

Nash told Bergson briefly about the night's tragedy, with the net result of a husky voice saying, "By Jove!" and a stout form subsiding heavily into a comfortable chair.

"It was just before midnight, he says, Fred. We were at the Palais Magnifique, dancing. Dancing! Good Lord, it's horrible!" Green then sat down, covered his face with his hands, then burst into wild sobbing. The expected reaction had set in, and while waiting for the fit of weeping to pass, Nash gave his attention to young Bergson.

"You spent the evening with Mr. Green, I believe?" he began.

Bergson assented with a nod. His honest brown eyes were on his friend, whose display of grief seemed to leave him shocked and speechless.

"You went to the theater and then to the Palais Magnifique?"

Nodding assent to this, Bergson turned to Nash

and without further questioning told his story of the evening, which agreed in every particular with Green's, and accounted for the latter's movements during the hours from eight thirty, when Bergson had joined Green and the Phelan girls at the theater, until two o'clock, when he and Green had arrived at the Evremonde and gone to bed.

During Bergson's talk with Nash, Green had regained some measure of composure and appeared not only willing but eager to answer questions when the inspector turned to him. He did not seem able to remain quietly seated, however, but began again to move nervously about the room.

"When did you see your wife last?" Nash asked him.

"In the afternoon," he answered, "about three or four—I don't remember the exact time. About four, I guess."

"You have not seen her since?"

"No. I came down to see my mother, and she insisted on my staying for dinner. She had invited some old Kansas City friends and wanted me to be here and see them. So I did, and—well, I've told you the rest."

"You haven't told me why you didn't go back to the Winsonia after your party instead of coming here."

"It was too late. I didn't want to disturb my wife."

"Didn't she expect you?"

"Why—yes, I guess she did."

"Did she know where you were?"

"Yes; I phoned her I wouldn't be back for dinner."

"When did you phone?"

"Why—I don't remember exactly. About six thirty, I guess."

"And when did you engage these rooms here?"

"Why—to-night—or this morning, rather, when Fred and I got here."

"I was told downstairs that you had taken up your residence here this afternoon."

A silence. Green stopped his restless wandering about and after a moment of frowning reflection said abruptly: "Oh, I guess I'll have to tell you the truth. It's a private matter, and I'd rather not have it get into the papers, but I guess it can't be helped. The fact is my wife and I had separated. We said good-by this afternoon, and I came down here and took an apartment in this hotel to be with my mother. You see, my mother wouldn't receive my wife, and my wife naturally resented that, and it made things generally unpleasant all around; so when my mother's attorney, Mr. Wainwright, made my wife an offer of a pile of money to leave me, the money looked better to her than I did, and she told me she was through with me. Naturally, I got out. And that's the last I saw of her."

"Had you paid your hotel bill?"

"Why, no. I was going to attend to that to-day."

"And get your trunk and clothes at the same time, I suppose?"

"Yes—of course."

"Then your decision to separate was rather a sudden one?"

"Sudden for me. We had lunch together as usual, and then I went out. When I got back a few hours later, Wainwright had been there and made his

offer, and she told me she had accepted it and was through with me. Of course, I got out right away. Never thought about my things or the bill. I was too hard hit."

Turning his back, Green looked out of the window into the gray light of the day that was dawning.

"You were very much in love with her, then?" Nash questioned after a short pause.

"I worshiped her," answered Green without turning. "Think a man in my position marries a girl in hers if he isn't crazy about her? Why, I gave up my home and everything for her. And then I found out all she wanted was what I had given up—the money and an easy life. When I couldn't give her that, she was through with me."

"We shall want an itemized list of the jewelry that was stolen, with a description of each item, to aid in our investigation. If you can't describe the things yourself, the jewelers from whom they were bought will probably be able to—since, as you say, the pieces were valuable."

"Well"—Green hesitated—"they weren't all valuable—just things I picked up here and there. I don't remember where I got them, and I couldn't describe them, I'm afraid. Except the engagement ring. That's a diamond solitaire that I bought in Kansas City. Cost about five hundred, I think."

"How about the pearls? Surely you remember where those were bought?"

"Well, I got those from a friend. He was hard up and sold them to me to get some ready money. He's—dead now, and I'd rather not give his name. I don't know where he bought the pearls. I paid him five thousand for them, but I guess they're

worth more. I don't know. He said they were. But, as I say, he's dead now, and I'd rather not give his name."

"When you say pearls, do you include the earrings? You mentioned earrings."

"Yes, I got the earrings from him, too, but——"

Green broke off and turned back to the window with a gesture of impatience. "I wish you wouldn't bother me about such things now," he said in a querulous tone. "I can't think. I'm half crazy over this affair. I loved my wife. I'm half crazy. I can't think." He started walking about again. "I'll try to make out the list you want as soon as I can."

"Very well," said Nash. "By the way," he added, "I don't believe I mentioned that we have one of the earrings."

"What?" Green came to a sharp halt.

"It was picked up in the hall just outside the bedroom door, where it must have been accidentally dropped. It's at the police station. I'd be glad to have you see it and, if possible, identify it."

"Certainly." Green's face twitched a little, and he turned it away. "I wish you'd leave me alone for a while," he added weakly. "I'm all in. This has been a terrible shock to me."

"I'm sorry," said Nash. "There are one or two questions, and then I'll have finished for the present. I wanted to ask if you have a key to your suite at the Winsonia?"

"A key?" Green was at the window again. The daylight from without fell on his face as he half turned to answer, and showed it to be much paler than it had appeared by the electric light of the room—pale and drawn. His eyes, too, looked

strained and bloodshot. He seemed, as he had described himself, to be "all in."

"Yes, a key," said Nash. "You have one, haven't you?"

"No." Green stared at Nash. "No, I have no key. I told you I had left the place for good. Why would I have a key?"

"I thought you might have one, that's all," replied Nash. "And now," he continued, "another question, if you don't mind—my last one."

"All right," said Green impatiently, "but please let it be the last. I can't stand much more of this."

"It is the last," said Nash. "I simply wish to know if you can tell me anything about a former resident of Kansas City named Vincent Solari?"

A frown was the first response to this, then a long, silent stare, then: "Why do you ask me that?"

"Because," replied Nash, "the Kansas City police have advised us that he threatened the life of your wife, because she testified against him when he was tried for manslaughter."

"Well, she did—that's true. But what of it? He's in prison now. It certainly wasn't he who killed her."

"He was in the hotel at the time. He is there now."

"What?" Green gave a violent start. If his astonishment was not genuine, it was wonderfully well feigned. "In the hotel?" he echoed, his face more ghastly in its pallor than it had seemed before.

"It was he who heard the groans in your wife's room, and who notified the office."

"Solari? At the Winsonia? What are you talking about?"

"Do you know Solari?"

"No, I don't know him, but I know about his trial and—the rest. I thought he was in Kansas—in prison."

"He is at the Winsonia."

"Good Lord!" The young man's eyes widened with a stare of horror that moved about the room and chanced to settle on his friend Bergson, who had been listening with rapt interest to the conversation. As if feeling himself personally appealed to, Bergson spoke.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"He's not the murderer," said Green, looking at Nash. "Why, you said she was robbed. Solari wouldn't have robbed her. He's got money. He doesn't need to steal."

"Is it true that he threatened to kill her when he was released from prison?"

"Yes, but I don't believe he did it. Has he confessed?"

"No. On the contrary. He says he had nothing to do with it. According to his story, he was passing room nine nineteen and heard a woman groaning."

"Groaning?" Green looked more amazed than before.

"He knocked, got no response, tried the door, and found it locked. Thinking something must be wrong, he says, he reported the matter to the office. The house detective who investigated found both the sitting-room door and the bedroom door locked, with the keys on the inside. He forced the sitting-room door and discovered your wife's dead body. Later investigation brought to light the fact that she had been murdered, and that the murderer must have made his escape by way of the bedroom transom."

"The transom?" The echo was one of utter astonishment.

"Solari is too large a man to have done that, but it is possible that he had an accomplice. I thought perhaps you might know——"

"I don't know anything about Solari," interrupted Green vehemently. "I don't know anything about the affair at all. What's more, I won't talk about it any more. I won't answer any more questions. You ought to have a little consideration for a man under such circumstances. You seem to forget it's my wife that's dead—my wife." And breaking into sobs again, he rushed into the adjoining room and banged the door shut after him.

His friend Bergson apologized. "He's such a nervous chap," he said. "Always has been. Used to have some sort of nervous ailment when he was a child. And, of course, this is pretty awful—having his wife murdered."

"Quite true," agreed Nash. "His reaction to the shock is easily understood. I'll not bother him any more at present."

With that Nash and Smith went off, and when they were seated again in the police automobile in which they had arrived, Nash asked his silent partner how he had been impressed by the interview just ended.

"Well," said Smith, who was by nature a direct speaker, "he could have got through that transom. He's little enough for it. Only it looks like he had an air-tight alibi. Couldn't make out why he got so worked up over Solari. How does he know Solari didn't commit the murder? But he got worked up

over everything, I guess—just naturally excitable and nervous, like his friend said."

"He's undoubtedly nervous and highly strung, that was evident," assented Nash. "But, as you say, he seems to have an A-1 alibi."

"Now for Solari," said Nash, and through the gray light of early morning and deserted streets the car speeded back to the Winsonia. A faint streak of sunshine was visible in the east when they reached the hotel again.

"Going to be a fine day," remarked Smith.

"I hope so," returned Inspector Nash, but he was thinking of things far removed from the weather.

CHAPTER IX

SOLARI RECONSIDERS

THE lobby of the Winsonia was waking up for the day. Two scrubwomen were at work on the tiled floor, rugs were rolled up, chairs pushed against the wall. In one of these the red-headed elevator boy was lounging, but he sprang up at sight of Inspector Nash. Evans, behind the desk, gazed expectantly in the same direction, and Detective Morrison, who had been watching the door with a disgruntled eye, got slowly to his feet. But none of the three moved. They merely looked on from where they stood while the two plain-clothes men that Nash had left at the hotel got up from their seats and went to meet him.

They had nothing to report, they said. George Hines, the man across the hall from the Greens' bedroom, had not yet turned up. Solari had made no move of any kind—according to Kernan, the detective assigned by Nash to patrol the ninth floor. Sergeant Mooney was still in the Greens' suite. In short, nothing had happened during the inspector's absence.

"Very well," said Nash. "Stay here and keep a lookout for Hines. If he comes in while I'm here, let me know at once. I'll be either in 919 or Solari's room. That's 940." And with a genial nod of greeting to Evans and Morrison he went on to the elevator, Sergeant Smith following.

Within Solari's room, Inspector Nash came to the point with a direct question:

"Is it true," he asked, "that you have just been released from the Kansas State prison?"

Solari inclined his head, but made no other reply. He stood with one hand on the footboard of his bed, facing Nash. He was still fully dressed and had not been to bed, had not even lain down. The bedspread and pillows were as smooth as they had been left by the maid. Apparently, he had been reading, for in his other hand he had an open book, and there was a chair behind him from which he must have risen at his visitor's knock.

"When were you released?" asked Nash.

"It is four days now that I am free," was the answer.

"How long have you been in New York?"

"I arrived yesterday."

"Why did you come here?"

"To return to my home in Italy."

"When do you expect to sail?"

"I have not yet taken my ticket."

"How long were you in prison?"

"Five years."

"What for?"

"I was convicted of manslaughter."

"For five years?"

"Seven."

"And got two years off for good behavior?"

"Yes."

"What is your business?"

"I was with an Italian firm of importers in Kansas City."

"Are you traveling on business now?"

'No. I return to my home, to my parents."

"What time yesterday did you arrive in New York?"

"About eight o'clock."

"Did you come straight to this hotel?"

"No, I went to a hotel near the station."

"When did you come here?"

"Yesterday afternoon—late."

"Why did you make the change?"

"I wished to see Mrs. Green."

So unexpected was this admission that Nash was dumb for an instant with astonishment. "You said you didn't know her," he reminded Solari quietly.

"I said an untruth. I knew her very well. Five years ago we were engaged to marry, then—I have been sent to prison. I will tell you."

Solari removed his hand from the bed and placed it, like the other, on the book. He stood perfectly erect, his broad shoulders squared, his handsome, dark eyes intent on his listener.

"I was young then—twenty-two, only. It was five years ago. She was not married. She was Rosa Barnell. I loved her. We were to marry soon. Then one night at a dance another man who loved her, also, insulted me, and I struck him with my fist. I did not wish to kill him—only to knock him down for the insult. But his heart was very weak. I did not know it. The doctors have said so at my trial. He was dead when they picked him up from the floor."

A shudder, just perceptible to his observers, passed over Solari, as though the memory of that moment, so disastrous in his life, were still horrible to him after five years; then he resumed his narrative as calmly as before.

"I was tried for manslaughter, because I said to the man who was dead that I would kill him if he did not keep himself away from Rosa Barnell. And I was so strong. They said I knew I could kill with my bare fist. But that was an untruth. I did not know it. And I did not wish to kill that man. I hated him. I was mad with love for Rosa Barnell; he, too, and so I hated him. But when I said I would kill him, it was only a threat that I did not mean. It is easy to say such things. Who does not say them? And it was to Rosa I had said it, like any mad boy who boasts to his sweetheart. But she told it in the court, and I was sent to prison."

"It was her testimony that convicted you, was it?"

"Yes. And I was like a wild man, because I knew then she did not love me, but that dead man. He was the man she loved, and I said I would kill her when I was free again. I sent that word to her, that so soon I was free I would come and kill her, too. It was all madness—all. I was like mad. Maybe I would have killed her then if it had been possible. But not now. Not now." The final words were said with a deep intake of breath, and the powerful chest of the speaker heaved as under stress of great emotion which found no other outlet, so firm was his grip on himself. And before Nash could reply, he went on again composedly.

"I am older now. I am no longer a mad boy. And I have been five years in prison. I have learned to be calm. And I have wished only to return to my parents in Italy. To kill means a prison cell, and for me I would die before I would go again to prison."

Another slight shudder coursed through the strong frame of the young man. His years in prison seemed to have been a terrible experience.

"I did not kill Rosa," he continued as calmly as before, "but it is natural you think so. I have killed one person, I will kill another—that is how it seems. It is a terrible misfortune for me that I am here in this hotel when she has been killed. But I did not come here to kill her—only to see her. I knew she was in New York, but not where, so I have asked her cousin, Tony Barnell. I had his address from Kansas City and went to see him yesterday morning. He told me he did not know where she was. He said after she married she had taken no more notice of her family, because she was rich now, and they were poor. But in the afternoon he came to me at my hotel and told me he had seen her and she wished to see me—very much—because, he says, she wishes to be friends with me again. He says she was going to get a divorce from her husband, that he was no good, and she did not love him any more. Well——"

Solari paused, and a faint frown disturbed the smoothness of his forehead, a faint flush of color appeared in his cheeks.

"Well, I wished to see her, also. I wished to see her once more before I went back to Italy. I wished to tell her that I had forgiven her for what she had done to me, what she has made me suffer. So I said to Tony Barnell that I would go, and he told me how I must do. I must take a room at her hotel and on the same floor, and he would tell her the number, and then she would come there and see me. He said she was afraid for me to come to

her room, because her husband might be there. So I did what he said. So I came here and asked for a room, high up, about the ninth floor; and then Tony telephoned, and I told him the number of my room to tell her. And then—then I waited.

"I waited from five o'clock until nearly midnight, and no message came from her—nothing. I did not leave my room. I did not go downstairs to dinner. I had no dinner. I did not think of it. Any moment I thought she would come. Then when it was nearly midnight I could not wait any longer, so I went to her door, to see if there was stilll a light in her room.

"In 919 there was a light, and I listened and could not hear any sound. Then I remembered Tony had told me she had a second room, 917, so I went to that, down the little hall, and there was a light in that room, also. And I went near to listen at the door, but then I heard a man's voice. Then the door opened, and I stepped back out of sight and walked down the hall quickly. I could hear him coming quickly behind me, but he stopped at the elevator, and when I was going around the corner I looked back. He was standing under the light, and I saw him very well. And then I went to my room to wait again. Her husband was gone now, I thought, and she would come. But she did not come."

Solari paused, and again a frown contracted his brows for a moment. Questions leaped to Nash's lips, but he did not utter them. He wished to hear the Italian out. His story might not be true; he had lied once, and could be expected to lie again. But lies were never made out of whole cloth; there

must be germs of truth in his statement, improbable though it sounded. And the wiser course would be to hear it to the end. Time enough then to riddle it with questions.

"I grew impatient, and after a little time I went back to her door," Solari continued. "Perhaps, I thought, her husband had returned to the room and would not go out again. If so, there would be no possibility of my speaking to her that night, and I had better go to sleep and wait to see her in the morning. There was still a light in 919. I could see that before I came to the door. Then when I came quite near I heard groans, as I have told you—a woman's groans. I listened for a little time. I was afraid to knock. Her husband might be in the room. So I went around to the other door, as I have done the first time, and there was now no light. And I could not hear anything at all.

"I went back to 919 and listened once more, and then I knocked—softly. No answer. I knocked louder. Nothing. The groans did not stop. Then I called. 'Rosa,' I said softly, with my lips quite at the door. But no answer; nothing but the terrible groans. I tried to open the door and could not. I looked through the keyhole and saw there was a key in it on the other side. I wanted to call again, but was afraid I would call attention from the rooms near by. I went to the other door; it was locked, also. I did not know what I should do. I went to my room, and after a little time I telephoned downstairs, and—you know all that happened after."

Solari ended with a heavy shrug of his broad shoulders and looked expectantly and anxiously at

Nash, who looked back at him with a bright glance that betrayed nothing.

"Mr. Solari," Nash said, "do you think your story is a plausible one?"

"It is true." The young man's dark eyes looked straight into his questioner's.

"Then why didn't you tell it before?"

Solari gave another lift of his shoulders. "I hoped it would not be necessary," he answered. "I thought she had killed herself. When you told me she had been murdered, I was all astonished and could not think in a minute what I should do."

"But you are registered here under your own name. You must have known that the newspaper account of the tragedy would mention your share in its discovery, and that your previous acquaintance with Mrs. Green would come to light."

"I did not think of that."

"You wished to see her merely to tell her you had forgiven her, you say?"

"Yes. I wished to tell her that."

"Couldn't you have written it?"

Solari hesitated; then: "I wished to see her," he answered, his pale face flushing a little.

"You were still in love with her. Was that it?"

The Italian's broad chest rose and fell before he replied. His emotions seemed always very near the surface, despite his outward composure.

"I did not think so," he said quietly, "but it may be."

"Was she in love with you?"

"I do not think so."

"And you never did see her alive?"

"No." Again the powerful chest rose and fell with a great heave of feeling scarcely controlled.

"You never saw her at all—not even for a moment? Alive, I mean, of course."

"No, I have not seen her living since five years, when she stood in the court and swore against me."

"I see. You only heard her—heard her voice?"

Solari said nothing for a moment. He seemed to be struggling with some mental difficulty. His black brows were knit, and his black eyes left his questioner's face for the first time, lowering to the small book that he still held tightly clasped in both hands.

"I heard a woman's voice," he answered finally. "I do not know if it was hers. It is difficult to know that from a groaning sound. It was a woman's voice; that is all I know."

"A woman's voice? You feel absolutely sure about that?"

"Yes, a woman's voice, I am sure."

"But you are not sure it was Mrs. Green's?"

"I—do not know."

"What do you think about it?"

"I—do not know what I should think."

"You thought it was her voice when you telephoned to the office, didn't you?"

"Then, yes."

"Why are you uncertain about it now?"

"Because I have been thinking. Why was it she did not answer me—if it was her voice?"

"I see. You feel sure she would have answered you if it had been she in the room?"

"I think so—certainly."

"So now you are of the opinion that there must have been some other woman in the room?"

"I think so."

"Any idea what woman?"

"No." Solari shook his head.

It was the inspector who was silent now, absorbed in his thoughts. He gazed past Solari at the wall, his bright eyes fixed on a pale pink rosebud in the wall paper. At last he brought out the result of his meditations.

"If the woman you heard was not Mrs. Green, then Mrs. Green may have been dead at that time, mayn't she?"

"I suppose so," was the answer.

"Did you hear her voice when you heard that of a man in the bedroom?"

"I heard the man's voice only."

"No woman's voice at all? In either room?"

"No."

"Did you recognize the man's voice?"

"No."

"You said it was her husband's."

"Naturally. Who else?"

"Have you ever seen her husband?"

"No, never."

"Then you don't know that the man who came out of the room was her husband?"

"Certainly I know it," Solari's black eyes flashed. "She was a good woman. I know that."

"Suppose you describe the man. You said you saw him standing at the elevator. What sort of man was he?"

Solari thought a moment. "He was small, thin, in a dark overcoat and hat. His face—I do not know how I shall describe it."

"Would you know the man if you saw him again?"

"Yes—certainly. I have seen him very well. There is a light at the elevator. He stood under the light."

"Did he go down in the elevator?"

Again Solari seemed to hesitate. "I—do not know," he replied. "I did not wait. I have not thought of that."

"Then he might have gone back to his rooms?"

"I—suppose that is so."

"And"—Nash paused a moment to give force to the question on his lips—"his wife might have been already dead when you heard him talking in the room?"

"I—do not know." This appeared to be an entirely new idea to Solari. He stared, wide-eyed and startled, at Nash, as if expecting him to pursue the subject.

Instead Nash said: "I think I shall ask you, Mr. Solari, to put on your coat and hat and come with us."

The Italian gave a start. "What? With you? Where?"

"No occasion for alarm. You are not under arrest," Nash assured him. "We are going down to see Mr. Green. I wish you to see him and tell us whether he was the man you saw come out of his wife's room."

Without replying, Solari laid his book on the table and went to the closet to get his overcoat and hat, and Nash, who considered no detail unimportant in such an affair, took advantage of the opportunity to glance at the title of the book. It was "The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius."

CHAPTER IX.

THE OTHER MAN

THE day had not yet fully dawned when Nash, Smith, and Solari left the Winsonia for the Evremonde. The party in the police car was a silent one, each man occupied with his thoughts. Smith sat with the driver, Solari with Nash, and as the latter watched his companion out of the corner of his eye, he wondered what was going on behind the half-closed, somber eyes of the Italian. He would have given a great deal to know.

Was Solari's story true? Certainly it was not plausible, but the narrator was intelligent enough to have realized that. Had he been lying, he might easily have concocted a more credible yarn. The truth often labored under the disadvantages of being more difficult to believe than a clever lie. Persons put it to the test of reason, forgetting that human conduct was rarely reasonable, especially at times of emotional stress.

And the Italian's face was distinctly in his favor. He looked like an honest man, though whether or not he was one was as open to conjecture as was the story he had told. That he was well bred and well educated, was not open to question, however, nor that he had gone through an experience which, to a man of education and refinement, must have been unforgetable. And if he had been innocent, as he claimed, of any intent to kill the man he had struck

in anger, five years in prison might well have taught him self-control. Besides, if he had come to the Winsonia to commit a crime, would he have registered under his own name? Not unless he was insane, and insane men did not beguile their waiting hours reading philosophy.

And who was the man Solari claimed to have seen leaving the Greens' bedroom just before the discovery of the murder? Could it have been Green? The elevator man had been positive in his assertion that he had not taken Green down in his car that night, and the night clerk had declared emphatically that he had not seen Green in the lobby during the night or evening. Besides, Green had what looked like a cast-iron alibi. Yet, if not Green, who was the man? On that question much depended.

What would be the result of Solari's meeting with Green? If he identified Green as the man he had seen, and if Green's alibi held after investigation, what then? Then it would look as if the Italian were trying to incriminate another to shield himself.

Well, thought Nash, summing up his speculations as the car came to a halt before the plain but charming entrance of the Evremonde, he had wanted a puzzle, and he had got it. And the solution was doubtless simple enough, if one could only find the right clew to it. That chap Barnell must be questioned. He was the dead woman's cousin and Solari's authority for her message to him. And the pearl earring must be seen by an expert. Green had been so insistent the murder was done by a burglar—a little too insistent, in fact.

The door of the Evremonde was still locked, and the same young man responded to Nash's ring as on his former call.

"Mr. Green?" he repeated after Nash. "I think he's out."

"Out? Where?" said the inspector in surprise.

"I couldn't say, sir."

"When did he go out?"

"Why—just after you were here, sir, I think it was."

"Did he say when he'd be back?"

"No, sir."

"Nor where he was going?"

"No, sir. He didn't say anything to me at all."

"I'll go up."

The elevator was summoned, and, leaving Smith and Solari downstairs, Nash went up to Green's rooms. There he had some difficulty in rousing young Bergson from sleep; having roused him, he learned nothing more than he had heard from the porter. Green had dressed and gone out immediately after Nash's departure, without telling his friend where he was going. Bergson, however, rather thought he was going to his mother's rooms to tell her what had happened, or to see the family lawyer, Mr. Wainwright. Bergson hadn't asked any questions; Green had seemed so upset and excited; but he had probably gone to his mother's rooms and then to his lawyer's.

"Did he have on his overcoat and hat?" Nash inquired.

"Yes, he did," was the answer. "That was why I think he was going out of the building—to see Mr. Wainwright, I guess."

"You guess?" said Nash. "Come now, don't you know where he went?"

"No."

"All right, thanks. Better go back to bed," and Nash took his departure. Inquiring of the elevator man about Mrs. Green's apartment, he was informed that it would be necessary for him to be announced from below by telephone before he could disturb her by a call. Accordingly, he went downstairs.

There was a short wait before the telephone bell was answered, and then, it appeared, a maid responded. Being told that Inspector Nash from police headquarters wished to talk to her mistress, she gave an audible gulp, then recovered her powers of speech and said Mrs. Green was still asleep and could not be disturbed at such an early hour.

"Is her son there?" asked Nash.

"Mr. Harlowe? Why, no, sir; he's in his own rooms, sir."

"When did you see him last?"

"Mr. Harlowe? Last night, sir—that is, yesterday evening. He was here for dinner with Mrs. Green."

"And he hasn't been there this morning?"

"Mr. Harlowe? Oh, no, sir; not this morning."

"Do you know where Mr. Wainwright's stopping? Mrs. Green's lawyer, I mean. I believe that's his name, isn't it—Wainwright?"

"Mr. Wainwright? Yes, sir, that's his name."

"Where's he stopping?"

"Why, I couldn't just say, sir."

"I've got to know. Guess you'd better wake Mrs. Green and find out." Then, forestalling the objections he knew would follow his request, he

added: "It's important. Something has happened. Mrs. Harlowe Green is dead."

"Dead? Oh, no, sir!"

"She's been murdered."

A frightened gasp responded, then a faint: "Hold the wire, please," and silence. In a few minutes a voice came over the wire; a new voice, altogether different from the first, full toned and authoritative.

"I am Mrs. Amos Green," it announced. "What is the absurd statement you just made to my maid?"

Nash repeated the "absurd statement."

"That's quite impossible," returned the voice in a tone of finality as if settling the question once and for all.

Nash did not discuss the matter. "Is your son there?" he asked.

"Of course not," snapped Mrs. Amos Green. "My son is doubtless asleep in his own apartment."

"Where is your lawyer, Mr. Wainwright, stopping?" Nash questioned, not troubling to argue with so cocksure and unreasonable a person as the lady at the other end of the wire seemed to be.

"My lawyer? What business have you with him?" Mrs. Green was plainly becoming indignant. She did not wait now for Nash to explain his business with Wainwright but continued haughtily: "I try always to treat persons who intrude on my privacy and annoy me with impertinent questions with more consideration than they see fit to show me. But my patience is rapidly becoming exhausted. If you compel me to do so, by insisting upon talking to me, I shall hang up the receiver."

Nash, whose patience was also nearing the point of exhaustion answered this ultimatum briefly:

"Madam," he said, "I am from police headquarters. Mrs. Harlowe Green was found dead in her rooms at the Winsonia Hotel, and we are trying to locate her husband. He is not in his rooms in this hotel, and I thought he might be with you, or possibly with your lawyer."

There came a pause. Nash thought that Mrs. Green had carried out her threat and put an end to the conversation; then her voice, much modified in assurance, sounded again in his ears.

"Dead! It's incredible."

Nash furnished a brief account of the events of the night, taking pains to cast no suspicion on young Green, and after an exchange of questions and answers she gave him her lawyer's address.

Mr. Wainwright lived at a hotel only about a dozen short blocks south of the Evremonde, and, leaving Smith and Solari outside of it in the car, Nash went first to a telephone booth and called the Winsonia to make sure that Green was not there and had not been heard from. Then he had himself announced to Mr. Wainwright. As he expected, he found the lawyer up and waiting for him, having been prepared for his visit by a telephone message from Mrs. Amos Green.

What the latter had lacked in patience and suavity, her lawyer had in abundance. He listened without an interruption to Nash's story of the discovery of the murder, the bare story, his face revealing no emotion of any kind. He had, of course, heard it all before from his client.

"Young Green," said Nash in conclusion, "seems to incline to the theory of murder in conjunction with robbery."

"Naturally," returned the lawyer. "That is the only likely explanation."

"We don't know yet that she was robbed," said Nash. "Her jewelry may be in her trunk. Do you know anything about its value? She had a string of fine pearls, I believe."

"Indeed?" Wainwright looked blank. "I know nothing about that. I dare say Harlowe had given her jewelry."

"Wasn't she wearing her pearls when you saw her yesterday?"

"Yesterday?" Wainwright looked blank again.

"Green says you called on her yesterday concerning a divorce."

"Ah, yes, I did see her yesterday." The lawyer's tone seemed to imply that his recent visit to the Winsonia had slipped his mind for the moment. "And I believe she was wearing a string of pearls, now that I consider the matter. But I can tell you nothing as to their value. Harlowe can undoubtedly give you all such information as you require."

"You haven't seen him this morning?"

"No, nor heard from him. If he has left the Evremonde, it was doubtless to go to the Winsonia."

Nash let this pass. He wanted to know about the divorce plans of the dead woman, so turned now to that subject.

"A divorce," said Wainwright, "was being considered. The marriage was very unsatisfactory to Mrs. Green, Sr. Young Mrs. Green, while a beautiful woman, was quite unfitted, by her lack of education and culture for her new position. She realized the hopelessness of the situation and had

agreed, so Harlowe reported last night, to go to Reno and get a divorce—for a money consideration, of course—a very handsome one, I may say. I made her the offer yesterday afternoon, and afterward she had a talk with Harlowe. They agreed between them to accede to his mother's wishes and end their relationship."

Wainwright rose with the air of one terminating an interview. "I must ask you to excuse me," he continued. "I must dress and go to Mrs. Green; she is expecting me. After that I shall be at your service as Mrs. Green's representative. She will, of course, take charge of the funeral arrangements and do everything that the situation calls for. And I request that you spare her any unavoidable annoyance."

"Certainly," said Nash. "But there's just one other point I'd like information about. Was there any objection to young Mrs. Green on the score of her—personal character?"

"Oh, no, nothing of that sort, I assure you," was the reply. Then the lawyer's thin upper lip curled a little, and he went on in a drier tone: "The point was naturally not overlooked. But in that respect she proved to be invulnerable. She bore an excellent reputation."

Wainwright paused and seemed to hesitate; then he went on again: "While her personal reputation was unimpeachable, she had been brought before the public eye in a most unpleasant way, in connection with a young Italian who had killed a rival suitor in a quarrel about her. She appeared to be only indirectly responsible for the affair, which was due mainly to the hot temper of the Italian, now

serving a prison term; but the notoriety that she unwillingly acquired was one of Mrs. Amos Green's most serious objections to her."

Wainwright then repeated that he must ask to be excused, and Nash took his leave.

His speculations took a new turn now, and so far had his thoughts wandered from Harlowe Green, in pursuit of whom he had come to Wainwright's hotel, that when he stepped out of the elevator on the ground floor and found Green standing there waiting to go up he paused with a shock of surprise.

Green gave him a startled stare and tried to pass. But Nash blocked the elevator door.

"Going up to see Mr. Wainwright, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied the young man ungraciously.

"Just come from the Evremonde?"

"Yes."

"You've been a long time coming."

"What do you mean?" Green glared at his questioner.

"Where have you been?" demanded Nash curtly.

"None of your business. Let me pass. I'm in a hurry."

"You needn't be. Mr. Wainwright is coming right down. You can see him when he gets here. Where have you been since you left the Evremonde?"

"I've been at the Winsonia, of course."

Nash shook his head. "Don't lie, please. I phoned the Winsonia. You haven't been there. Where have you been?"

"It's none of your business."

"Oh, yes, it is. It's most decidedly my business."

"Well, then, find out for yourself. I'll not tell

you. My private affairs are my business. Your business is to find out who murdered my wife."

"Quite so," said Nash.

"Well, what interest is it to you where I go? I didn't kill her, did I? I was at the Palais Magnifique dancing when the murder was committed, wasn't I? Or, if you don't believe that, ask the people I was with. Ask at the Palais Magnifique. They know me. They'll tell you I was there. So will Fritzi Flynn. She's a dancer there."

"Just a minute, please," said the inspector quietly. "I have not questioned your word, remember. But a man was seen leaving Mrs. Green's room shortly before the discovery of her murder, and the person who saw him took it for granted it was you and——"

"A—man?" Green's sallow face grew livid, and the two words were stammered. "What are you talking about?" he demanded the next moment in a forced tone of indignation. "How could it have been I? I was dancing at that time, I tell you. If you don't believe me, ask the people that were with me. If any man was seen coming out of my wife's rooms, it was the burglar that robbed her and killed her. Who says it was I?"

"Solari."

"Solari?" Green stared in astonishment that was plainly genuine. "Solari?" he repeated. "He never saw me. He's been in prison for the last five years and had only been in Kansas City about a year before then, when I was in Europe. Did he say he had ever seen me?"

"No, but the description he gave of the man he saw seems to fit you——"

"Fit me? Then he's trying to put something over! He's trying to incriminate me!" Green's tone, though, was strained with excitement. "He's trying to save himself. That's it."

Nash soothed him. "He doesn't say that the man he saw was you," he explained. "He merely took that for granted. But you can convince him that he was mistaken by stepping out to the sidewalk. He is out there in a car."

"All right!" Green's head went up in defiance. And, Nash leading the way, they went out to the waiting police car.

"This is Mr. Green," said Nash to Solari without preface of any kind. "Is he the man you saw last night at the elevator?"

Solari's somber eyes looked into the eyes of Green, which met them unflinchingly. Neither man spoke while the scrutiny lasted, and from Solari's expression it was impossible for Nash to predict his reply, so impassive was his pale face, so quiet his glance. Then he turned to Nash and answered in a matter-of-fact tone:

"No."

"Quite sure, are you?"

"I am sure."

Nash nodded to Green. "That's all, thanks," he said, and Green turned on his heel and disappeared into the hotel.

CHAPTER XI

A NEW LEAD

THE presence of Solari made discussion between Nash and Smith inadvisable on the return ride to the Winsonia, but when Solari had gone to his room the two detectives went into the hotel restaurant, which was being put in order for breakfast, and ordered coffee and eggs. While they revived their physical forces, they talked things over. Not that Nash expected any valuable suggestions from his companion; the sergeant served merely as a safe target at which his superior officer could talk things out and clarify his own ideas.

"Looks like Solari to me," was Smith's summing up. "First place, he had a motive. Second place, he was there when the murder was done, right on that floor—admits he was. And as for him not being able to get through the transom—well, he had an accomplice, that's all. Those Italians hang together in a thing like that. And stealing the jewelry and making things look like suicide was all just for effect."

"Think he knew that man across the hall wasn't returning?" Nash asked.

"Well," answered Smith after a pause for thought, "he didn't come back. He hasn't come back yet, for that matter."

Nash was silent. The continued absence of the Greens' nearest neighbor might be sufficient, and it

might not; but, until it was explained, it was a fact that had to be reckoned with. At his request, Morrison had unlocked Hines' door with a master key, just to make certain that the occupant was not in it, and the room had been found in good order, the bed undisturbed, and nothing to indicate the remotest connection between that room and the one across the narrow, transverse hall. Hines' all-night absence was perhaps only a coincidence.

"He might have been the accomplice," suggested Smith, ending the pause which Nash seemed to have no intention of ending.

"If so, he would probably have been found in his bed. He wouldn't have been out all night."

"Well, somebody had to get rid of the stuff they stole, and he might have gone out to do it and met with an accident."

"That is not impossible," said Nash. "But I think we'll save time by thinking less of Hines and more about young Green."

"He's got an alibi that lets him out."

"Yes," asserted Nash musingly as he stirred a second cup of coffee, "and he doesn't let you forget it." He snapped his fingers. "That for his alibi," he said. Then, leaning across the table, he went on: "You fellows think I've got some sort of occult power of divination, that that's how I solve unusual cases. You think I get a hunch—out of the ether—and play it. I don't. I play a face. Now there's Solari. A fine face. You couldn't meet a finer in a day's journey; a broad, fine forehead, good jaw, large, clear eyes, and a straight look."

"And a prison record," put in Smith, grinning a little.

Nash nodded. "All right," he said. "A prison record. He knocked down a man who had a weak heart, and the man died—from his weak heart, not the blow. That could have happened to any man with a heavy punch. It was an accident. But Green's face wasn't an accident."

"A man can't help having a homely face."

"No, but he can help having a mean one, and that's what Green has—a mean, sneaking, cowardly face. I'm not talking about his features, but his expression. Meanness is written all over him. And over his mother, I'll bet—without seeing her. I heard her voice and a few choice remarks over the telephone wire. She's purse-proud and haughty and insolent and mean."

"What are you going to do about Green?" Smith inquired. "You intended finding out where he was this morning? How are you going to do it?"

"Well," answered Nash, smiling pleasantly, "I'm not going to sit still and wait for a hunch to be wafted to me on the autumn air. I'm going to do just about what you'd do, sergeant—have him shadowed. I shall also look into his alibi very thoroughly, and into his former mode of life, and I think I may also have a talk with a certain young person who goes by the name of Fritzi Flynn."

Smith's response was a noncommittal nod.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," added Nash, rising from the table, "by employing a commonplace method like that, but it can't be helped."

They went upstairs then and noticed that the man on the elevator was not the red-haired youth who should have been born a girl. Arriving at the ninth

floor, Nash and Smith went directly to room No. 919.

Mooney was still in charge and was enjoying a breakfast that Nash had ordered sent up to him. He looked as if he had had a good sleep and was ready for a day's work. But he had nothing whatever to report.

In a few minutes a locksmith, who had been summoned by the hotel at Nash's request, appeared and opened the trunk of the dead woman, and a thorough search was made of the contents. No jewelry was found except a few small articles of no value. Nor were there any papers, bills, or letters that might have given the searchers some reward for their trouble. The missing hand bag and trunk keys continued missing. That robbery had accompanied the murder, whether for its own sake or as a blind, seemed established.

The test of the transom was next made. Mooney, the smallest man present, five feet six and thin, was utilized for the purpose. He demonstrated convincingly that if any man had escaped from the room in that fashion it was a smaller man than himself.

"Green isn't smaller," commented Smith, adding at once: "Even if he didn't have an alibi."

"Could it have been a woman, do you think?" Mooney asked.

No one replied. He had voiced the question the others were asking themselves in the silence of their own minds.

There being nothing more to detain Nash, he and Smith went down the hall to interview Kernan, who was keeping Solari under surveillance. He reported

merely that Solari was in his room. Knocking, Nash received an instant response and found the young Italian undressing, preparing, he said, for a bath. With his coat off, his splendid physical development was more apparent than ever, his broad, strong shoulders extending far beyond the line of his hips, too far indeed for symmetry. He gave Nash the address of the dead woman's cousin, Tony Barnell, which Nash had neglected to get from him before, and was again left in peace.

Going down in the elevator, the inspector questioned the new youth at the lever, who said his name was Herbert Rider.

"Do you know a man named Hines, on the ninth floor?" Nash asked, when he found that the boy knew nothing of value about the Greens.

"Hines? Oh, sure, I know him. I know everybody in the hotel. That's my business."

"What's his business?" questioned Nash.

"Well, say"—Herbert smiled broadly—"if he's got any business but playing poker, I don't know what it is."

"Gambles, eh?"

"He sure does—every night of his life."

"Where?"

"Search me. He wouldn't be likely to tell that, would he, with the unpopularity that gambling enjoys in this little town?"

Nash conceded that the point was well taken. "Plays all night, does he?"

"Sometimes he does—if he's winning. Generally he don't." Herbert grinned as he stressed the final word.

"He appears to have played in luck last night," said Nash. "He hasn't come in yet."

"That so? Well, he'll show up any time now, I guess. You looking for him?" Herbert was alert with curiosity. "He has the room just opposite the Greens' bedroom.

"Do you know whether he was acquainted with Mrs. Green and her husband?"

"Search me. I never seen him talking to either of them."

Nash made his customary nod of acknowledgment and turned away. "Oh, say," the elevator man called to him, "I'll tell you somebody can maybe give you some information about Mrs. Green."

"Who?" asked the inspector, turning back.

"Mrs. Gray."

"Who is she?"

"She's a hairdresser that comes here to the hotel —a manicure, too. She was in Mrs. Green's room yesterday afternoon—right after lunch. She can tell you something maybe about Mrs. Green. She always talks to the ladies when she's doing things for them, and they tell her things about their private affairs. You better talk to Mrs. Gray."

"Thanks for the tip," said Nash pleasantly. "Where is she to be found?"

"Well, I don't know her address, but I guess they've got it at the office—in case anybody asks for a hairdresser, you know."

With another of his pleasant nods Nash again turned to go, but again the elevator boy detained him.

"Say—about Hines. Did you ask the fellow that was on the elevator last night about him?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Because he knows him well. They're from the

same town. What did he tell you about him? I'll bet he didn't tell you about him gambling every night, did he?"

"No."

"I knew it." Herbert grinned. "He wouldn't give him away. But the way I look at it is that it ain't right not to tell the police all you know when they ask you—anyhow, in a case like this, where they need all the help they can get."

"Quite right," said Nash and moved on to the office, leaving his eager "helper" much pleased with himself.

In the office, Evans was still on deck, though the day clerk had taken charge. The latter was a crisp-mannered young man who answered questions readily enough, but contributed no information of value. When Mrs. Gray's address was asked for, it was Evans, who was hovering within earshot, who replied:

"Yes, we have Mrs. Gray's address, but I don't think she can tell you anything. I was talking to her about it last night."

"Last night?" repeated Nash on a note of inquiry.

"Yes. She was here giving a massage to one of the guests who is troubled with insomnia, and came downstairs just after Morrison had phoned me that Mrs. Green was dead. He thought Mrs. Green had killed herself, and I didn't see any harm in mentioning it to Mrs. Gray. She has so many customers in the hotel, I thought Mrs. Green might be one of them. But she said she didn't even know her by sight, so I hardly think she can give you any information."

"The elevator boy tells me she went to Mrs.

Green's room yesterday afternoon to solicit work," said Nash.

"That so?" Evans looked surprised for a moment, then he thought of an explanation of the apparent discrepancy. "Oh, he's mistaken, I guess," he said. "It must have been some other room. He's a crazy kid; you can't depend on what he says, but I'll give you the address if you want it."

"I think I'll take it," said Nash.

CHAPTER XII

BARNELL DISPROVES

MRS. GRAY'S address was on the upper West Side, not very far from that of Barnell, and directly on the way; but as Nash was uncertain as yet whether or not he would take the time just then to interrogate the masseuse, he hurried on to the other address without stopping.

He was particularly desirous of questioning Mrs. Green's cousin before the news of her death had had time to reach him, or before the newspapers had informed him of Solari's part in the events of the night. He wanted Barnell's own statement of what had passed between him and Solari, untinctured by any consideration of friendship or of personal responsibility. Friendship, he knew, was often a stronger tie than kinship.

He would see Barnell in time, anyhow, and check up Solari's story by his. If they agreed, the fact would go far toward establishing his complete confidence in the Italian's word. Already prejudiced in Solari's favor, he hoped to be fuly justified in his favorable impression by events. Moreover, it was possible that Barnell in the first shock of the news would unwittingly divulge facts about Mrs. Green's private affairs that might be worth knowing. The identity of the man whom Solari claimed to have seen leave the Greens' bedroom must be discovered without delay. It was not Harlowe Green,

for Solari could have had no motive in shielding Green, and it could hardly have been a burglar, since Solari had heard him in conversation with some one in the room.

Whoever the man was, he evidently had the intention of going downstairs in the elevator, and whether or not he had done so must remain unknown until he was identified. If he was a guest of the hotel, the elevator man would doubtless recall taking him down in the elevator—if he had done so—for passengers were scarce at that late hour.

From the dead woman's near neighbor, Hines, it looked as if nothing was to be expected. He might have overheard the Greens quarreling in their bedroom at various times, but of what value would such information be? He would not know anything about the murder, if, as seemed probable, he had spent the night at a gambling place.

And as for that masseuse, or hairdresser, Evans was very likely right. The elevator boy had been mistaken about her having gone to Mrs. Green's room. For what possible motive could she have for saying she had not known the dead woman by sight if she did know her?

Confining his speculations to the privacy of his own thoughts, Nash answered briefly to one or two remarks from Smith, who refrained thereafter from conversation, lapsing into thoughts of his own.

The house before which the car presently brought up was unmistakably a lodging house, with a small, dingy shop in the basement, displaying in its show window a headless dress form encased in a woman's black cloth suit, and upon the window the sign in gold lettering: "Attractive Tailors."

A ring at the door brought a stout woman, with a cloth over her head and a broom in hand, to see what was wanted. She identified herself as the lady of the house, as well as its maid of all work, and replied pleasantly enough that Mr. Barnell might be in his room; if not, she did not know where he might be. She understood that he had been in New York only a short time and was looking for work. If he were out, that was probably what he was doing.

But Mr. Barnell was not out, though he appeared to be just on the point of going. He had his dapper-looking brown felt hat in his hand as he opened his door.

"Your name Barnell?" said Nash.

"Yes." The speaker's handsome, black eyes looked frankly into those of his questioner. He had given Smith a glance, then focused his gaze upon Nash.

He resembled Mrs. Green, Nash thought. The eyes were the same, also the luxuriant, black hair. But, whereas she had been under the average woman's height, he was taller than the average man. That he was not prosperous at the moment, was evident from his surroundings, which were a shabby frame for so handsome and stylishly dressed a figure.

"From Kansas City?" Nash inquired.

"Yes."

"Related to Mrs. Harlowe Green, I believe?"

"I'm her cousin, but——" Barnell stopped abruptly.

"But what?"

"Nothin'. I'm her cousin. We'll let it go at that. But what's it to you whether I am or not?"

"I'm from police headquarters," said Nash.

"We've been notified by the Kansas City police that an Italian named Solari had threatened Mrs. Green's life, and to keep an eye on him. Know anything about it?"

A pause, while Barnell stared at Nash intently; then he looked sharply at Smith for a moment. "Say, has anything happened?" he asked, his gaze returning to Nash as he spoke.

"Happened? What do you mean?" Nash pretended perplexity.

"Oh, nothin'," was the reply. "You asked me if I knew about Solari threatenin' Rosa. Well, yes, I knew it. Everybody did, I guess. Wasn't much of a secret if the police knew it, was it?"

"Did you know Solari was in New York?"

"Yes, I knew that, too."

"How?"

"Saw him."

"When?"

"Yesterday. He come here lookin' me up soon as he got in from K. C. Say, how did you get my address?"

Nash opened his lips to reply, then paused hesitating. He had been about to say that he had got the address from Mrs. Green, but reflected that she might not have known it, and he was anxious that Barnell should not catch him tripping. He wanted to get Barnell's account of his meeting with Solari, without telling him of the murder. He wanted an unprejudiced version.

"I got it from Solari," he said finally, being forced to it.

"From Vince?" exclaimed Barnell. "Say, what's happened? He hasn't——"

"Hasn't what?"

Barnell frowned. "Nothin'," he muttered. "Go on. You say you got my address from Solari. How'd that happen?"

"After getting the communication from Kansas City, to which I have already referred, we of course communicated with Mrs. Green," replied Nash, "and asked her to let us know if anything developed. An hour or so later she notified us that Solari was at her hotel, and we——"

"At her hotel?" Barnell interrupted in a tone of astonishment.

"The Winsonia. He had taken a room there."

"Taken a room?" Barnell's amazement was still more marked. "Say," he burst out in a sudden change of tone, "for Heaven's sake tell me nothin' hasn't happened to her. If he's killed her, I'll never forgive myself!"

"It was you who told him she was at the Winsonia, I suppose?"

"Yes. But tell me what's happened?"

"Just a minute, please," said Nash. "What else did you tell Solari?"

"What else did I tell him? What do you mean?" Barnell looked mystified. "I didn't tell him nothin' else. He come to me soon as he got into New York, wantin' to know where she was livin', and I told him I didn't know. It wasn't so, but I didn't want to take no responsibility for what he might do. Then I got to thinkin' after he was gone that maybe I ought to tell her, warn her he was in town lookin' for her, so I went down to see her right after lunch and told her. Didn't she tell you I'd been there and told her he was in New York lookin' for her?"

"No."

"Well, I did, and she laughed and says she ain't afraid of him, that she could manage him, just to tell him where she was if I wanted to. And I says she'd better not be too sure about it, but she just laughed and says——"

"Well?" Nash prompted when Barnell suddenly paused.

"Why, nothin'. She just says she might get a divorce from Green and marry Solari and live on her alimony. And I says she wouldn't get any alimony after she was married, and she says she would, because——"

Another abrupt stop. "Because what?" prompted Nash.

"Oh, nothin'—just some foolish talk of hers. Don't know now just what it was she says—about that. But I know she says she ain't afraid of Vince, to just tell him where she was livin' if I wanted to. And—well, I was feelin' sore, because I asked her for a small loan, and she turned me down. So I went to the hotel where he was stoppin' and told him she was at the Winsonia. And that's all I told him."

"Sure of that?"

Barnell frowned. "What else do you think I told him?" he asked.

"You didn't tell him she wanted to see him?"

"No. I told him where she was, and that's all. And I didn't tell him that till he swore he wasn't feelin' sore at her any more for testifyin' against him and sendin' him up, and just wanted to see her again before he went back to Italy for good—just wanted to tell her he didn't have nothin' against her."

"You didn't give him any message from her?"

"Message? What do you mean?"

"Didn't she send him any message of any kind?"

"No. I've just told you what she said and what I said. She didn't send him any message. And I didn't give him none."

"Did you suggest his going to the Winsonia and taking a room there on the same floor as hers?"

"Did I—what?" Barnell stared. "Say, what you drivin' at? What's happened? Why don't you tell me? What are you puttin' me through this third degree for?"

"Mrs. Green has been murdered," said Nash.

"Oh, Lord!" Barnell sat down on the nearest chair, his body sagging. "And I done it! I told him where she was. I'll never forgive myself. It was my fault. I told him where she was, just because I was sore at her, and now she's dead." He looked up suddenly at Nash. "Where is he? Have you caught him?"

"He has made no effort to escape," the inspector answered. "He denies that he committed the murder."

"Denies it?" Barnell got up. "Why, who else——" He stopped, turned, and walked the length of the room before he went on: "Maybe he didn't. He swore to me he wouldn't hurt a hair of her head. He said he just wanted to see her again before he went back to Italy for good. He swore to me he wouldn't touch her. Maybe he didn't; it might have been—somebody else."

"Who?"

Barnell gave a slight start, as if he had unwittingly spoken his thoughts aloud. He frowned, and

his manner changed. "How do I know?" he said curtly. "I don't know anything about it."

"Do you know any one who had a grudge against her?"

"Sure, I do—lots of people. After she got married to Green and thought she was in high society, she cut all her old friends and her relatives—treated everybody like the dirt under her feet. Think people like that? Plenty of 'em have got a grudge. But that ain't sayin' they'd murder her, is it? I didn't feel very friendly myself, but I went and warned her about Vince, 'cause I thought it was my duty. She was my cousin, even if she didn't like me to remind her of it."

"Do you know of any man with a special grudge?"

"Man? No. Nor no woman. I ain't got any idea who killed her if it wasn't Vince Solari, and he swore he wouldn't hurt a hair of her head."

"Quite sure you didn't tell him anything about her except where she was living?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

"He says you told him she wanted to see him."

"Oh, well, I might have told him that. And I might have said she was thinking of getting a divorce—or he may have known it. Everybody in Kansas City knew Green's mother was trying to buy her off. I might have told Vince what she said about marrying him after she got the divorce, but I don't remember telling him. But I was sore enough to tell him anything. Only, I know I didn't tell him to go there and take a room. What would I want to do that for?"

"He says that you did."

"Well, I never, that's all." Barnell had turned

sullen. "And I doubt if he says I did. You're just trying some monkey business on me, like you did when you first come in. I knew the minute you said you was from headquarters that you was tryin' to put somethin' over on me. But I've told you all I know."

Barnell paused for an instant as if struck by a sudden thought. "How was the murder done?"

"Mrs. Green was stabbed."

"Stabbed? What with?"

"A common, black-handled knife, with a long blade. There were no finger prints and nothing about the knife that give us any clew to the murderer."

"Well"—Barnell spoke reluctantly—"it might have been Vince, I don't know. I got to admit that Italians are more likely to use a knife than other people. But Vince told me he'd die before he'd go back to a cell, and he looked like he meant it.

"I wish now I'd kept out of the whole thing, though Vince could have found out where she was from somebody else, if I hadn't told him."

As that seemed to be all the inquirers were likely to extract from the young man they took their leave. On the way downtown again Smith made a brief remark that summed up his impressions of their morning call.

"One of them's lying," he said.

Inspector Nash shrugged his shoulders.

"This is the street that hairdresser lives on," Smith presently reminded Nash, with a nod toward the corner they were approaching.

"We'll not stop," said Nash. "If she told the clerk she didn't know Mrs. Green by sight, it's not

worth while questioning her. I may do so later, to pick up any gossip about the Greens she may have heard. The hotel will be buzzing for a while, and she's likely to hear anything about the Greens that the women are saying. What I want to do now is to have another little talk with Solari."

"Funny Barnell never asked anything about Green, wasn't it? Did you notice that?" said Smith.

"Yes, I noticed it."

"Struck me he's got a suspicion who might have done the killing if it wasn't Solari. Notice he didn't tell us everything his cousin said to him yesterday?"

"I noticed it," replied Nash, who was thinking of Solari.

That Solari was in some way more deeply involved in the case than he had admitted, Nash was convinced. It could hardly have been mere coincidence that he, the man who had openly threatened Mrs. Green's life, should have been the person to give the alarm that led to the discovery of her murder. But for him, her body would not have been found until morning, when the maid went into the room to put it in order. Because of him, it had been found shortly after breath had left it.

Was Solari the murderer? If so, he must have had an accomplice who had locked the doors and escaped by the transom. Had Solari, then, given the alarm in order to put himself, as he hoped, beyond suspicion? Had he registered at the hotel under his own name for the same reason? Was his story about Barnell telling him Mrs. Green wished him to come to the Winsonia and take a room there all a lie? Perhaps.

But how explain the flimsy pretense of suicide?

How explain the robbery? A burglar would have done his job, grabbed his loot, and made his getaway as quickly as possible. He would not have tried to make his crime look like a suicide, nor have locked the door and squirmed through a transom. Besides, it was doubtful if any one but a small woman could have squirmed through, and she would have needed assistance. A boy might have, of course. But what boy? Burglars used boys, but this was no burglar's job. Robbery had been a blind, that was all. The murder had been committed for its own sake, not for the sake of robbery.

And who beside Solari had a motive? Green? Was there another woman involved, because of whom he had wished to be rid of his wife?

But why should he have murdered his wife if she had agreed to a divorce? Perhaps she had not. According to Barnell, the mother-in-law had been trying to bring about a divorce, which implied that she had encountered difficulties. The assertion that young Mrs. Green had agreed to the terms offered, was Green's. Wainwright, in making the statement, had quoted Green as his authority. And Green might have been lying.

Of course, Green's alibi must be closely investigated. But for the moment, it was Solari who held the center of the stage. Nash felt that another talk with him was of prime importance just then.

However, the talk with Solari was destined to be postponed. A surprise awaited the inspector—one of those sudden turns in events that upset all calculations.

CHAPTER XIII

HINES TURNS UP

AS Nash had expected, newspaper reporters were abundantly in evidence when he again entered the Winsonia lobby. His first glance revealed Morrison, the hotel detective, surrounded by an eager group of them, having, apparently, the time of his life. So fully engaged was he in being interviewed that he failed to note the entrance of Nash until the latter had reached the elevator; then he immediately hastened to meet him, arriving at the same moment with the plain-clothes men Nash had left in charge.

"Good morning, inspector," he said loudly with an air of importance. "Hines turned up while you were away, and I put him through a thorough examination. He doesn't know a thing. Was away all night —gambling. He admitted as much after I'd accused him of it.

"He said he knew the Greens by sight, of course, meeting them in the hall, and that he had heard them rowing in the room across from his, but he had never paid any particular attention to anything they said; couldn't hear much, in fact, except their voices. Said he left his room about eight o'clock and didn't show up again until this morning. He seemed completely dumfounded when I told him Mrs. Green had been murdered, and it was no fake, either. I never saw a man look more astonished in my life. He just sat and stared at me. Couldn't say a word for

a minute or two. Just looked horrified. I give you my word, I thought for a minute he was going to faint. He wouldn't go up to his room at all, even after I told him the body had been removed. He just drank a cup of coffee and went on to work."

"Then he's not here now?" Nash asked.

"No, he had to get down town to business."

Nash nodded. "Anything else?"

"Nothing except that Kernan says Solari wants to see you."

"See me?" Nash echoed interestedly. "What about?"

"Wouldn't say. But Kernan says he's all excited about something. Says he's been walking up and down in his room ever since he came upstairs from breakfast. No idea what's eating him."

"All right. I'll see what he wants. You two go downstairs again and keep the newspaper men away from me. Anything doing with you, Mooney?"

Sergeant Mooney shook his head disconsolately. "Nothing but the reporters, and you're not meaning them, I suppose?"

"I am not," returned Nash emphatically, and he and Smith went off to see what Solari had on his mind.

That the Italian was quite as eager as he had been reported to be for Nash's return, was proved by his actions. The inspector had hardly reached the door of 940 when it was opened from within, and Solari's dilated eyes met his.

"Come in. I have something to tell you," he said with breathless haste. "The man I have seen last night—at the elevator—I have seen that man again —this morning—in this hotel."

"In the hotel? Where?" demanded Nash, entering the room and leaving Smith to follow and close the door.

"In the dining room, when I was having coffee. He has a bad mark on his face—just here, over the right eye." Solari indicated the exact place on his own forehead. "It is purple from a blow. He was talking to that detective—what is his name?"

Nash looked puzzled. "You don't mean Morrison?"

The Italian assented eagerly. "Yes, Morrison, that is the man. He was talking to Morrison in the dining room. I do not know his name. He is young and has blond hair and a small face with small eyes, and that mark—a purple mark—over one eye, just here." Again the exact location of the distinguishing mark on the unknown's countenance was indicated.

"Talking to Morrison," repeated Nash, turning to Smith. "Do you suppose it could have been Hines?"

"Morrison didn't mention any purple mark. Neither did our men," said Smith.

"Go down and find out," said Nash, and Smith hurried off.

"You say the man was young?" Nash continued, addressing Solari when they were left alone. "With blond hair?"

"Yes, and a small face."

"A small man, was he?"

"Small, yes, and thin. His clothes were a brown color—dark. And he was very white in his face. He drank three cups of coffee. He seemed to be—how do you say?—nervous."

"What else did you notice about him?"

Solari thought a moment. His dark eyes, which had formerly been so somber in expression, were now bright with excitement. That he felt he had made a discovery of vital import to himself, was obvious, and he was now no longer the self-contained stoic he had seemed before, but a youth palpitating with eagerness in every atom of him. His pale face was flushed, he talked rapidly in making his replies, and his hands gesticulated constantly. Noting the change, Nash felt that he was seeing the real man for the first time, glimpsing Vincent Solari as he had been before his years in prison had tamed and aged him.

"What else?" he repeated, thinking hard. "I cannot remember. But I have told you already much. You can find him. That mark in his face—he cannot remove that. It will be there for a week. It is from a blow, a strong blow."

"You feel quite sure about him, do you?"

"Absolutely. I have seen him well. I am sure—absolutely."

"Sure he came out of the Greens' bedroom and not out of the room opposite?"

"Yes—certainly. I remember his voice. I told you, you know, that I heard him speak, and that was why I hurried from the door."

"Was he talking to Mrs. Green? Did you hear her voice?"

"No, only his."

"But you didn't hear what he said?"

"No, only the voice. And this morning I heard it again in the dining room. Only the voice. He

was too far to hear the words. But the voice is hoarse. I think he has a cold, perhaps."

"You're not sure that he went down in the elevator?"

"No, I did not wait. I went to my room."

Nash asked no other questions at the moment. Until he had learned from Smith the results of his inquiry downstairs it was useless to do so. And as for the talk with Solari that he had had in mind, it must wait for the present. This other matter must be looked into first. There might be something in it, and there might not. It was, conceivably, only a ruse of Solari to serve some end of his own, one not yet apparent. On the other hand, it might prove to be a lead of the greatest importance. And in so mystifying an affair nothing could be neglected.

As the wait for Smith's return lengthened, Nash suddenly decided to end it by going downstairs himself. He had heard all that Solari could tell him about the matter, it seemed, and there would probably be no occasion to question him more closely. Accordingly, he left him, and on his way to the elevator he encountered Smith returning.

"It was Hines," the latter announced without prelude.

"Morrison say so?"

"Yes. Says he wasn't in the restaurant with any one else but Hines. Says he sat in there with him while Hines had his breakfast. And he says he's got a purple mark on his forehead, over the right eye, where he fell down the subway steps last night and struck himself. It don't show with his hat on, Morrison says. Guess that's why our boys didn't notice it."

"Hines, eh?" Nash thought a moment. "And he said he was out of the hotel from eight o'clock on."

"That's what they all claim he said."

"And the elevator boy that was on last night said he'd been out all evening. Remember? That red-haired boy. What was his name?"

Smith shook his head. He didn't think he'd heard it, he said.

"Perhaps not," said Nash; "which goes to show how easy it is to overlook important items. Fortunately, this oversight can be remedied. They'll have his name and home address at the office, of course. I think we'll look him up without delay. He's from Hines' home town, the other elevator boy said."

"Buffalo? That's where Hines is registered from."

"Buffalo. We'll see the red-headed youth from Buffalo and find out what he has to say to Solari's story about Hines. While I get his address from the office, suppose you call up those brokers that Hines works for—Golden & Karsch, 50 Wall Street. That was the firm, if I remember rightly."

"That was it. I just asked Morrison."

"Well, call up and find out what Mr. Hines of Buffalo has to say for himself."

What Mr. Hines of Buffalo had to say for himself proved impossible to discover. Likewise, Mr. Hines. Likewise, the brokerage firm of Golden & Karsch. According to the telephone directory and "information," no such firm was listed. If they did business at 50 Wall Street, or anywhere else in New York, they did it without the assistance of Mr. Bell's invention.

"We'll go and talk it over with John Robinson,

the elevator beauty, who lives in a Y. M. C. A. boarding house not far from here. They give him a good character at the office," said Nash when he had heard Smith's report on Hines. "I recall distinctly his saying last night that Hines had been out all evening. We'll see what he has to say about it now."

CHAPTER XIV

HASTY FLIGHT

THE Winsonia had spoken highly of its employee, John Robinson, and the young man in charge of the office of the Y. M. C. A. boarding house where the elevator boy lived did the same. Robinson, he said, was a youth of good morals and trustworthy character.

"He's probably asleep," the young man said in concluding his remarks on the subject. "He's doing night work now. But you may go up, of course—under the circumstances. And, come to think of it, he may not be asleep. He had a caller a little while ago, a young fellow, friend of his."

"That so?" Nash murmured encouragingly and pricked up his ears.

"We try to protect our night workers from being disturbed during the morning, but this young fellow said he was an old friend of Robinson's and only in town for a few hours, so we let him go up."

"I see," said Nash. "Know the friend's name?"

"No, I don't. Never saw him before."

"Rather small, thin young fellow with blond hair and a rather small face and small eyes?"

"Well, yes, that description fits him pretty well."

"When was he here?"

"Oh, about twenty minutes ago, or so."

"Still here?"

"No, he's gone."

"How long since?"

"Oh, five or ten minutes, I guess."

"I see. He didn't stay long?"

"No."

Nash and Smith went upstairs. There were three flights to climb, and they took them easily and silently. Reaching finally a door on the top floor, to which they had been directed by the young man in the office, they listened there and heard the quiet, even breathing of a healthy young sleeper.

"Doesn't seem to have worried him much, Hines' call," observed Smith in a whisper.

"He's been up all night. Nothing could keep him awake, I guess," returned Nash as he rapped sharply at the door. Three times he knocked before a response came from within.

"Who is it?" the voice speaking was plainly tinged with alarm.

"Are you John Robinson?" Nash called quietly.

"Yes, who is it?"

"Police inspector from the Winsonia. Want to talk to you."

"I'm in bed. Wh-what do you want?" Robinson stammered.

"Open the door," said Nash.

The door was opened, and the red-headed boy, in a long, white, Canton-flannel nightshirt, obviously homemade, backed away to allow his callers to enter.

"Get back to bed," Nash ordered and pulled down the open window, then he drew up a chair beside the bed.

"Robinson," he began abruptly, "what did George Hines come here for this morning?"

The elevator boy opened his blue eyes in a frightened stare and was dumb.

"You're said to be a good boy, John," continued Nash, "but it's very easy to lose a good reputation; a good deal easier than to get one; and the easiest way I know of to do it is to get into bad company."

"George Hines isn't bad company," declared young Robinson, finding his tongue in defense of his friend. "I've known George all my life. He wouldn't do anything wrong—not real wrong."

"Well, then, what was he doing here this morning?"

The blue eyes blinked under a troubled frown. "I can't tell you," was the reply. "I promised George I wouldn't."

"I see." Nash nodded his head solemnly. "And I suppose you also promised him to say nothing about last night. Didn't you?"

"Yes, I did," said Robinson stoutly, "because George gave me his word of honor, and he swore it on the Bible, too, that he didn't do anything wrong last night. But he said he couldn't tell me yet just what happened, and asked me to trust him. And I said all right I would."

"I see. So you feel in honor bound not to tell us what he told you?"

"He didn't tell me anything." The blue eyes were as candid as a summer sky. "He said he couldn't. He couldn't tell anybody—yet. That was why he wanted me to promise not to tell the police that—not to tell them anything."

"Not to tell them that he was in the Winsonia last night at the time Mrs. Green was murdered, eh?"

Robinson looked unhappy.

"We know he was there, John," said Nash in his

most fatherly tone. "You didn't tell us, don't worry. We were told so by some one else who saw him waiting for the elevator. But why didn't you tell me last night when I asked you about Hines that you had taken him downstairs shortly before? Had he asked you not to?"

"No. He never asked me till this morning. But you didn't ask me anything but was he in the hotel, and I said no he was out."

"You told me he had been out all evening."

"Well, he was. He went out about eight and come back after eleven and only stayed in a few minutes. That was all evening, wasn't it?"

"It was. But you can see that you gave me a wrong impression by what you said. I naturally supposed that Hines had gone out and stayed out."

"I didn't say so. You didn't ask me. And I knew George didn't have anything to do with Mrs. Green's being murdered, so why should I drag him into it?"

"Especially when you knew he was out at a gambling house playing poker, eh?"

The boy frowned uncomfortably. "Oh, George don't gamble to amount to anything," he protested. Then with a flash of his blue eyes: "I know where you got that from. You got it from that fellow Rider. He's always knocking people, and he knows George hasn't got any use for him. He's a low life, Rider is—shoots craps in the kitchen—that's his gait."

"How long after eleven was it when Hines came in?" Nash asked, not interested in the habits of the other elevator boy.

"I don't know exactly."

"Now, John, you had much better be truthful," said Nash in a tone of friendly admonition. "It's my business, you know, to investigate this murder and——"

"But I don't know anything about it, and neither does George. He swore to me on the Bible he didn't."

"He was seen coming out of the Greens' bedroom shortly before the murder was discovered."

"What?" Robinson stared as if utterly taken aback.

Nash nodded emphatically. He repeated his statement.

"Who saw him?" asked the boy.

"I can't tell you that at present," replied Nash. "But he was seen, and you took him down in the elevator right afterward."

There was a pause. Robinson's brows were wrinkled in anxious thought. "What time was that?" he asked suddenly.

"You ought to know that without asking."

"No, I don't, because—well, I don't know."

"Why don't you know?"

"I—don't remember." The boy stammered. That he was not entirely truthful in the statement was plain. He seemed aware that it was, and he grew extremely uncomfortable in consequence. His friend Hines had placed a heavy burden on him in binding him to secrecy.

"Now, my boy, take my advice and tell the truth," said Nash, fatherly again. "This is a very serious matter, and your friend had no right to ask you to hold back anything you know from the police. It's your duty to tell the truth. If he hasn't done any-

thing wrong, he has nothing to be afraid of, and if he has you'll only get yourself in trouble by lying to protect him."

"He swore to me he hadn't done anything wrong!" Robinson insisted earnestly. "He swore it on the Bible, and I know he wouldn't have done that if he was lying. But he said there was a reason why he couldn't tell me what happened last night. He said he had tried to do somebody a favor and had got himself in trouble by it, and he asked me not to say he had been in the hotel if anybody asked me. That was all he asked me, and I promised. And I didn't tell you. You knew it before you asked me. Didn't you?"

Nash nodded. "We know, too, that Hines gave a fictitious address as the place he was employed, and that—he has disappeared."

"Disappeared? What do you mean?"

"Just that. We don't know where he is. Do you?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"Yes, I'll swear I don't. I'll swear it on the Bible."

Nash disregarded the offer. His faith in Bible oaths was not so strong as Robinson's appeared to be.

"Any idea where he might be?" he inquired next.

Robinson shook his head. "His home's where mine is, in Buffalo. Maybe he's gone there. He doesn't know anybody in New York—leastways, I don't think he does. He's only been here a week or so."

"Know where he goes to play poker?"

"No, he never told me."

"And you're sure you don't know where he went from here?"

"No, I'll swear I don't."

"Will you swear you don't know anything about his movements last night?"

Silence.

"Will you swear that on the Bible, John?"

"No, but I can't tell you what I know."

"Because of your promise to Hines?"

"Yes. I gave him my word. I can't go back on it."

Nash got up from his chair by the bedside. "Well, I've warned you, son, that you're doing wrong to hold back anything you know about the murder last night. You're likely to get in trouble yourself if you aren't careful. You were in the hotel yourself last night when that murder was done and——"

"What!" Robinson gave a start that made the bed springs creak. "You don't think I had anything to do with it," he cried.

"Why not?" said Nash quietly, meeting the astonished blue eyes with a narrowed stare. "You say you're keeping silent to keep a promise you made to your friend, but how do we know it wasn't to shield yourself? Isn't that so, sergeant?"

"That's how it looks to me," said Smith solemnly.

Robinson looked dumbstruck. He gazed at Smith a moment, then back at Nash, as if too taken aback to utter a word.

"If you want to keep out of trouble, John, you'd better tell us the truth—the whole truth," Nash advised.

"I—I can't," faltered the boy in a hoarse whisper. "I gave my word to George. He trusts me, but I

swear I haven't done anything wrong. I'll swear it to you on my Bible."

"Appearances are against you, son," said Smith. "Better take the inspector's advice and speak out."

"I—I can't." The boy's face was white now, but resolute. "I gave my word, and George gave me his he hadn't done anything wrong. I know he hasn't; and I can't go back on him."

"That your last word?"

"I—can't tell."

"That final?"

"Are you going to—arrest me?"

"If you make it necessary."

Robinson's throat, bare above the low collar of his night shirt, worked violently, but his clear gaze did not waver. "I can't tell," he said again.

"Well, I guess we'll let you think it over for a while," said Nash. "I don't think you realize how serious this is for you."

The boy sank back with a relieved expression, and Nash proceeded to question him about the Greens, thinking to elicit something of value, but he was disappointed. The answers came willingly enough to his questions, but the elevator boy knew nothing.

It was when he was at the door, on the point of leaving, that Nash suddenly remembered the hairdresser and paused to inquire about her. Did Robinson recall seeing her at the hotel late the preceding night?

"Mrs. Gray?" The boy shook his head.

"Didn't you take her down in the elevator after the discovery of the murder?"

Another shake of the red head.

"The clerk says he talked to her at the desk afterward."

"Well, she might have walked downstairs. She does sometimes when it's only one or two flights and she's in a hurry. I guess she was at Mrs. Vandercoff's last night. That's on the third floor, and she could have walked down easy from there. Anyhow, I didn't see her. Not after the murder was discovered."

"Very well," said Nash, not much interested in the hairdresser. "Sleep on what I've said, Robinson. I'll see you later." He opened the door, then paused again. "By the way, did you notice that mark over Hines' right eye?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes," said Robinson, "he fell down the subway steps."

"When?"

"Yesterday evening."

"You noticed it last night, then?"

"Oh, yes; he got that early in the evening, he said, and I know he did." Robinson spoke eagerly. Obviously, this subject was not forbidden. "I noticed it the first time he came in last night."

"The first time he came in?" echoed Nash.

The boy's jaw sagged. It was plain he had accidentally let fall something he had not intended to tell. In his relief at being able to speak frankly, he had overstepped the bounds of his promise.

Nash repeated his words, but no response came. "What did you mean by that—the first time he came in last night?"

"I can't tell you." Robinson was white again, but resolute, and Nash did not press him. Repeating that he would drop in later, he went away.

"The boy is not mixed up in the affair except through Hines, that's clear," he observed to Smith when they were out of doors. "But he displayed unexpected nerve in standing by his friend."

"I'll say he did," agreed Smith. "Looked at first like taking candy away from a kid, but he fooled us."

"So Hines went out and came back twice during the night. And he told Robinson he had got into trouble doing some one a favor, or trying to do it."

"What do you make of that?"

"Nothing as yet. We've got to find Hines. If he isn't the murderer, he probably knows who is, and he must be in pretty bad himself to have run away."

CHAPTER XV

FRITZI FLYNN

THE machinery of the police department was put to work at once to find George Hines of Buffalo, who appeared to be the most important missing link in a chain of evidence that to its closest students seemed to lack several links. The coöperation of Buffalo was enlisted, and the commonplace histories of George Hines and his friend John Robinson were soon passing over the telegraph wires. They contained nothing that seemed to have any bearing on the problem in hand.

The two Buffalo youths had come from good homes, bore good reputations, and had gone to school together. Robinson had been in New York six months, Hines only a few weeks. The latter had left a good position with a firm of brokers, Golden & Karsch, to try his luck in New York. Since then nothing had been heard from him in his home town. His mother was dead, his father had remarried, and George had been for a year or more on his own.

While this unsatisfactory information was filtering in, Nash was busy in other directions.

One interesting fact had come to light. The pearl earring picked up by the Winsonia detective, Morrison, outside the Greens' bedroom just before the discovery of the murder, was pronounced by an expert to be an imitation.

A chief concern of the investigators was, of

course, the alibi of Harlowe Green. The Misses Phelan and young Bergson were questioned with the greatest care, and all three upheld Green's story. The four had gone to the theater, then to a cabaret where they had danced until well after midnight. Green had never at any time during the evening been absent from the sight of his three companions for more than a few minutes. On that point they were all perfectly positive. The two girls so unexpectedly dragged into the limelight of publicity, appeared so genuinely distressed by the fact, as was their mother, also, that the idea that they might be conspiring with Bergson to shield Green was untenable. The latter's alibi, Nash was compelled to admit to himself, had every mark of being authentic.

Nevertheless, the inspector paid a visit to the Palais Magnifique, at which cabaret the party had wound up its evening. "Ask Fritzi Flynn!" Green had challenged, and Nash had decided to ask her.

Her address was obtained easily enough from the cabaret manager who employed her as one of his entertainers, and at the same time Nash made inquiries about Green and his midnight party. He learned that the young millionaire—as he was supposed to be—was well known at the cabaret and was remembered as having been there the night before with several friends.

Miss Flynn's residence was conveniently located near her place of business, in a five-story house that had once been a private dwelling but had now been converted into small apartments, with an Italian restaurant occupying the first floor and basement. A series of mail boxes in the vestibule, with bells and names above them, served as the tenants' directory,

from which Nash learned that "Miss Frederica Flynn" lived on the top floor.

Without announcing himself by a ring, he went up. The odor of cigarette smoke greeted him on his arrival, and, inferring therefrom that Miss Flynn was awake for the day, he expected a prompt response to his knock. None came. He knocked again. Still no reply. He listened but could hear no sounds of any kind within. There was a second door on the floor, and he repeated the knocking there. The result was the same as before.

Then he shrugged his shoulders and smiled wisely to himself. The lady was not alone. That was the explanation—both of the silence and the cigarette smoke. Visitors were not wanted. The back room at the head of the stairs, from which the odor of tobacco issued, was doubtless her bedroom, the other her sitting room. And she was not at home to callers. He might knock his knuckles raw on her door for all she cared. Short of breaking in he would not get a word out of her.

Nothing to do but go away and come back later, he concluded, and retraced his steps down the long descent of uncarpeted steps. Then the unexpected happened. As he was lingering a moment in the vestibule, debating with himself whether or not he would question the Italians on the ground floor about the top-floor tenant, a taxicab drew up before the house, and a young woman got out. And the instant he saw her face Nash felt sure that she was the lady he wanted to see.

He had what his associates at headquarters called a "hunch" to that effect. Not that he would have admitted it. He would have explained his feeling as

the natural result of a rapid process of deduction. The girl had an Irish look. She had Irish red hair, Irish blue eyes, and an Irish nose. Moreover, she was very slender and handled herself lightly and gracefully—like a dancer, in short.

The taxicab was geting into motion, and from habit rather than deliberate intent Nash made a mental note of the number. The driver's face had already registered itself on his memory. His years of experience had made exact observation of such details automatic with him.

Then the girl entered the vestibule, and he spoke. "Miss Flynn, I believe?" he said politely.

She gave him a nod and a stare in one, then waited for him to state his business.

"I should like a few words with you," he went on. "I was given your address at the cabaret where you dance. I wish to inquire of you if you recall seeing a young man named Green there last night?"

She continued to stare as she nodded again. "Who are you?" she demanded.

"Inspector Nash, from police headquarters. Green's wife was murdered last night, and we are checking up his movements—just as a matter of form, of course; he's not under suspicion. Mrs. Green was probably killed while resisting robbery. He seems to have a good alibi, but I'm making sure of it, that's all. And he suggested that I ask you. Said you would remember seeing him at the cabaret last night."

She nodded again. "He was there. I remember talking to him."

"You haven't seen him this morning?"

"Seen him this morning?" She echoed the ques-

tion in a tone of wonder. "No. What would I be seeing him for?" she added with a shrug of indifference as she unfastened the top button of her moleskin coat.

"I thought he might have told you he had suggested my coming to see you. You didn't seem surprised to hear of the murder."

This was a deliberate shot, and it went straight home. The dancer's eyes betrayed the fact.

"It's not in the morning's papers," continued Nash quietly, "and they hadn't heard of it at the cabaret when I was there a few minutes ago. I took it for granted he had called you up."

"Well, you made a wrong guess. He didn't." She smiled a little as if she thought the joke was on him.

"How did you hear of the murder?" he asked.

"I didn't, till you told me just now," she lied calmly.

"And you were not surprised to hear of it?"

"Surprised?" She smiled. "Surprised to hear of a murder in New York? Say"—she gave a short laugh—"murders in this town don't surprise anybody but the police. The only thing that could surprise the public would be for the police to catch a murderer once. Most of us would drop dead with surprise if that ever happened."

Showing nothing of his inner annoyance, Nash smiled his genial smile into the smiling eyes of Miss Flynn. He liked spirit in a girl, and he was Irish himself. And she was pretty as well as Irish. But she was lying, for all that.

What had she been doing out so early? Any hour before noon was early for a girl to be up and

out, who had danced until three or four. Might be as well to look up that taxicab driver and see what he knew.

While thinking thus, Nash was speaking. "People are usually surprised to hear of the murder of a person they know," he said in an easy, matter-of-fact way.

"I didn't know the woman," returned Miss Flynn. "Didn't even know Green had a wife till you said she was murdered."

"Weren't you surprised to hear that, either?"

"That he had a wife?" She laughed again. "It wouldn't surprise me to hear he had six wives. He's a nut, you know—a real nut. If it wasn't for his money, he'd have been locked up long ago. Say, listen, you know what he wanted me to do once?"

She paused a moment, not for a reply to her question, but to indulge her merriment, for she went on again without receiving a response from her listener.

"It was about a year ago. He used to come every evening to the place I was dancing. Acted like he was crazy about me. Wanted me to marry him. Well, I wasn't looking for trouble, so I just laughed at him and let it go at that. What he wanted was for me to marry him under an assumed name, and what do you think the name was? Harold Gray! That's a grand disguise for Harlowe Green, isn't it? He said he had to keep the same initials because he had just had ten thousand cigarettes stamped with his monogram. Can you beat that for nutty? Harold Gray! Honest to gracious, I laughed myself sick over it! I can't think of it now without laughing."

This statement appeared to be strictly true, for she

went off into a gale of laughter that was so infectious that Nash laughed with her in spite of himself. He forgave her for her dig at the police. She was so good to look at and listen to!

"I reminded him of it last night, and it made him sore," she went on. "I called him Mr. Gray, and he got mad, so I stopped."

The mention of the name Gray had recalled to him the hairdresser of the Winsonia whom he had in mind to interview as soon as he could get around to it, and it occurred to him that a good idea might be to do so some time during the day. However, there was no hurry. He could probably see her at the Winsonia when he was there for some other purpose and to save himself a trip uptown to her home address. The chances were that she knew nothing, anyhow.

CHAPTER XVI

THE UNEXPECTED

RETURNING to headquarters, Nash first commissioned Smith to look up Miss Flynn's telephone calls and the driver of her taxicab. Not that he expected any worth-while results from either source, but they were possible channels of information, and for that reason not to be neglected. One never knew in a case of this kind from which direction the right lead might unexpectedly appear.

Information concerning the Greens continued to pour in from Kansas City. They were too rich and too prominent in the social life of their native town not to have had all their doings chronicled.

Like her son, Mrs. Amos Green had retired into the inviolable privacy of her apartment, but through her attorney she made her attitude in the case clear. She was impatient with the police for making a mystery of what, in her opinion, was no mystery. Their failure to have placed Solari under instant arrest had annoyed her greatly, and she wished the persons responsible for her annoyance to know it.

All this, of course, Wainwright made known in his own words, courteous and deprecating when he called. It was plain that he shared his wealthy client's point of view, if not her impatience and displeasure. Why there should be any hesitation or delay in putting Solari behind bars, he could not understand. While forced to admit that the case presented

apparent contradictions not yet explained he insisted that the outstanding facts, admitted by the Italian himself, were of such a character as to justify only the one course, Solari's arrest and indictment for murder.

Patiently, Nash replied that no harm was done by delay, that Solari was under constant surveillance and could not escape if he wanted to, and that had he wished to do so, he had ample opportunity on the previous night, when, instead of taking a course that led to the discovery of the murder, he might have left the hotel and been far away before the discovery was made in the ordinary course of events nine or ten hours later.

"I don't want to make a mistake, Mr. Wainwright," Nash replied pleasantly to the lawyer's protest. "I don't want to send an innocent man to jail."

"Jail would be no new experience for Solari," was the retort, "and your delay in sending him there is exposing to suspicion a man about whose innocence there can be no question."

"Meaning Green?"

"Certainly. He has an alibi which is unassailable."

"Well," said Nash, "Solari has what amounts to the same thing. Both doors of the Greens' suite were locked when the crime was discovered, and the murderer must have escaped by the transom. Solari is much too large a man to have done that."

"He may have had an accomplice."

"So may Green."

Wainwright rose. "It is useless, I see, to argue with you," he said with dignity, and he took his leave.

Left alone, Nash sat thinking. If the murder had been committed by an accomplice, either of Solari or Green, who could the accomplice have been? And what the motive? It must have been a strong one. Persons did not commit murder for others without the expectation of gain for themselves.

Green, now, might have tired of his wife and fallen in love with another woman. But why should he have murdered his wife if he could divorce her? He had no religious prohibitions against it, nor had she. A divorce would free him as effectually as death.

A sudden thought struck Nash, a memory of something Barnell had quoted Mrs. Green as saying—that she might divorce Green and marry Solari. Yet Solari had made a point of the fact that he could not have married a divorced woman because of his religion, and Mrs. Green must have known that. Then what had she meant by her remark?

Hines. There was another problem. Where did he come in? That he came in somehow, was plain; otherwise, he would not have sworn his friend Robinson to secrecy as to his comings and goings during the night. He had been out and in twice. Why?

Was he Green's accomplice? Had he taken that room across the hall to serve Green's ends? He was a small man, according to the descriptions of him.

Well, a careful watch was being kept at the Evremonde now. If Green stirred out of doors again, detectives would be at his heels.

And so, his speculations having arrived nowhere in particular, Nash took up his active investigation again. The report on the telephone calls to Miss Frederica Flynn's apartment was negative. There

had been none since the preceding evening about eight o'clock.

Nash was not disappointed. He had expected nothing of value from his inquiry into Miss Flynn's activities. And he looked for nothing more from Smith's interview with her taxicab driver than that she had been to the dressmaker or the hairdresser.

As the word "hairdresser" flitted through his mind, the inspector recalled his intention of having a little talk with the hairdresser of the Winsonia, Mrs. Gray. Might as well do it now as any other time. The afternoon papers were appearing with the news of the murder on their front pages, and the women guests of the Winsonia must have talked the Greens over pretty thoroughly during the course of the morning. It was possible something of interest might be picked up from the hairdresser.

It has been many times, and wisely, remarked that it is always the unexpected that happens. As Nash put on his hat to go to the Winsonia, he was told that Sergeant Smith wanted him on the telephone.

"Now what?" thought Nash as he took up the receiver.

Smith's voice was excited. "Could you come right up here?" he inquired, explaining that "here" was an uptown pawnshop not far from the Winsonia. He had stumbled on an interesting and highly important discovery. Concerned the murdered woman's stolen jewelry. That was all he cared to say over the telephone, but the matter was urgent.

Nash jumped into a police car and hurried to the pawnshop. Outside it, as he approached, he sighted the taxicab from which he had a short time before

seen Miss Flynn alight at her door. And on the sidewalk near it Smith was waiting.

His story was that, having located the taxicab by the license number Nash had furnished him, he had learned from its chauffeur that, shortly before ten o'clock that morning, he had been hailed on the street by a good-looking, red-haired girl who told him to drive her to a bank on Broadway in the Forties. He was sure about the time because the bank did not open its doors for three minutes after they got there, and the girl seemed very impatient. The instant the doors opened, she was inside, stayed a few minutes, then came out and gave the taxi driver the address of the pawnshop. Arriving there, she entered, remained a few minutes, and was then driven to a house with an Italian table d'hôte restaurant on the first floor, where she paid for the cab and dismissed it.

Having heard this much, Smith said, he had caused himself to be driven to the pawnshop and had questioned the keeper of it, who said that the pretty, red-haired girl who had been in his place that morning had redeemed some jewelry pawned shortly before twelve o'clock the night before by a young man. The jewelry consisted of two articles—a woman's solitaire diamond ring and a woman's wrist watch. The watch was marked with an engraved monogram, "R. D.," and the ring was marked inside: "H. G. to R. D." These details the pawnbroker had entered on his records, together with the name on the pawn ticket, which was "Green."

"Green!" exclaimed Nash in astonishment.

Smith nodded impressively. He had done a good hour's work and knew it.

"Did he describe the man?" Nash asked eagerly.

"Yes; and the description fits Green all right."

"Then that was where he went this morning, to get that girl to redeem the jewelry for him." Nash was thinking aloud, but Smith replied to the remark:

"Looks like it," he said. "But it looks, too, as if he didn't know anything about the murder till we told him."

Nash nodded silently.

"Think he'd have pawned the things under his own name if there had been anything irregular about it?"

Nash made no response to the question, but said he would go in and talk to the pawnbroker.

The latter was a middle-aged man of a strongly Hebraic cast of face, whose name had probably not always been Livingston. He answered the questions put to him without demur or hesitation, being doubtful of his facts only on one point, that of time. It was before midnight, he was sure, but just how long before he could not say with certainty. He lived in the room behind his store and had three friends, men, with him at the time, playing cards. The store was closed, but there was a light in it. The late customer had knocked, and after a short exchange of words through the door Livingston had, he said, admitted him and made the loan requested. Had he been alone, he would, of course, not have let the man in at all, but considered it safe enough even at that hour with his friends there.

The young man, continued the pawnbroker, had explained his need of money by saying that his wife had just received a telegram from Kansas City that her mother was dying and wanted to hurry to her

immediately, and there was not enough cash in the house for her railroad ticket, so she was pawning her engagement ring and her watch, and would redeem them very soon.

Livingston punctuated this statement with a slight shrug. He heard many such explanations, the shrug seemed to say, but considered them quite unimportant features of his business transactions. What difference did it make to him why his customers needed money? That was their affair, not his.

The wrist watch, he said, had been of little value, though of gold, but the diamond in the ring had been a good stone, and he had loaned two hundred dollars on it. The customer had wanted more but had taken the two hundred. He had looked to be about twenty-four and was well dressed, with a good overcoat on and a nice-looking hat. His face was not handsome, but not homely, either, and as honest looking as the general run of faces. The pawnbroker was sure he could identify the man if he should see him again, and the girl, also.

"Then," said Nash, "I shall have to ask you to leave your business long enough to do so."

At this Livingston offered a protest, but presently agreed to leave the pawnshop in the care of his clerk and accompany the detectives. Nash stopped a minute to speak to the taxicab driver, then ordered him to follow the police car, and a moment later the two machines were in motion.

The party went straight to the Evremonde. Nash was determined to penetrate the privacy of Green in one way or another and confront the young man with the pawnbroker, but the obstacle that he en-

countered in accomplishing this was altogether unexpected. Green was out.

"Out where?" Nash asked, but, when it became apparent that no one attached to the Evremonde knew, the police party did not linger. That Green really was out, Nash believed, because the detectives assigned to shadow him were nowhere in sight. Wherever Green was, they were also, so it was all right. And it was quite possible that Green was at that moment with Fritzi Flynn, gone to get from her the jewelry she had redeemed for him, and that, by hurrying to her apartment, two birds might be killed with one stone.

Arriving at the dancer's address, Nash led the way upstairs, followed by Smith and Livingston. To go noiselessly was impossible, for the stairs were bare, but Nash went a flight in advance and as quietly as he could. No cigarette smoke welcomed him now as on his former visit, but from the front room a languid dance tune, played by a phonograph, floated out.

With a warning gesture to his companions to wait on the floor below, Nash tiptoed toward the door of the front room and laid his ear against the crack. Some one was dancing to the music. The light scraping of feet on an uncarpeted floor was distinctly audible. But there were no voices. Three minutes he waited, hoping that when the music stopped some one would speak, but the music stopped only to start again, grinding out the same record.

The dancer must be practicing, and apparently she was alone. Beckoning the group waiting below to come up, Nash knocked at the door. There followed a cessation of the dancing, then of the music. Then

the voice of the girl he had talked with a couple of hours before spoke:

"Who is it?"

Without replying, Nash knocked again.

"Who is it?" Miss Flynn repeated more loudly. "What do you want?"

Nash continued to knock. The others had joined him by now, and the three men filled the narrow hall.

"Who is it?" Miss Flynn seemed to be losing her patience.

"Open the door, Miss Flynn," said Nash quietly. "It's a couple of men from police headquarters."

She came to the door at that but did not open it. "What do you want with me?" she demanded, stressing the pronoun heavily.

"Just to see you for a minute."

"About that murder again?"

"Yes."

"I don't know a thing about it. I told you so when you were here before." She had evidently recognized Nash's voice.

"I understand," was the answer. "But there are several questions I should like to ask you."

"Well, ask 'em."

"Open the door," said Nash.

"I will not!" This was emphatic. "I'm alone here, and I don't open my door to any Tom, Dick, or Harry that knocks on it."

"I must see you." Nash spoke in his most peremptory tone.

"Why?"

"Because you are suspected of having stolen prop-

erty in your possession—a wrist watch and a diamond ring."

A pause, then: "Oh, that's it, is it?" in a perfectly commonplace voice. "Now I understand. Just wait a minute."

They waited. They could hear hurrying steps in the room, and in a few seconds the girl was back at the door. To their surprise, she opened it without further protest. In one hand she had a ring and a watch and held them out to Nash.

"Is this what you mean?"

He took the things, looked at them a moment, then passed them to the pawnbroker who stood behind him. This brought the latter into the girl's range of vision, but the sight of him did not seem to make the slightest effect upon her. She looked calmly on while the jewelry was under scrutiny, and when Livingston returned the jewelry to Nash with a slow nod she spoke as composedly as before.

"What's it all about?" she asked.

"Where did you get the pawn ticket for these things, Miss Flynn?" Nash asked, disregarding her question.

"I bought it." Her tone was entirely matter-of-fact.

"When?"

"Last night."

"Where?"

"At the cabaret."

"From whom?"

"A friend of mine."

"Who?"

"I'd rather not say."

"Why not?"

"Because," she answered frankly, "I don't want to get anybody into trouble. I don't believe the things were stolen—in fact, I know they weren't—not by the person that sold me the ticket. But if you think they were stolen, you can take them. I don't want to keep anything that don't belong to me. I'm three hundred out, but what's that to a poor working girl?"

She smiled at her jest. Passing stolen property over to the police might have been an everyday affair with her. But Nash did not trust her. Now that she was smiling, he trusted her less than ever, and he meant to have a look about her rooms before he left them. Her ready surrender of the jewelry had aroused a suspicion in his mind that she was anxious to get rid of her callers, so anxious that she was willing to lose the jewelry to accomplish it.

"You won't tell who sold you the ticket?"

She shook her head. "No, I won't. I don't believe the things were stolen, and if they were you've got them back now. What more do you want?"

"I want to know who stole them."

She laughed. "Sorry, but I don't know. If I did, I'd tell you. Honest, I would." She laughed into his eyes.

"This is no joking matter, Miss Flynn. That jewelry was stolen by the person who murdered Mrs. Green," said Nash sternly.

"Well, I didn't murder her. I was at the cabaret dancing with her husband at the time. Ask him." She laughed again. "Say, listen, I'm going to have my picture in all the papers to-morrow morning, with a good story about Green and me. My publicity man is fixing it up now. I'll get my three hundred in free

advertising." She threw back her head and laughed gleefully.

This time Nash did not join her. He had acquired wisdom since their previous meeting. Very grimly he continued his questions.

"Was it Green who sold you the pawn ticket?"

"Why don't you ask him?"

"I'm going to, but first I'd like to look about here if you don't mind."

"I do mind."

She tried to close the door, but he had been too quick for her, and, once in, she was powerless to eject him. But she made the best of it, though it was evident she was annoyed.

"Say, listen, what's the idea?" she demanded smilingly. "Think I've got more stolen property concealed here?"

"If you haven't, what's the objection to my looking about?"

"Objection? Do you think any woman likes her place inspected at a moment's notice? Give me time to put things in order, and you can help yourself. Say, listen, I'll tell you what you want to do, Mr. Detective. You want to go to headquarters and get a warrant to search this apartment, and by the time you and your friend get back I'll be ready for visitors. You need a warrant, you know. Police or no police, you've got no legal right to come here and search anything."

Nash conceded the point by a nod. He was already engaged in looking about him. The room was gayly furnished, with bright-flowered chintz at the windows and on the chairs, which had been pushed against the wall to leave the floor free for dancing.

As he had surmised, she had been practicing and seemed to be alone. There were no traces of any other person's presence, but the door into the adjoining room was closed, and that struck him as worth remarking. If she were entirely alone, that door would probably be open.

"You're quite right," he said in corroboration of his nod and turned to Smith, who was standing in the doorway with Livingston, looking over his shoulder. "Sergeant, just take the car and go and get a warrant. We'll proceed properly. I'll wait here for you." Then he looked around at Miss Flynn. "Suppose we sit down," he said pleasantly.

To his surprise, she laughed at her failure to get rid of him, wheeled, and walked swiftly to the closed door of the room and opened it.

"Come on, son," she called cheerily. "Time to face the music. I've just heard your entrance cue. Come on!"

A pause followed. Smith, who had turned to go, stopped to watch developments. Then at a sound in the hall he spun round, in time to see a slim, dark-clad figure dart from the rear door of the apartment and go plunging down the stairs. Automatically, he started in pursuit. Nash rushed into the hall after him, Miss Flynn following.

"My lord, the poor nut!" she ejaculated in a tone of disgust.

Down the stairs went the fugitive, with Smith after him. Nash was about to follow but reconsidered the intention and, turning back into the room, threw up a window and shouted to the drivers of the two waiting cars to stand ready to head off the runaway. In a moment the latter appeared from the

street door of the house, but as he started down the five or six steps of the stoop he tripped and went headlong to the sidewalk. And before he could pick himself up Smith and one of the chauffeurs had him fast by the arms.

They jerked him unceremoniously to his feet, and then for the first time Nash got a sight of his face. It was strange to him.

"Who is that man?" he exclaimed to Miss Flynn who was hanging out of the other window, but before she could reply he answered himself as he caught sight of a dark mark on the man's forehead.

"It's Hines!"

CHAPTER XVII

GETTING SOMEWHERE

THE whole party, including the pawnbroker, the taxicab driver, and Miss Flynn, went to the police station, and there Hines and the dancer told their stories.

The latter was cheerful enough and on the way tried to cheer up her young friend, whom she addressed always as "son." Though in years she was very little older than he, she was plainly much older in experience and knowledge of the world, and her association with men much older than herself probably made Hines seem younger to her than he really was.

"Don't worry, son," she admonished him. "You've done nothing wrong. You've been a fool, that's all. But if they put folks in jail for that, we'd all be there. Isn't that so, inspector?"

"That darned heel," muttered Hines under his breath, but not so far under that she missed it. Apparently, he was laying all the blame for his present plight on the heel that had tripped him and cut short his escape. He seemed to have landed on his head again, as on his fall down the subway steps, for he kept raising his hand to his head as though it hurt him.

"The trouble wasn't with your heel, son, it was with your head," Miss Flynn sagely remarked. "But never mind; you'll take my advice next time, maybe.

Anyhow, don't worry, everything is going to be all right."

Hines was not so sure. He looked white and badly shaken, partly from his accident, no doubt, but partly, too, from fright. He was not a bad-looking youth, and had a hangdog expression that showed he had the decency to feel very much ashamed of himself.

He had come from his home in Buffalo, he said, to try to get a job in New York, and had gone to stay at the Winsonia because his friend John Robinson was working there, and because John was the only human being he knew in New York. He had saved a little money and had hoped to get a good job before it was gone, but he had met up with a couple of young fellows at the hotel, who had steered him to a poker game. As he was a good player, he had been tempted to try to make a little money that way until he had found employment. And that, he now realized, had been the beginning of all his trouble.

"I didn't know the Greens, either one of them," he continued. "I'd noticed them, of course, and I'd heard them rowing in their room across from mine. They were always quarreling about money. Of course, they had noticed me, too, meeting me in the hall, but I'd never spoken a word to Mrs. Green until last night, and then she spoke to me first. It was when I came in from a moving-picture show I'd been to down the street, near the hotel. I was telling John about the picture going up in the elevator, and I remember I was thinking about it when I was unlocking the door of my room, and then I

heard the door behind me open, and she came out and spoke to me.

"She asked me if I'd do her a favor, and of course I said I'd be glad to, and she asked me to step into her room a minute and I did, and she said she was in trouble and needed money. I thought she was going to try to borrow some from me, and I was just starting to tell her I was sorry I didn't have any, because I didn't, but she said she wanted me to take some jewelry to a pawnshop and get her as much on it as I could. I said it was awful late for pawnshops to be open, but she said there must be some open, that she had noticed them open after the theater at night, and she begged me to go out and look, because she said she wanted to leave New York that night and had to have some money.

"I didn't ask her what the trouble was. I didn't think it was any of my business. She didn't say where her husband was, and I didn't ask her, of course. I thought he must have left her, or something like that. She took off her wrist watch and a diamond ring she had on and asked me what I thought she could get on them. She said the ring cost five hundred dollars. And she said it was the only good piece of jewelry her husband had ever given her, that everything else was imitation. She said she thought her pearl necklace was real till that afternoon, but then her husband told her it wasn't.

"I asked her if she didn't want to go with me to hunt a pawnbroker, but she said she didn't want to go out. She had her trunk packed, and her suit case and her hat and gloves were on the bed, and she said she was just waiting for money so she

could leave New York on the first train she could get. She said her husband had promised to bring her some money and hadn't done it. She said he was trying to starve her into getting a divorce. But she said she was going to make his mother give her a million dollars before she'd go to Reno. She said she could make her do it, too, because she knew something that they'd die rather than have get out.

"She didn't say what it was, and I didn't ask. I didn't want to mix up in anything like that. But I couldn't refuse to do what she asked me to, so I went out and hunted around for about twenty minutes, and then I found a pawnbroker's that was closed, but there was a light in it and—but you know all about that."

Hines paused for a moment, then went on more slowly, his brows contracted, a strained look about his young eyes. His listeners unconsciously leaned forward a little.

"I took the money back to the hotel to give to her, and I noticed as I passed her sitting room that the light was out. I didn't think anything of that, but I remember noticing it, because that was the room I was going to knock at, and there had been a light in it when I went out. But there was a light in her other room, and so I knocked there. But there wasn't any answer, so I knocked again, two or three times—not very loud, because it was nearly twelve o'clock, and I didn't want to disturb anybody. But I couldn't get any answer at all. I didn't know what to think. It seemed awfully queer, and then I thought maybe she had gone downstairs to the office for something. It just happened I hadn't

come through the office. I had come in the side door to the elevator, I thought maybe she was downstairs in the office, waiting there for me to come back with the money.

"I started to go downstairs and see, and then I thought I'd just try the door first, because the room was lighted, and maybe if she had left for good she had left the door unlocked, and it was unlocked and I opened it to look in and——"

Hines had hastened his narrative suddenly, as if anxious to get it over, but he stopped now for a moment for breath. His face worked a little, and he had to steady himself before he could go on.

"She was on the floor with blood on the front of her dress and a bloody knife lying by her right hand. I couldn't move I was so taken by surprise. I thought, of course, she had killed herself—nothing else occurred to me—and I watched her a minute to see if she was still breathing—I mean if her chest moved. And it didn't, and her eyes were staring horribly. It made me feel sick, and I closed the door and went into my room a minute, wondering what I'd better do. I couldn't tell anybody what had happened without telling about her asking me to pawn her jewelry, and I didn't like to do that. I knew people would think it was awfully queer for her to have given her jewelry to a perfect stranger to pawn for her, because I thought it was queer myself, and I didn't like to repeat what she had said about her husband and his mother. I didn't want to mix up in the thing at all.

"But there was the money. I didn't know what to do about that. It wasn't mine, of course, and—I never meant to keep it, I swear that." He lowered

his eyes in shame as he went on: "But I was broke, and she was dead; I couldn't give her the money, and I didn't see what harm it would do her or anybody for me to use it. That's all I meant to do, I swear—just use it. I thought I could win some with it at poker, and then I would go to her husband and tell him privately what had happened and give him the money and the pawn ticket. But everything turned out different from what I expected."

He drew another labored breath and went on heavily, his eyes still downcast. "I won at first, that was the trouble. I won big, and I lost my head and kept on, and then I began to lose, and I couldn't break my luck. I thought I'd stop when I got down to the two hundred—that wasn't mine—but I—couldn't, somehow. I kept thinking maybe my luck would turn. And I did win a little, but I'd always lose it again, and when the game broke up this morning I had only about fifty dollars left.

"But I didn't worry so awful much—then. I thought I could borrow the money, or maybe if I told Mr. Green the truth he'd let me return the money later when I had it. You see, I thought she had killed herself. I never thought anything else. It wasn't till I got back to the hotel and that Detective Morrison told me she'd been murdered that I had any idea of such a thing. Then I was scared. I saw I was in bad, because he said she had been robbed, and I knew if they found her things that I had pawned and the pawnbroker identified me it would look bad for me. And then some other detectives started asking me questions about where I'd

been and where I worked, and I was so scared I hardly knew what I said.

"First thing I thought of was to see John Robinson—he had left when I got back this morning to the hotel—so I went to his boarding house and asked him not to tell about my being in the hotel during the night, and then I went down to Miss Flynn's to try to borrow enough money to get the things out of pawn before the police started looking for them. I'd met Miss Flynn several times at the cabaret where she dances, and she had been awfully nice to me, and she said right away that I ought to go to the police and tell the truth, but I thought I could fix things so I'd never have to tell, so she said she's get the things out for me, and she did. And I've been down at her apartment ever since. And—that's all."

"And it's all true, every word of it," declared Miss Flynn stoutly. "I'd stake my life on it. George is as good a boy as ever lived. I knew that the first time I ever saw him, and, believe me, I'm a judge. I know the good ones from the bad ones. He did wrong to use the money, and he was foolish not to tell the truth right off the reel, and I was foolish not to make him. But we've told it now, anyhow."

"Have you anything to add to his story, Miss Flynn?" Nash inquired.

"Not a thing. What he has told you is exactly what he told me this morning."

"Then," said Nash, "I should like to ask him some questions."

Hines looked up, waiting dumbly.

"Why did you give the name Green when you pawned the jewelry?"

"Why, because I was doing it for Mrs. Green, that's all."

"And why did you tell the story about your wife's mother being sick and so forth?"

"Well, I had to say something. I was afraid the pawnbroker might think I had stolen the things."

"I see. And now about—the murder." Nash paused and let his glance rest silently on the young man's face before he went on. "You say there was no light in the sitting room when you discovered Mrs. Green's dead body, but there was a light in the bedroom?"

"Yes."

"You are quite sure of that?"

"Yes."

"And the bedroom door was unlocked?"

"Yes. When I turned the knob, the door opened."

"How about the sitting-room door?"

"I don't know. I didn't try it."

"Was there a key in the bedroom door—on either side?"

"I don't know. I didn't notice."

"Did you go into the sitting room?"

"No."

"At any time?"

"No."

"You didn't look about the rooms to make sure no one was in them?"

Hines stared as if atonished by the question. "I never thought of such a thing," he answered. "I never moved from the door. When I saw the body

on the floor, I just stood still where I was. I couldn't move."

"Then some one may have been in the sitting room at that time?"

"I—suppose so. I never thought of that."

"Did you meet any one in the hall near the Greens' rooms at any time last night?"

"I don't remember seeing any one. I know I didn't after I found Mrs. Green dead."

"Did you notice a man walking before you down the hall when you went out to pawn the jewelry, after you had been in Mrs. Green's room talking to her?"

Hines thought a moment. "I believe I did," he said, "a dark-haired man with big shoulders. Yes, I remember now, he walked down the hall in front of me and went around on the other side, and I stopped at the elevator."

Nash paused again, then shifted to another phase of the case. "You took it for granted, you say, that Mrs. Green had killed herself. Why did you think so?"

"Why? Because she seemed so unhappy and worried and I never thought of her being murdered. Besides, there was the knife on the floor right near her hand."

"Did you notice any blood on the carpet—under her shoulders?"

Hines shook his head. "I didn't go near enough for that."

"Did you notice whether the transom over the door you stood in was open or closed?"

"No."

"Did you return to the room after you left it that time?"

"Oh, no. One reason why I went out and stayed out all night was because I couldn't bear to go back to my room."

"I see." Nash nodded as though the feeling struck him as very natural. "And now about what Mrs. Green told you about her husband. Have you told me everything she said about him and his mother?"

"Yes, everything."

"She didn't tell you what it was she knew that the Greens would not wish to have known?"

"Oh, no, of course not."

"Have you any idea what she meant?"

"No. I thought maybe she was just talking."

"She said Mrs. Green's mother would pay her a million dollars rather than have what she knew come out?"

"Yes, that's what she said, but I didn't take much stock in talk like that."

"What did she and her husband quarrel about beside money?"

"Nothing, so far as I know. It was always money I heard her rowing him about. Telling him she was tired of the way she was living, cooped up in a third-rate hotel, and things like that."

"You never heard her quarreling with him about other women?"

"No, never about that sort of thing. It was always money—as far as I could make out. I got the idea she was sort of hard to get along with—for anybody, I mean. I heard her fussing at the maid when she was in her room in the morning cleaning up, and once I heard her having a fuss with that

hairdresser, or manicure, or whatever she is that's around the hotel all the time. I forget her name."

Nash leaned forward involuntarily as he said: "Mrs. Gray?"

"Yes, Mrs. Gray."

"Do you know Mrs. Gray?"

"Know her? No. I've seen her around a lot, and my friend Jack Robinson told me that was her name."

"And you heard her having a fuss with Mrs. Green? When?"

"Why, the other day—— No, it was yesterday—yesterday afternoon."

"At what time?"

"I don't know exactly. Must have been soon after lunch, because I went downtown soon after lunch and didn't get back till late."

"What was the quarrel about?"

"About? Oh, I don't know. I didn't pay any attention to it. I just heard their voices and could tell they were having some sort of row. It didn't last long, though, I remember."

"You know Mrs. Gray's voice when you hear it?"

"Yes, I've heard her talking in the elevator several times."

"And you are positive it was she you heard in Mrs. Green's room yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Did you see her in the hotel last night?"

"Last night? No, I'm sure I didn't."

"Very well," said Nash. "That will do for the present. I'll have you taken to the Winsonia, and you will stay there under close watch. If you give us any trouble, you'll be locked up."

"He won't give you any more trouble, inspector," Miss Flynn promised when Hines said nothing. "Cheer up, son," she added to her young protégé. "You've got the thing off your chest, anyhow, and there's nothing to worry about."

When they had gone, Smith remarked that the youth had given them something to think about. If his report of the murdered woman's remarks were true, Green had a motive for wishing his wife dead.

"I've always suspected as much," said Nash. "Now it appears he was lying about her having consented to a divorce, and about the value of her jewelry. We're getting somewhere at last, sergeant —we're getting somewhere." Nash rubbed his hands together; his eyes shone.

"Where?" asked Smith in wonder.

"Well, we've got as far as Mrs. Gray. That's somewhere, I should say. She has been popping up every little while like a Jack in a box, and I didn't have the wit to notice her especially, but we'll notice her now. Young Hines has let in daylight."

Smith was dumb for a moment. Day had not dawned for him. "What puzzles me," he said, "is that bedroom being lighted and the door being unlocked after the murder was committed—after it."

Nash smiled. "It was through that unlocked door, sergeant," he replied, "that the daylight came in."

CHAPTER XVIII

UNTRUTHFUL MRS. GRAY

FOLLOWING the light he had received from Hines, Inspector Nash made the seeing of Mrs. Gray the immediate business of his life. Learning that she was not at the Winsonia when he called there, he went to her home address and found it to be an old-fashioned "walk-up" apartment house in a poor but respectable neighborhood. In the vestibule was a row of bells, speaking tubes, and mail boxes, and the house was provided with a mechanism for releasing the lock of the street door by pressing electric buttons in the apartments, a device apparently for night use only, as the street door at the time was wide open.

Glancing along the mail boxes, he found the name he sought. In fact, he found more than he sought, for on the engraved visiting card that had been cut down and slipped into the slide provided for the purpose on the mail box was the hairdresser's official title, "Mrs. Harold Gray."

Nash stared at it, fascinated. Coincidence? Possibly. But possibly not. And if not, then what?

"We're getting somewhere now," he assured himself and pressed the button below the name.

No answering click came from the lock, and, after ringing once more with the same result, he went upstairs. On the second floor he found a door with

Mrs. Harold Gray's card above a bell. He rang the bell. No answer.

He sought out the janitor and found the janitor's wife, who said he could leave a message for Mrs. Gray with her. He thanked her and said he would call again.

"Well, you're not likely to find her in no time," he was told curtly. "She's a hard-working woman, out early and out late, according to when she's wanted. If you've got anything to leave, you better leave it with me, and she'll attend to it."

He was being mistaken for a bill collector, he saw, and embraced his opportunity to ask a few questions in that character.

"Where's her husband working?"

"She's a widow, with nobody to do for her but herself."

"Widow, eh?" He looked skeptical. "Sure she's not divorced?"

"Her religion wouldn't allow it," retorted the janitor's wife in a tone of finality. "If you want to leave anything, I'll give it to her."

"Isn't there anybody upstairs I can leave it with?"

"No. She rents rooms to young ladies that works all day, but they're all out, too. You can put what you've got under the door, or you can give it to me."

There the conversation ended. It was useless, he knew, to try to find out if Mrs. Gray had had an early caller that morning. The woman wouldn't know, probably, and wouldn't tell if she did. Besides, at that stage he did not wish to disturb her impression that he was a collector, for his call would, of course, be reported.

Returning to the Winsonia, he inquired again

for Mrs. Gray and, failing still to find her there, went up for a chat with one of her customers, Mrs. Vandercoff. According to Herbert Rider, the elevator boy, it was at Mrs. Vandercoff's that Mrs. Gray had probably been at the time of the murder.

Mrs. Vandercoff was in. She was resting, she said, for the evening, but graciously permitted him to disturb her. He thanked her, explaining that he thought she might possibly be able to give him some information about Mrs. Green. Women, he knew, sometimes told each other their troubles.

"But I didn't know the woman!" Mrs. Vandercoff exclaimed. "I knew her by sight, of course—every one did. But I'm sure none of the ladies in the hotel had anything to do with her. She was very ordinary, you know. You could tell that by looking at her. I said all along that her husband had married beneath him, and I hadn't the remotest idea then who he was." She fixed a pair of round blue eyes on Nash.

"I understand," he replied, "that the hairdresser, Mrs. Gray, was here with you at the time of the murder."

"She was. She was giving me a massage. You see"—Mrs. Vandercoff paused to sigh—"I am a great sufferer from insomnia. Last night I went to the theater, so I had it very late, of course, and that's how Mrs. Gray happened to be here."

"What time did she leave?"

"Why, let me see." The lady thought a moment. Then it seemed to strike her as an odd question. "Why do you ask?" she said.

"I thought that, going through the halls, she might have encountered somebody connected with the affair.

We can't neglect any possible clew in this sort of case, you know."

Mrs. Vandercoff looked impressed. "Of course not," she agreed. "But the Greens' rooms are on the ninth floor, and this is the third. Mrs. Gray would not have been likely to meet anybody coming from there, if that's what you mean."

"She might, if they went down the stairs, and if she did. The elevator boy says he didn't take her down in the elevator, so she must have walked down. He says she does sometimes."

"I see. I never thought of that. I didn't suppose anybody ever used the stairs except in case of fire. I never do. But I can see that a murderer probably would have, being in a hurry to escape. Tell me, who do the police think he was?"

"We don't know yet. That's why I'm here. I thought you might help us out. Mrs. Gray, I understand, washed Mrs. Green's hair yesterday afternoon. Did she say anything about her to you?"

Mrs. Vandercoff shook her blond head. "Not a word. But I shouldn't be surprised if Mrs. Green had told her things. A woman like her would be just the sort to tell her private affairs to strangers. If you'd like me to, I'll ask Mrs. Gray to-night."

"Is she coming here to-night?"

"Yes, at ten o'clock."

"Then I won't trouble you. I'll try to see her myself."

But Nash did not have to wait until night to see Mrs. Gray. Chance arranged it otherwise. The hairdresser appeared at the Winsonia half an hour later, just as he was on the point of leaving.

In the meantime, however, there had been develop-

ments in another direction. In attempting to trace Mrs. Green's movements on the preceding afternoon, two very interesting facts had come to light.

The woman's only appearance downstairs on the closing day of her life had been made, it was established, at luncheon, which she had eaten with her husband. After luncheon he had gone out, and she had returned to her room. The elevator boy recalled distinctly taking her up, because he had taken up Mrs. Gray at the same time.

Whether or not Mrs. Gray had carried out the intention attributed to her by the elevator boy, of going to Mrs. Green's room, was doubtful, but it was certain that two other persons had done so a very short time after luncheon—one an elderly man who was announced as Mr. Wainwright, the other a young man who did not give his name, but told the telephone operator he was an old friend and exchanged a few remarks with Mrs. Green, which resulted in his going up to see her.

The young man was described by the operator and identified by Nash very easily as Barnell, Mrs. Green's cousin. That he had announced himself as an old friend rather than a relative, was doubtless out of consideration for her, since, according to his own admission, she had not been proud of the connection. Wainwright's call, of course, required no explaining.

That Green had also spent some time with his wife during the afternoon, he had himself stated. But no one at the hotel recalled seeing him come in or go out, so that the time of his leaving could not be determined. There had been no other visitors and no telephone calls.

About seven o'clock Mrs. Green had telephoned down for her dinner to be sent up, ordering the table d'hôte dinner which the hotel served in addition to its à la carte menu. The waiter who took it up went, he said, to her bedroom door as he was in the habit of doing when he took up her breakfast. It was, he added, unusual for her to have dinner sent up, and he thought she was probably ill.

He knocked at the door, and she said "Who is it?" And when he told her, she said for him to come in. "The door is locked, ma'am," he answered, and she said: "Wait a minute," and came to the door to open it. Then she said: "I can't open it. My husband's got the key. You'll have to go to the other door."

He went to the other door, which she unlocked to let him in.

This statement of the waiter gave Nash food for thought. The question of the bedroom-door key began to assume unexpected importance. He remembered distinctly asking Green, when questioning him at the Evremonde that morning, if he had a key to his rooms at the Winsonia, and that he said no, adding that of course he had not as he was leaving the place for good.

What had he done with his key? His wife evidently supposed him to have one, the key to the bedroom door.

Green, then, had had a key; that much was certain. And according to the waiter's testimony, which might reasonably be accepted as disinterested, his wife supposed him still to have one at seven o'clock. If he did not have it, what had he done with it?

He claimed not to have returned to the Winsonia after leaving there in the afternoon.

Then how had the bedroom-door key got back into the bedroom lock? It was there when the murder was discovered. But who had put it there? If not Green, then some one to whom he had given it. That seemed the only possible conclusion.

But wait. Nash caught himself up suddenly. That door, according to Hines, had been unlocked when he returned to the Winsonia the first time, before he went out to hunt a pawnbroker. It was from that door, he claimed, that Mrs. Green had appeared and spoken to him while he was unlocking his own door just across from it. How had it got unlocked? She had not been able to unlock it for the waiter. Had she found the key lying somewhere in the room, where Green had left it? That, of course, was possible, and indeed seemed probable, for she had told Hines that she had been expecting her husband to bring her some money, and he had not done so. Then it was not he who had unlocked the door. She must have come upon the key by chance somewhere in the room while packing her trunk. That was the simplest and most likely explanation, and probably the true one.

But, likely and simple though the explanation was, Nash learned presently that it was not the true one. He asked that the women servants of the hotel who had at any time come into contact with Mrs. Green be sent to him, and three came; two young women and one of middle age. The younger women were chambermaids who had attended to the Greens' rooms. Both were reluctant to talk about the dead

woman, for the reason that she was dead and they had nothing good to say of her.

But it came out after a little persistent questioning by Nash that one of them had asked to be transferred to a different floor, when a vacancy occurred, in order to avoid "that woman in 919." She was, they said, "mean," by which they appeared to signify that she was irritable, fault-finding, and domineering. There was no pleasing her, it seemed, and the maids agreed that she was probably unaccustomed to servants, and under the impression that they were slaves. They had both heard her wrangling with her husband about money, and had gathered that money was scarce with the pair. That was all they knew.

The older woman, stout and friendly, had, only by accident, she said, seen and spoken to Mrs. Green the evening before. The laundry had been late in coming back, and, the maids being gone, she had herself taken the evening towels around.

"What time was that?" Nash questioned.

"Well, now," said Mrs. Johnson pleasantly, "it must have been after eight when I got to the ninth floor."

"After eight?"

"It must have been. I knocked at 917, happening to come to it before I did to her other door, and she asks me who was it, and I says it was the maid with the towels, and she says well I'd have to come to the other door because that one was locked and her husband had the key to it and he was out. And I says well I had a key, and I unlocked the door and went in and put the towels in the bathroom. She says I was very late, and I says well it

couldn't be helped and I hoped it hadn't put her out any, and she didn't answer me.

"I noticed she was packed up, and I says: 'Going away?' I didn't mean any harm. I just spoke to be friendly. But she didn't like it and says very sharp it was none of my business. Well, I see she was no lady, so I says no more. But when I was going out the door she says to me to lock the door again, but when I was doing it she says to wait a minute, and she came over and tried the bolt, and when it worked all right she says for me to leave the door unlocked, because she could bolt it. So I did, and then I went on about my business, and that's all I ever saw of the poor creature."

The fact of the door being unlocked when Hines came in the first time was now explained. But how it had been locked again and the key put into it, remained as much of a mystery as ever. And Nash harked back to his original idea that, since Green had had the key, it must have been through his agency that it got back into the door. If Mrs. Green had collected her belongings and finished packing without discovering the key about the room, there seemed little possibility that she had found it afterward.

Moreover, there was ample evidence now that she would not have opened her door to any one who merely knocked at it. Yet she must have opened it to admit her murderer. Even with a key, no one could have entered that bolted door. She had opened it herself; after being satisfied as to the identity of the person outside; so much was certain. Then the murderer must be some one she knew and trusted. Not Solari. There was no doubt that fear

of him hastened her preparations to leave the Winsonia. Her statement to Barnell that she did not fear the Italian was probably sheer bluff.

To be sure, she might have opened the door without first inquiring who was there, thinking it was Hines, whom she was expecting, because it was while he was out looking for a pawnshop that she had been murdered. She might carelessly have taken it for granted when she heard a knock that it was he.

But for Green's alibi, Nash would not have entertained a doubt of his guilt. Everything was against him. He had lied in saying his wife had agreed to divorce him, and that she was not expecting him to return. He had lied about the value of her jewelry. His ready acceptance of the burglary theory was a lie. Then there was the suspicious fact of his refusing to view her dead body, of his refusing to tell where he had gone that morning after being informed of the murder, of his refusing to be questioned again. On the strength of his alibi, he defied the police. And his mother clamored for the arrest of Solari.

But, whoever the person was that Mrs. Green had opened her door to, it was certainly not the Italian, unless she had done it unintentionally. That might have happened, and he might be her murderer—it was not impossible. But it was not Solari who had put the key in the bedroom door.

In the back of the inspector's mind an idea, that had come like a flash of light when listening to Hines' story, still glowed faintly. Daylight, he had called it, but sober reflection had caused him to think less highly of it. Nevertheless, though he did not speak of it to any one, he did not dis-

card the idea, startling though it was. But, because it startled even him, he kept it to himself.

Having finished his examination of the hotel employees, Nash was on the point of leaving the Winsonia. Then it was that he was informed Mrs. Gray had come in and had been told he wanted to speak to her.

He found her waiting in the lounge by a group of artificial palms, seated and apparently absorbed in a magazine. As he approached, she looked up, and rose.

"You're the detective that wants to speak to me, I suppose?" she said, her dark eyes lifted inquiringly to his. "I'm Mrs. Gray."

"I just wanted to ask you a few questions," he returned.

She glanced across the lounge at the office clock. "I hope you won't keep me long," she said. "I have an appointment, and you know my time is money to me."

"I'll not keep you longer than is necessary," he promised, rather favorably impressed by her business-like manner and speech, as well as by her appearance. While young and good looking, she was very simply dressed, very appropriately for one in her walk in life, and there seemed to be no nonsense about her. He had to admit to himself that she looked like an intelligent, honest, self-respecting young woman who was going about the business of earning her living without making a fuss over it.

"You were in the hotel last night at the time of the murder, I believe?" he began.

"Yes, it seems I was," she answered. "Mr. Evans, the night clerk, told me about it as I was leaving.

He thought I might know the woman, that she might be a client of mine. But she wasn't. I had seen her, but I had never spoken to her. And I had never seen her but once. I went up in the elevator yesterday afternoon with her and asked the elevator boy who she was. I thought she had just come to the hotel, and I might get her for a client. He told me her name and the number of her room, and I remembered the number. But I never can remember names, and, when Mr. Evans said last night that Mrs. Green had committed suicide, I didn't connect it with the woman I had seen on the elevator. They didn't know then, I believe, that she had been murdered."

"No, it was mistaken for suicide at first."

"The elevator boy seems to think that you went to Mrs. Green's room after speaking to him about her," he said.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Gray in a matter-of-fact tone, "I had no such intention. I had an appointment at the time and merely asked about her, thinking it mightn't do any harm to stop there some day and see her. That was all."

So calmly was this said that, but for evidence to the contrary, Nash would have been inclined to believe her. But, convinced as he was that she was lying, he found something almost uncanny in her composure.

There followed a few questions about the time she had left the hotel, and how she had come downstairs. She had walked down the two flights from Mrs. Vandercoff's floor, she said, and as for the time she did not know exactly, but perhaps Mr. Evans did.

Nash let her go then. He did not wish her to suspect that she was an object of interest to him and so be put on her guard. Better to leave her feeling free to come and go as she liked.

At headquarters he heard a report on Green, whose movements during his second absence from the Evremonde had been followed by detectives. Burnham, one of the men detailed to watch him, reported that Green had gone to a barber's for a hair cut, and to a tailor's to have a mourning band sewed on his sleeve. Then he had gone back to his room and remained.

Nothing very interesting in that, but one item of interest was included in the report. Among Green's callers, none of whom he had received, was a young woman who had sent up a note to him. The description of her fitted Mrs. Gray so neatly that Nash felt sure it must have been she. She had not gone upstairs, had apparently not wished to go. She had merely sent up a note and gone her way again.

"Burnham," said Nash, "we've got to get closer to Green."

Burnham shook his head doubtfully. "Only one way, then, and it won't be easy," he said. "We're fighting money. The Greens have every employee of the place fixed. I felt them out. They won't tell a thing. Wainwright's fixed them—solid. They're protecting the Greens' privacy, they say. We'd have the management against us, too, if we tried to get inside with their help. We're law and order, but the Greens are money. And there you are."

"We've got to get inside," said Nash.

"All right," said Burnham. "Leave it to me."

CHAPTER XIX

BURNHAM GETS RESULTS

THE funeral of young Mrs. Green was held on the following morning, the second day after her murder. The body was not taken to Kansas City to be interred in the family burial plot beside the hallowed remains of John Harlowe, the founder of the family fortune. It was laid to rest in a New York cemetery, alone. Flowers were abundant, but mourners were few. Mrs. Amos Green was among those present, supported by several loyal friends and her attorney, Mr. Wainwright. Green attended with his friend Fred Bergson for support, and Barnell, the dead woman's cousin, was there alone. And, of course, there were the reporters.

Meanwhile, at the Evremonde the funeral was being put to excellent use by Burnham. Not that he was at the hotel in person. But his agents were. Unfortunately, neither he nor Nash nor Smith, being known at the Evremonde, dared show themselves. But the afternoon before, not long after Nash had "left it" to Burnham, two young men, well dressed and in appearance and manner up to the Evremonde standard, had appeared there with suit cases and applied for a suite. They were shown several and took the one directly under that occupied by Harlowe Green. In half an hour their trunks arrived. And that was all the Evremonde ever knew about

them. They knew their names, of course—or thought they did.

What was in the trunks of these new guests, or what went on in their rooms, the hotel certainly did not know. Several callers dropped in during the afternoon and evening and again the next morning, after the occupant of the rooms above had left to attend his wife's funeral. And after the widower had returned to his rooms a typewriter might have been heard in the rooms below by any passer-by in the hall outside.

And very soon afterward Burnham brought Nash a typewritten document that read as follows:

12:44 Green comes in with man he calls Fred.

Green—Thank the Lord, it's over. I've got a terrible headache.

Fred—Better take something for it.

Green—That's no good. It's nerves.

Fred—What do you do for it?

Green—Massage. Know anybody I can get?

Fred—No. They might downstairs. Shall I ask?

Green—No, never mind. Guess it'll pass off. Lord, I wish I could get away from New York.

Fred—Why don't you, then?

Green—How can I? (Pause.) I'll bet they never arrest that dago.

Fred—It's an outrage.

Green—That's the worst of having money. You've got everybody down on you. They'd arrest me quick enough, if they had any excuse.

Fred—Think there can be any doubt Solari did it?

Green—Of course not. He swore he'd kill her, didn't he? And he was there, wasn't he? Wainwright's going to the district attorney if something doesn't happen soon.

Fred—You mean if they don't arrest somebody?

Green—I mean if they don't arrest Solari. Who else could they arrest? It's that inspector that's making all the trouble. Wainwright says so. Say, did you see Flynn last night?

Fred—Yes.

Green—What did she say? Had they been to see her?

Fred—Yes, she said they had.

Green—Nash, I'll bet. What did he say?

Fred—She just said he asked if she had seen you at the cabaret night before last. She told him she danced with you.

Green—What else did he ask her?

Fred—Nothing, she said. I only got a minute alone with her. Looked to me as if she didn't want to talk to me.

Green—Guess you imagined it. She's all right. Lord, but my head aches! Wish you would call down and ask them if they can recommend somebody to—— No, wait a minute. Believe I've got an address of one. Yes, I have. Say, will you call up the number for me?

Fred—What is it?

Green—Why, it's—never mind. Guess I won't. It'll wear off—if I could sleep.

Fred—Want me to go?

Green—Well, I'm pretty poor company, I

guess. And maybe I ought to try to sleep. Come in this evening if you can. I'll be feeling better then, I guess. Much obliged for your going along this morning.

Fred—Oh, that's all right. Well, so long. See you to-night.

Green—So long. (Door slams. Pause for three minutes.) Hello. Get me Riverside 6824. (Pause.) That Riverside 6824? Mrs. Gray there? Yes, Gray. (Pause.) I'm sure she's in; she's expecting a call. (Pause.) Thanks. (Longer pause.) Hello. Can you come at two? (Pause.) Yes, this afternoon. (Pause.) Here! (Pause.) I can't. I'll explain when I see you. (Pause.) Good-by!

"Two o'clock, eh?" Nash looked at his watch, then at Burnham, then ran his eye once more over the papers in his hand. "You have a second stenographer on, of course? It takes two records for court evidence, you know."

"I know," said Burnham. "I've got two on and two more ready to relieve them if necessary."

"I'm hoping it won't be," replied Nash. "Things are falling into line now, developing just as I expected. I thought those two would get together before long. She's his wife; I'm sure of it. I've had her marriage record looked up. Her name was Nora Murray, and she married Harold Gray two years ago in New York. And Gray's signature on the record is as much like Green's signature on the Winsonia register as two different names can be. The Hs and Gs are identical. And there's been

no divorce, because she has religious scruples against it."

"I see," said Burnham. "That's good evidence."

"He had two wives. That's what the fuss was about between the two women that Hines overheard. Mrs. Gray probably told Mrs. Green she wasn't legally married, and Mrs. Green saw what that let Green in for. That's what she meant when she told Hines she knew something that Green's mother wouldn't have get out for a million dollars. She was blackmailing him. And, if my guess is right, that is why she's dead."

"Where do you think the other wife comes in?" Burnham asked.

Nash shook his head. "I know she comes in, that's all."

"Think he went up to see her yesterday morning early?"

"Don't know. Haven't been able to find out. I expect to know that and a good deal more after their meeting at two o'clock. See that I get the dictograph records as soon as possible."

"I'll do that," and Burnham went off.

Where did the other wife come in? That question had been uppermost in Nash's mind ever since he had discovered that there was another wife. Was it possible she had been Green's accomplice, that she had been the murderer of his other wife? Such a theory seemed incredible. What motive had she? She was the legal wife. Her position was not in danger.

But she had been at the Winsonia at the time of the murder, and she was small enough to have escaped by the transom—if any one had escaped in

that way. With a plausible pretext she might have been admitted by Mrs. Green, and she might have had Green's key. In fact, she was the only suspect so far who had satisfied all the conditions of the case.

Still, it seemed incredible that a woman was the murderer, and Nash dismissed the idea from his mind. No use speculating, anyhow, he thought. He would soon have facts.

And facts he did have soon, but not at all what he expected. Burnham came back at about two forty-five, bringing with him one of the young men who had registered at the Evremonde.

"I've brought Gotthold with me," he said. "Didn't let him take the time to type out his notes. He can read them, he says, and I thought the sooner you heard them the better."

Nash nodded. "Sit down," he said, "and read."

Gotthold was a dark-eyed, keen-faced young man in his twenties. He sat down at once in the chair Nash indicated and took out a stenographic notebook and opened it. His expression was intensely serious, and as he turned the leaves of his notebook with a quick hand the sound of the paper was all that broke the stillness of the room.

Suddenly his hand paused; he had found the place he sought; he ran his eye down the page, then looked up at Nash.

"You know about the appointment for two o'clock?" he asked.

Nash nodded.

"She came on time and was announced by telephone from downstairs, in the usual way. He told them to let her come up. Then there was a wait,

of course. I could hear him walking about the room. Then I heard a knock and the door opening. Then the door closed. Then another wait. Then——"

Gotthold had given the preliminary details rapidly in a businesslike tone, as if eager to get them out of the way. Now as he began to read from his stenographic record he spoke more slowly.

"She: 'Well?'

"He: 'I got your note yesterday, but I couldn't see you till to-day—after the funeral. Somebody was always coming in about something."

"She: 'Why couldn't you meet me somewhere else, as I suggested?'

"He: 'Because—because newspaper reporters are always hanging around here, and I was afraid they might follow me. It's all right here. Nobody knows you here, do they?'

"She: 'I don't know.'

"He: 'It's all right, anyhow. I told them I was expecting a masseuse to give me a treatment for headache.'

"She: 'Still have headaches, do you?'

"He: 'Yes, I still have them.' (Pause.) 'I thought you were dead, Nora.'

"She: 'Did you?' "

Gotthold glanced up for an instant. "You could tell from her tone she didn't believe him. Her voice was as hard as nails. And his sounded nervous from the start. I haven't indicated it everywhere, but he stammered quite a lot when he talked."

Nash nodded. "Go on," he said.

Gotthold read on:

"He: 'I swear I did! Think I'd have got married again if I hadn't?'

"She: 'I don't know what you'd do. But I want to tell you right now that as soon as this is all over I want you to get a divorce. You can go out West and get it for desertion. I won't stop you. You won't have to murder me to get rid of me.'

"He: 'What do you mean? Don't say things like that. It's no joke.'

"She: 'I wasn't joking.'

"He: 'Well, don't say things like that, I tell you. Come away from the door. Sit down over here. There might be somebody passing in the hall and hear you. So be careful what you say, that's all.'

"Sounds of walking and of the door opening and closing."

"He must have looked out to make sure no one was in the hall," Burnham interpreted, and Nash gave his little nod.

Gotthold continued:

"He: 'I guess you saw my picture in the paper, didn't you?'

"She: 'No.'

"He: 'Then how did you—find me?'

"She: 'I saw you at the Winsonia—with her.'

"He: 'When?'

"She: 'Day before yesterday. I saw you come out of the restaurant after lunch and walk through the lounge to the door. I thought it was you the minute I saw you, but I wasn't sure, so I stood behind some palms and heard you talking when you went by, and I was sure when I heard your voice. You went out, and she went upstairs, and I got on the elevator with her. When she got off, I asked the

elevator boy who she was, and he told me. He said her name was Green and she was married, but I wasn't sure yet that you were the man she was married to, though from your conversation with her it sounded like it—all about money. So I went to her room and knocked on the door, and she engaged me to give her a facial massage. I wanted a chance to look around and pump her. I wanted to know just what was what.'

"He: 'I see now! You told her you were my wife. I wondered how she found out I'd been married before.'

"She: 'No, I didn't tell her I was your wife. But I told her she wasn't. I saw your brushes and things on the chiffonier, and so I knew you were the man she called her husband, but I thought you were just living with her. I didn't think you'd have been fool enough to commit bigamy. I thought you were just living with her, and I wasn't going to tell her anything, but she was impertinent to me, and I lost my temper and let her have the truth; that she wasn't legally married. I told her I wasn't going to make any trouble for her, and that your wife wouldn't. I said your wife was a friend of mine, and that she had been glad to get rid of you, which was true. And then I went off.'

"He: 'I see. You told her my wife's name was Nora Murray, didn't you?'

"She: 'Yes, and I was sorry afterward I had, because I didn't want to get mixed up in any troubles of yours. And I wasn't anxious to make any trouble for you, either, even if you did desert me and leave me without a dollar and sick in bed. She said she was expecting you back soon, so,

after I had given a manicure on the floor below, I walked up and went by your room to see if I could hear your voice and what was going on.'

"He: 'Did you hear me?'

"She: 'No. There was a man there, but it wasn't you. I listened at the door and heard her laughing. "Tell him, if you want to," she said; "I can manage him." And he said all right, he had nothing more to say, and she said to beat it. Then the door opened and I got out of the way; and the last thing I heard him say was that she'd be sorry, and she laughed again. He walked down the hall behind me, and we went down in the elevator together, so I got a good look at him.'

"He: 'Do you know who he was?'

"She: 'Yes, I do.'

"He: 'How do you know?'

"She: 'I made it my business to find out. I know a good deal more, too. I don't want to make any trouble for you, but it's not you I'm thinking of now, it's myself.'

"He: 'What do you mean by that?'

"She: 'That's what I came here to tell you.'

"He: 'Who was the man?'

"She: 'You know who he was. I don't have to tell you.'

"He: 'I don't know what you're talking about.'

"She: 'I'll tell you what I'm talking about, if you'll keep still a minute and let me talk.'

"He: 'All right.'

"She: 'I thought from what I'd overheard that they were talking about you and what I'd told her, and that you hadn't come back yet, so I decided I'd wait and see you myself first and prepare you.

As I say, I didn't want to make any trouble for you. When all was said and done, you were my husband. So I took a seat near the front door and waited for you. And then I saw that that man was waiting, too. So, you see, I had plenty of time to get acquainted with his face. After a while you came in, and I waited to see if he would speak to you, and when he didn't it was too late for me to do it, because you went straight to the elevator, and I didn't want the elevator boy to see me speaking to you. He was the one I had just asked about you and her, you see. So I sat down again. And I saw that man still waiting. I felt sure he was waiting for you, so I waited. And it wasn't long before you came down and went out again. And that man followed you. And so did I.'

"He: 'Followed me? Where did you follow me? What do you mean you followed me?'

"She: 'I followed you till I saw him speak to you and saw you go down the street together and go into the subway.'

"He: 'Well, what of it?'

"She: 'I'll tell you what of it. That man was in the hotel last night when she was killed.'

"He: 'What are you talking about?' "

The reader paused for a moment at this point to add a comment. "I could hardly get his words there, they were so faint," and he reached over for a glass of water.

CHAPTER XX

NEW EVIDENCE

"GO on," said Nash. His eyes and Burnham's were fixed on the stenographer's lips. Both leaned forward in their seats.

Gotthold read on:

"She: 'I saw him. I was there myself giving a massage treatment to a client after the theater, and I met him in the hall. I walked downstairs, and as I got to the second floor he came down the second-floor hall. I recognized him the minute I saw him, but I didn't think anything of his being there. He walked on down the hall as if he was going to his room, and I thought he must be stopping in the hotel. I didn't know then who he was. And, when the night clerk told me Mrs. Green had committed suicide, I didn't think anything, either, except that maybe I had driven her to it by telling her what I did. Then, yesterday afternoon, I saw in the papers that she had been murdered, and I put two and two together. And what I came to tell you is that I'm going to the police and——'

"He: 'The police. No, no, for Heaven's sake. What for?'

"She: 'Because I don't want a thing like this on my conscience. If he's the murderer, I ought to——'

"He: 'But he's not.'

"She: 'How do you know?'

"He: 'I know he's not. It was that Italian. He

swore he'd kill her five years ago. He's the murderer.'

"She: 'The police don't think so. That's what they say at the Winsonia. And they'd arrest him if they did.'

"He: 'Well, he did it. The police are crazy.'

"She: 'Well, if her cousin is innocent, what I tell won't hurt him; and if he's guilty, it's my duty to tell. If I don't, I'm an accomplice.'

"He: 'But he's innocent. I know he is. Can't you take my word for it?'

"She: 'What do you know about it?'

"He: 'He's her cousin.'

"She: 'What has that to do with it? I heard him threaten her. "You'll be sorry," he said.'

"He: 'That didn't mean he'd kill her.'

"She: 'What did it mean?'

"He: 'How do I know? I wasn't there, was I?'

"She: 'What did she mean when she said to him, "Tell him if you want to?" What did he tell you?'

"He: 'He didn't tell me anything.'

"She: 'What was he waiting to see you so long for?'

"He: 'He wanted to borrow some money from me.'

"She: 'Well, that may be so, but what was he doing at the Winsonia night before last? At midnight? He isn't stopping there.'

"He: 'He wasn't there. You mistook some one else for him.'

"She: 'No, I didn't. He was there. I saw him. And I'm going to tell the police he was, and everything else I know about him.'

"He: 'No, no! For the Lord's sake, don't do that.'"

There was a break in the reading here. Gotthold had turned over two pages of his notebook at once by mistake, and a few seconds were required to recover his place. He had been reading in a rather slow, deliberate manner, with the utmost pains not to make the slightest error, and without the slightest expression in his voice, and the effect of such dialogue so read was very queer. Originally, it must have been rapid and animated, even excited.

"'No, no! For the Lord's sake, don't do that,'" he repeated calmly to make the connection clear before passing to the following page, then continued as slowly and monotonously as before:

"She: 'I've got to. I can't have a thing like that on my conscience and on my soul. I'd be committing a sin not to tell.'

"He: 'But he didn't do it. It was that Italian. It wasn't Barnell, I tell you.'

"She: 'Well, if it wasn't, my telling what I know about him won't hurt him. And if it does, what's Barnell to you?'

"He: 'He's nothing to me. But if you tell everything you know you'll tell that you're my real wife, and that will get me in bad with the police. They'll think she was blackmailing me, and that I had a reason for wanting to get rid of her.'

"She: 'That is just what I'm thinking.'

"He: 'What are you talking about? I wasn't near the place. I was at a cabaret dancing.'

"She: 'Oh, I know you've got a good alibi. But I haven't forgot about your hiring two thugs to beat

up a man soon after we were married. Remember that?'

"He: 'I didn't have anything to do with this murder. And neither did Barnell. I know, because I accused him of it.'

"She: 'You accused him of it?'

"He: 'Yes, and he proved to me he didn't do it.'

"She: 'Proved it? How? What do you mean?'

"He: 'He proved it was the dago.'

"She: 'How did he prove it?'

"He: 'I can't tell you that.'

"She: 'Why doesn't he prove it to the police?'

"He: 'Because he's a friend of Solari.'

"She: 'Why don't you tell the police? You're not a friend of Solari, are you?'

"He: 'I promised Barnell not to tell what he told me.'

"She: 'How did he come to tell you what he wouldn't tell the police?'

"He: 'Didn't I tell you I accused him of the murder?'

"She: 'Why did you?'

"He: 'I can't tell you that.'

"She: 'Why not?'

"He: 'Because—because I promised him I wouldn't. He convinced me he didn't do it. The rest doesn't matter.'

"She: 'When did you see him?'

"He: 'Why, yesterday.'

"She: 'Where? Here?'

"He: 'No, of course not. I went up to his place. I went up right after I heard of the murder. The police came here and told me, and as

soon as they were gone I went up there. And he told me it was Solari that did it.'

"She: 'How did he know who did it if he wasn't there?'

"He: 'Say, what is this, the third degree?'

"She: 'I've got to know the truth about this, Harry.'

"He: 'Well, I've told you the truth.'

"She: 'I don't believe it.'

"He: 'Accuse me of lying, do you?'

"She: 'It wouldn't be your first lie. You lied the first time you ever spoke to me—when you told me your name was Gray.'

"He: 'Oh, what's the use of dragging in that? Think I haven't got enough trouble without you coming here bothering me? I married you, didn't I? What difference did the name make?'

"She: 'I didn't come here to bother you. I came to find out about Barnell. And if you don't tell me, I'll go to the police.'

"He: 'What good will that do you? What have you got against Barnell? Has he ever done anything to you?'

"She: 'If he's the murderer, I ought to tell what I know. I can't have anything like that on my soul.'

"He: 'Oh, you make me sick about your soul.'

"She: 'Are you going to tell me?'

"He: 'I can't tell you. I gave Barnell my word.'

"She: 'Why?'

"He: 'Why? Because he asked me to.'

"She: 'You must have had some bigger reason than that.'

"He: 'Well, I said if he could prove he wasn't the murderer I wouldn't tell what he told me.'

"She: 'And he proved it was Solari?'

"He: 'Yes.'

"She: 'How could he prove that?'

"He: 'He did, all right?'

"She: 'I can't see how, if he wasn't there himself.'

"He: 'How much more of this do I have to stand? My head is about to split now!'

"She: 'You may as well tell me first as last, Harry. I'm not going till you do. How can Barnell know who committed the murder if he wasn't there?' (Pause.) 'If you don't tell me, I'll do what I said I would. I mean it.'

"He: 'If I tell you, will you promise first not to go to the police?'

"She: 'I can't promise anything, Harry. But if you don't tell me, I will go. That's my last word.'

"He: 'You're a fine wife!'

"She: 'What was it Barnell told you day before yesterday when he followed you out of the Winsonia?'

"He: 'He didn't tell me anything. He borrowed some money.'

"She: 'What was she talking about when she said: "You can tell him if you want to?"'

"He: 'I don't know. Solari, I guess. Barnell had just told her Solari was in town looking for her. And I guess she said he would tell him where she was if he wanted to.'

"She: 'Barnell told the police she told him she wanted to see Solari. That was in the papers.'

"He: 'He was just backing up Solari in what he

had told them. Because they're friends. He knows Solari's guilty.'

"She: 'How does he know it?'

"He: 'Well, if you got to know, Barnell was there and saw Solari come out of the room. You see, it was like this: Barnell was sore at Rosa—awfully sore. She gave all her poor relations the cold shoulder after she got married. Didn't even speak to them on the street if she met them. Naturally, they didn't like it, especially Barnell, because he had been soft on her once and helped her out when she needed money and things like that. But, when he heard Solari was in New York, he thought it was his duty to warn her and he did, and she didn't even thank him. She gave him fits for coming to see her and told him to get out, and he went off sore—dead sore. And he told Solari where she was. He says Solari promised him he wouldn't do anything to her, but after he told him he says he got to worrying about it and couldn't sleep, so he got up out of bed and went down to the Winsonia to see Solari and make sure everything was all right. That's how he happened to be there.'

"She: 'I see, but——'

"He: 'Now wait a minute. He didn't know, of course, but that something might have happened already, and naturally he didn't want to get mixed up in it, so he slipped into the hotel by the side door and walked upstairs. And when he got up to the ninth floor he went very quietly to the door of our sitting room, 919, and listened, and he heard somebody moving about inside. There was a light, and he thought it might be Rosa and was just going to knock and warn her again about Solari when the

doorknob rattled and he just had time to dodge down the side hall before Solari came out. He peeped and saw him, so there's no question about the thing. Solari went on down the hall, around to the other side of the house where his own room was, and Barnell followed him. He was going to ask him about things, but just as he started to knock at the door he heard Solari telephoning to the office that there was something wrong in 919. Not knowing just what to make of that, Barnell says, he thought he'd better get out of the hotel, as fast as he could, so he went downstairs—walking, of course—and slipped out by the side door, the way he came in. And that's all there is to it.'

"She: 'I see, but I——'

"He: 'That explains everything, doesn't it? It proves Barnell wasn't the murderer, doesn't it, and that Solari was?'

"She: 'Yes, but—didn't Barnell tell you Solari was in town? I mean, didn't he tell you day before yesterday?'

"He: 'No. I've told you a dozen times that all he wanted with me was to borrow money.'

"She: 'I know, but it seems as if he would have told you.'

"He: 'Well, he didn't. I told you he was sore at her.'

"She: 'Did he tell you he was? I mean, did he tell you before the murder?'

"He: 'No, of course not.'

"She: 'Then why did you think he might have killed her? Why did you go up to see him right after you heard she was dead?'

"He: 'Oh, for the Lord's sake stop talking to

me, will you? Stop asking questions! I've proved to you that Barnell didn't kill her, haven't I?'

"She: 'You've explained how he happened to be in the hotel, but——'

"He: 'But what?'

"She: 'If Solari was the murderer, why did he telephone to the office?'

"He: 'Oh, that was just to fool the police—that and the doors being locked and the rest.'

"She: 'But the doors were locked, both of them. Morrison, the detective at the Winsonia, told me so himself. And if Barnell saw Solari come out of the sitting-room door and go to his own room, Solari couldn't have locked that door on the inside. And it was locked on the inside. Both doors were.'

"He: 'Well, he might have had an accomplice who locked the doors and got away by the transom.'

"She: 'After he had gone to telephone to the office? You said Barnell told you that Solari called up the office as soon as he got to his room? He wouldn't have done that, would he, until he was sure his accomplice had got away safely?' Pause. 'Of course he wouldn't have, Harry. Besides, Morrison said nobody but a small woman could have got out through the transom, and she would have needed help.'

"He: 'Well, the accomplice may have been a woman, for all I know. And Solari may have helped her through the transom.'

"She: 'But Barnell would have seen him if he had.'

"He: 'Why would he? He might have done it before Barnell got upstairs.'

"She: 'Then who locked the door after Solari came out and went to his room?'

"He: 'Oh, forget the door.'

"She: 'Both doors were locked on the inside when Morrison got there, and he went right up after Solari phoned down.'

"He: 'Well, damn it, how do I know who locked them? I wasn't there, was I?'

"She: 'There's no need of your swearing about it, Harry.'

"He: 'Well, you're enough to make a man swear. First thing you did when you got here was to accuse me.'

"She: 'I didn't accuse you of it.'

"He: 'Same thing. Said if I wanted to get rid of you I needn't murder you.'

"She: 'Well, I meant that. I want you to divorce me as soon as this is over. It won't be a divorce for me, but it will for you, and you can marry again whenever you want to. I don't want any money or anything else. I just don't want to see you again after this is over—if it ever is over.'

"He: 'What do you mean by that?'

"She: 'Oh, Harry, I hope to Heaven you haven't got this awful crime on your soul. You've got sin enough on it without that.'

"He: 'You don't need to worry about my soul. All I ask of you is to keep your mouth shut. Solari is the murderer, and the police know it. They just won't arrest him because we're rich, and he isn't. If it wasn't for my alibi, they'd have me locked up right now. That smarty, Nash, ought to be in jail himself. It's criminal neglect of duty for him not to arrest Solari. Wainwright says so, and he's going

to the district attorney and insist on Solari's arrest. So you don't have to worry. Solari's the murderer, and if you go telling the police anything now you'll only get other people into trouble. Barnell, I mean, and me, too. And what good will that do you?'

"She: 'Well, I won't go right away. I'll wait and see. And I won't go without telling you beforehand, I promise that. I don't want to get you into trouble, Harry; or Barnell, either. You ought to know I'm not that kind. But I wish you'd tell me why you thought Barnell was the murderer. You say you didn't know he was sore at her until after the murder and——'

"He: 'I didn't say I didn't know it. I said he didn't tell me. That's what I said, wasn't it? I did know it. I knew all her relations were sore at her for the way she treated them, and naturally when I heard she had been murdered I jumped at the conclusion it was one of them. And as Barnell was the only one in New York, I hit on him. That's how it was. Now I hope you're satisfied?'

"She: 'But what did you go up to see him for?'

"He: 'To accuse him of it.'

"She: 'How did you know where he lived?'

"He: 'Oh, say, Nora, for the love of Heaven, give me a rest, won't you? You've just given me your word you won't go to the police, and everything was settled; and now you're starting in all over again. How did I know where he lived? Why, he told me, of course, when he asked me for a loan. I didn't have the money with me, and I took his address so I could send it to him. That's how I knew.'

"She: 'I see.'

"He: 'My head's bursting, and, anyhow, somebody may come in any minute, and——'

"She: 'I'll go, then.'

"He: 'And you won't—do anything? You promised, you know.'

"She: 'I promised I wouldn't without telling you first.'

"He: 'Well, all right. I see you've got it in for me.'

"She: 'You know that's not true, Harry.'

"He: 'All right. If you want to see me again, you'll have to write. I'm not answering telephone calls. They've got orders to that effect downstairs. I'd be bothered to death otherwise by the newspaper men.'

"She: 'Well, good-by. And if I don't see you again, don't forget what I said about a divorce.'

"He: 'I won't, don't worry. You won't have to murder me to get rid of me, either.'

"She: 'Good-by.' "

Here the reading ended. Gotthold looked up and added a few words: "I heard the door close, and then he walked about for a while. That was all."

"All right," said Burnham. "That'll do. Better get that typed off as soon as you can. We may need it." With a word of assent, the stenographer went away.

"Well," commented Nash when the door had closed and he and Burnham were left alone, "that lets her out."

"And lets him in," said Burnham.

"He's been in from the start—with both feet, so far as my opinion is concerned," returned Nash.

"He appears to have guessed it," said Burnham with a grin.

Nash returned the grin. "I'm a smarty, he thinks. Well, I'd have to be really profane to say what I think about him. But that wife of his is all right. Say, Burnham, how in the world does an ugly, mean little shrimp like that, a measly half portion of a man, get a woman like her to marry him?"

"Attraction of opposites," said Burnham.

"She's got a head on her. I saw that when I talked to her yesterday at the Winsonia. And the way she kept him in the middle of the road with her questions was very all right."

"I'll say it was."

"She stuck to the vital point like a leech. Why did he suspect Barnell of the murder? Why did he go up to see him right after he heard about it? That's what I'd like to know, too."

"It was news about Barnell being at the hotel. Strange no one noticed him."

"No, it's not. Hotel employees see so many strange faces—new ones every day and every hour—that they get so they don't notice them."

"Got a theory?" asked Burnham.

Nash smiled. "Oh, yes," he said, "I have a theory, but if I told you what it is you'd throw up your hands. You'd say it was impossible. You'd say it was absurd. So I'll keep it to myself. It came to me in a flash when Hines told about finding the bedroom lighted and the door unlocked after the woman was dead."

"Think the murderer was concealed somewhere in the room when Hines opened the door and looked in?"

"As to that, I have no idea. But"—Nash shrugged the point carelessly aside—"it's a detail. The essential thing now is that we have by elimination narrowed our suspects down to three—Green, Solari, and Barnell."

"And none of the three could have gone through the transom."

"Quite true."

"Then there must have been a fourth—a woman or a boy."

Nash nodded. "There may have been a fourth," he conceded, "but, since that fourth remains an unknown quantity and must in any case have been a mere subordinate, and since Green has an alibi which eliminates him as the actual murderer, our choice is narrowed to two—Barnell and Solari."

"You think one or the other is the murderer."

"Undoubtedly. And now which shall we tackle first? We've learned nothing new about Solari except that Green said that Barnell said that he had seen Solari leave room 919 and go to his own room and telephone his message to the office, which may or may not be true. But about Barnell we have collected a great deal that is new and probably true, so I think we will see him and hear what he has to say about it. I'll have Smith locate him. He knows him. He was with me when I questioned Barnell yesterday morning."

Having despatched Sergeant Smith to locate and bring Barnell to headquarters, Nash returned to his thoughts.

CHAPTER XXI

A WARRANT IS ISSUED

IT was not, as it happened, until evening that Sergeant Smith succeeded in delivering Barnell at police headquarters. After returning from the funeral of the murdered woman, the young man had betaken himself to a motion-picture studio just outside New York in search of employment, and had remained to look on at the "shooting" of some outdoor scenes. As he had left no word at his lodging house, there had been nothing for Smith to do but await his return, for so immune had Barnell been from suspicion that no watch had been kept on his movements.

He seemed much surprised to find the detective waiting for him, but made no objection to accompanying him, accepting with perfect confidence, apparently, Smith's statement that Inspector Nash wished to question him about the life of his cousin in Kansas City and her associates there. He merely remarked that he didn't think he knew anything that would be of value to the police, but that anything he did know was at their service. He inquired if any progress had been made in the investigation of the murder and, being told that none had, began to talk about his visit to the motion-picture studio.

Nash, meanwhile, had of course had every possible precaution taken to guard against communication between Barnell and Green. As Green had not left

his hotel since his conversation with Mrs. Gray, and as there was little likelihood that he had communicated with Barnell by letter or telephone, because he would hardly have dared to do so even if he had been able to reach Barnell, it seemed safe to assume that when the latter arrived in the presence of Nash he did so entirely unprepared for what awaited him.

"How are you, inspector?" he said cheerfully, glancing about the room. "I feel like this was in a picture. Hard to realize it's life. I've been over to a picture studio all afternoon and can't get my mind back to realities."

"What do you play?" asked Burnham pleasantly. "Villains?"

"You guessed it." The actor laughed, his dark eyes sparkling. "Goes by contraries, as you might say."

"Sit down, Mr. Barnell," said Nash. "We've asked you to come here this evening, hoping you might be able to open up some avenues of investigation that we have not been able to discover for ourselves. I don't mind admitting to you that we're completely at sea. This is the most perplexing case we have had to deal with in a long time.

"It has occurred to us," continued Nash, "that by going back a little in Mrs. Green's past we might find some clew that has escaped us so far, and that you are just the guide we need."

"I'll tell you what I know, but that ain't much," was the reply, and there followed then about ten minutes of talk about Kansas City and the manner of life of young Mrs. Green before her marriage, and so on, which had no object except to mislead Barnell as to the real purpose of his being there.

In the talk the affair with Solari naturally figured, and from that Nash passed easily to the question of Solari's probable connection with the murder. Barnell stoutly maintained his belief in the Italian's innocence.

"He swore to me he wouldn't touch a hair of her head," he said again and again. "Suppose I'd of told him where she was if I'd of thought he would? Of course not, and I don't believe he did."

"Just when did you tell him?" Nash asked.

"When? Why, I went straight to see him from seein' her. I told you she got me sore treatin' me like she did."

Barnell's reasons for telling Solari where Mrs. Green was did not at the moment interest Nash, nor did his opinion as to Solari's guilt or innocence. The inspector was on a quite different tack.

"You say you went directly from the Winsonia to Solari's hotel?"

"Sure."

"That's strange." Nash looked merely puzzled.

"Strange? What's strange about it? I was sore, I'm tellin' you, and I couldn't get to Solari quick enough. I wanted him to go up and give her a scare. That's all I was thinkin' about. I didn't want him to murder her, of course, and I didn't think he would—not for a minute, but——"

"That's not the point, Mr. Barnell," Nash said, interrupting the young man's flow of protestations. "I understand that your motive in telling Solari was inspired by irritation, and that you might have been in a hurry to get to him; but your statement that you went directly to his hotel after seeing Mrs.

Green conflicts with statements made to us by others."

"By others? Who's been makin' statements about me?" Barnell seemed surprised and interested, but not at all confused.

Nash ignored the question. "You were seen sitting in the lobby of the Winsonia for a long time after you came downstairs from Mrs. Green's room."

"Who saw me?"

"That is hardly the question, Mr. Barnell. The question is: were you there or were you not?"

Barnell hesitated. "Well, yes, I was. But I don't see what harm there was in it." His dark eyes looked straight at Nash.

"Oh, no harm," replied Nash pleasantly, "only, you couldn't have been in quite so big a hurry to get to Solari as you have just said you were."

"Oh, I was in a hurry, all right, but I knew I was sore, and I thought I'd better sit down and think a little before I went and done what I'd be awful sorry for after I done it."

"I see. But when you finally left the Winsonia you did go directly to Solari."

"Sure."

"Alone?"

"Alone? What do you mean? Sure, I went alone. Who would I go with?"

"Where did you leave Green?"

There was a pause, a brief one, then Barnell gave a quick laugh. "Aw, say, have a heart, inspector," he said with an air of half-humorous embarrassment. "Did somebody see me with Green, too?"

Nash nodded.

Barnell laughed again. "Didn't know I was so

famous," he replied. "Well, if you've got the goods on me, there's nothin' to do but own up, I guess. What I was waitin' in the Winsonia for was Green. I hate to admit it, but I was broke. And he was the only person I knew that I could borrow from. She'd said she was expecting him in soon, so I set down and waited. I waited a darn long time, too, and I was just thinkin' he wasn't comin' in when I see him goin' out. He'd come in, and I'd missed him. Got thinkin' about something, I guess, and wasn't noticin'. So the first thing I knew I seen him going out of the turnstile, so I went after him, and he was goin' down in the subway, so I went along. And that's all there is to that."

"Did you get the money, may I ask?"

Another laugh. "Well, I got some."

Nash was puzzled. Barnell was plainly a facile liar, yet when forced to it he had told the same story as Green.

"Have you seen Green since then?" was the next question.

"I seen him this morning at the funeral, that's all."

"Talk to him?"

"Nope."

"Haven't seen him to talk to since day before yesterday when you borrowed the money?"

"Nope."

"Have you seen Solari since the murder?"

Barnell grinned. "I guess you know I haven't, don't you? You got him watched, ain't you? That's what the papers said."

"Have you seen Green since the murder?"

"I just told you I ain't—except at the funeral."

"You didn't see him the morning after the murder?"

"No, I just told you I——" Barnell paused, frowning. "What you drivin' at, inspector? Askin' me over and over about seein' Green? What's the idea?"

"The idea, Barnell, is that you have seen him," said Nash.

"When?"

"I don't have to tell you that."

"I don't know what you're talkin' about." Barnell looked utterly mystified.

"I'm talking about your seeing Green after the murder."

"My seein' him? What would I be seein' Green about?"

"That's what I'm asking you. What were you seeing him about?"

Barnell gave a shrug of utter bewilderment. "I don't get you," he said, gazing unblinkingly at Nash.

"You're a wonderful liar, Barnell," said the latter.

"Say, is this a joke?" Barnell glanced at the other detectives as if for help in his perplexity, and met blank stares. "I don't get you, inspector," he repeated, turning back to Nash.

"That's too bad," said Nash dryly. "Then I'll have to explain. You saw Green yesterday morning—early."

Barnell laughed. "That's news to me," he said. "I must have seen him in my sleep."

"Perhaps you did. It was still early enough for you to be asleep, and it was in your room that you saw him."

Barnell gave his shrug again. "It sounds interestin', but I wish I knew what it's all about," he said and smiled. "Did you get that dope from the ouija board, or where?" he asked.

"I got it from Green," said Nash.

"Green?"

"From Green. Green said he was there."

Barnell, who all this time had been sitting back in his chair with crossed legs and an air of perfect composure, now uncrossed his legs and leaned forward, an earnest, troubled expression in his dark eyes.

"Say, is that right?" he demanded. "Did Green really tell that? Did he say he'd been up to see me?"

"He did. He said so this afternoon."

"Oh, well, that's different," said Barnell, in a tone of great relief, and resumed his former position. "That lets me out," he went on as he carefully pulled up his trousers at the knees; "it's his affair, not mine. I promised him I wouldn't tell, and I naturally wanted to keep my promise. But if he said he was there, there's no use in my sayin' he wasn't. Is there?"

"What was he there for?" Nash questioned.

"Didn't he tell you?"

"Yes, he said what he was there for. But I'd like your version also."

"To see if they agree?"

"Exactly."

"Well"—Barnell put his hands in his trousers pockets and slid down a little in his chair to a still more comfortable position—"I don't know what he told *you*," he said, tone and manner quite indifferent, "but I know what he told me. He told me he had

just heard Rosa was dead and had told the police—I guess it was you fellows—that he and Rosa had come to a friendly agreement about a divorce, and he was afraid I might tell you different, 'cause he knew I knew they hadn't done nothin' of the kind. I and him had talked about it in the afternoon before goin' down in the subway.

"He was hot about the way she was goin' on and let off steam to me; said she was holdin' out for more money than his mother would pay her to get a divorce, and he couldn't do nothin' with her. He said he was nearly crazy and was thinkin' of blowin' out his brains and all that kind of talk. When he heard she'd been murdered, I guess he remembered the way he'd went on to me about her and was afraid of how it would look if I told, and, bein' I'm her cousin, he thought I might, he says, so he hot-footed it up to see me before you fellows did, and got me to promise not to say nothin'. See?"

Nash nodded. "And you promised, did you?"

"Not right away, I didn't. I was suspicious at first. Looked funny to me his askin' me to, under the circumstances. I asked him all about the murder, and he told me what you'd told him. And then I says: 'What're you so excited about? Was it you murdered her?' I asked him that right out. He said he hadn't been anywhere near the place when the murder happened. So at last I said all right, if he had an alibi, like he said he did, I'd keep still about the trouble there'd been between them. So when I see in the papers that his alibi was O. K., I did keep still. And when you started askin' me questions I tried to keep from havin' to tell, like anybody would that had made a promise."

Nash nodded again. His perplexity was increasing. This version of the early-morning conversation between Green and the murdered woman's cousin did not agree with Green's. But it was plausible and very neatly turned the tables. Green's version was that he had gone to Barnell because he suspected him of committing the murder, but the reason given for his suspicion was not adequate, while Barnell's reason for suspecting him was. There was no question that Barnell's story was the more plausible. However, he had proved himself such an expert liar that nothing he said could be trusted.

"What else did you and Green talk about yesterday morning?" Nash inquired next.

"Nothin'. After he got my promise, he hurried back to his hotel."

"Didn't you discuss the murder at all?"

"Well, I told you he told me about it—what you'd told him."

"Didn't you discuss the probable identity of the murderer?"

"Oh, naturally we done that."

"And who did you decide that it was?"

"We didn't decide nothin'. We didn't know nothin' about it."

"Didn't you tell Green about Solari being at the Winsonia?"

"No. How could I tell him when I didn't know it myself?"

"Didn't you know it yourself?"

"No. I'd told him Rosa was there, but I didn't know he'd gone there. He promised me he wouldn't touch a hair of her head and——"

"Yes, I know," put in Nash, interrupting the fa-

miliar phrase. "Then you didn't see Solari after you told him where Mrs. Green was?"

"No."

"But you must have suspected him of being the murderer."

"Well—naturally, I done that."

"But you didn't mention your suspicions to Green?"

"No."

"Didn't Green know that Solari was in New York trying to find Mrs. Green?"

"I don't know. She might have told him."

"But you didn't?"

"No."

"What?" Nash exclaimed in astonishment. "You mean to tell me that you and Green had a long talk about his troubles with his wife and you didn't tell him about Solari?"

"No. Say, what do you think I am?" Barnell looked mildly indignant. "Vince is a friend of mine, and Rosa was my cousin. What would I want to go blabbin' about them to Green for? I'd warned her about Vince. That was enough, wasn't it?"

The point was well answered, Nash admitted to himself. If Barnell was lying, he was doing it very skillfully. And in this instance, at least, he might be telling the truth. Nash recalled the astonishment of Green on being told of Solari's presence at the Winsonia. That was before he had gone to Barnell, so it was probable that at that time he had not heard anything about the Italian and believed him to be still in prison—a deduction, Nash said to himself, that was worth remembering.

"Does Green know Solari?" he asked Barnell, just to make doubly sure of this point.

"Don't think so," said Barnell curtly. He seemed for the first time to be getting tired of the rapid fire of questions. Perhaps the strain of keeping his footing was wearing his nerve down a little.

Noting his change of tone, his inquisitor was quick to take advantage of it. He had been waiting for a sign of weakening to launch his biggest bolt and at once prepared to do so.

"Mr. Barnell," he said after a moment of apparent reflection, "if you don't mind, I'd like you to tell me again just what it was you said to Solari about Mrs. Green when you told him where she was living."

Barnell frowned. "I don't know exactly what I told him," he replied wearily. "What difference does it make, anyhow? If he says I said she wanted to see him, I guess I did. She did say she wasn't afraid of him. I told you I didn't remember just what I told him. I was sore and wanted to give her a scare, and I didn't stick to the truth like I ought to. But I never thought any harm would come of it. And, as I've told you a dozen times already, I don't believe Vince had a thing on earth to do with the murder. It was just coincidence—like he says—his bein' there at the time. It was rotten luck, that's all. He's as innocent as you are."

"I see," said Nash when this irritable outburst was over, "then you didn't tell Green that you knew Solari was guilty?"

He put the question very quietly, nothing in his tone or manner indicating that he considered it in any way startling. But that it was startling to Barnell, was obvious. For the first time his quick wit

was not equal to the demand on it, and he sat dumb, his black eyes staring at Nash. But it was only for an instant that he halted; then, as if he had doubted his ears, he said calmly:

"I don't get you." And he looked as if he really had not understood the words. "You been askin' me questions till my head's buzzin'. Say that again, will you?"

Nash repeated the question in exactly the same words as before. And now a response came promptly, sharply:

"Did Green say I did?"

"Yes. He said you told him you saw Solari come out of Mrs. Green's room after the murder."

A rush of angry blood spoke from the actor's cheeks before his lips replied. In fact, the color had subsided before any words came. And when they came, they were obscene and profane.

After that first outburst, he went on:

"And he give me his word of honor he'd never tell a livin' soul." As if amazed and horrified at the breach of confidence involved, and not at all concerned about the revelation itself, Barnell sat staring at Nash, and, when the latter merely returned the stare, the actor challenged him: "Go on. What else did he tell you?"

"Is that true?" asked Nash. "Did you see Solari come out of Mrs. Green's room after the murder?"

"Yes, I did," was the answer. "But you'd never have got it out of me. That—— I'll pay him up for this. Now I got to tell, and I'd rather have my tongue cut out of my mouth. I never betrayed a friend in my life before."

He looked utterly wretched and gazed with un-

happy eyes from Nash to Burnham as if seeking sympathy. Getting none from Burnham, he turned back to Nash. Smith, he ignored, for some reason. Perhaps he had seen enough of that hard-boiled veteran not to expect any sympathy from him.

"No matter how things look," he went on, "I still don't believe Vince is guilty, but he was in Rosa's room that night. I saw him come out with my own eyes. You see, after I told him where Rosa was, I cooled down, and then I got to thinkin' that I done wrong in tellin' him. But I didn't see what I could do. It was too late to do anything then. I had my dinner and then went to see a picture, and then I went home. But I couldn't sleep for thinkin' about my tellin' Vince, and the more I thought the more worried I got. At last I couldn't lay still no more, and I got up. I didn't have a phone, so I thought I'd go out and call up Rosa and make sure she was all right and tell her I'd told Vince where she was. See?"

"I see," said Nash. "Go on."

"Well, that's all I was goin' to do when I started out. But then I got to thinkin' that I was foolish to be worryin' like that, 'cause Vince had give me his word, and, anyhow, Rosa wouldn't thank me for calling her so late, and maybe she was asleep. I was goin' back in the house again, and then I thought I might as well make sure and be easy in my mind, so I thought I'd go on down to the Winsonia and satisfy myself. I walked through the lobby and could see there hadn't nothin' happened, 'cause nobody was excited or anything; but then I thought it wasn't twelve yet, and Rosa might be up. I was going to have 'em phone up to her, and then it struck me I

couldn't say what I wanted to over the hotel phone, with the operator listenin' in, maybe, so I just thought I'd walk upstairs, and if there was a light in her room I'd knock on the door. So that's what I done."

"You walked up—the eight flights of stairs?"

"Sure. I didn't mind that. And if I'd went on the elevator, the boy might have asked me where I was goin' or watched to see, and that would have looked funny, wouldn't it; a man goin' to a woman's room late at night? I had to consider Rosa. That's how I looked at it, anyhow."

"I understand. Go ahead. You went upstairs and then what?"

"Well, when I got there, I went to 919. I remembered the number from bein' there that afternoon, you see. And I listened at the door and heard somebody movin' around, and there was a light, and course I thought it was Rosa, 'cause Green had said he'd quit her for good; and I was just goin' to knock when I heard the doorknob turn, and I sneaked around the side hall to see who was comin' out; and it was Vince."

Barnell paused. "Say," he went on then, "you could have knocked me down with a feather. I was so surprised. And then I got scared, and I went down the hall after him."

"Didn't you stop to see whether anything was wrong or not?"

"No, 'cause I didn't know where Vince's room was. I had to follow him. I wanted to see where his room was. And after I seen him go in I was goin' back to Rosa's room. Then I thought I'd see Vince first, 'cause maybe he and Rosa had just been

havin' a talk, and if so she'd be sore at me for spyin' around. That's all she'd of thought it was. But just when I was goin' to knock at Vince's door, I heard him phonin' downstairs. He said somethin' was wrong in room 919 and asked 'em to send right up and find out about it.

"Well, I didn't know what to make of his doin' that, and I says to myself that if anything was wrong I didn't want to be caught around the premises without a permit, 'cause it would of looked bad for me, walkin' upstairs and all, like I done. So I beat it as quick as I could. And I can tell you I thought I'd never get out of that house. Every floor I come to somebody would be comin' along, and I'd have to sneak back to the landin' and wait till they went by. Or if I didn't do that I'd have to walk along the hall, like I was goin' to my room, and then go back when the coast was clear again to the stairs. But I got down at last and slipped out the side door and beat it home. And that's the truth, so help me."

He raised his right hand to emphasize his oath and looked earnestly and anxiously at Nash.

"What did you think had happened when you heard Solari phoning that something was wrong?" Nash asked, ignoring the actor's dramatic finale.

"I didn't have no idea. It was like I just told you. I didn't stop to think, I just beat it."

"And you didn't know that Mrs. Green was dead until Green told you?"

"No, I didn't."

"Then what did you think?"

"Well, I didn't know what to think then, either."

"But you told Green that Solari was the murderer. Isn't that what you believed?"

Barnell looked down at the floor, frowning unhappily. "What else could I think?" he replied. "What would you have thought in my place?"

"But how did you explain the fact of Solari's being the one to give the alarm?"

"I didn't explain it. I can't explain it yet, unless it was some trick to fool the police."

"How about the doors being locked when the house detective got upstairs a few minutes later? Can you explain that?".

"No, I can't explain anything. I've told you all I know."

"But you saw Solari go out of the door, you say?"

"Yes."

"Then that door was locked after he went out?"

"I guess that's right."

"Who locked it?"

Barnell shook his head. He gave the riddle up, he seemed to say. "I didn't, that's all I know," he answered. "The way I figure it out, Vince was talkin' to Rosa, and they started quarrelin'. Then he got mad and stabbed her before he knew what he was doin'. He's got a terrible temper, Vince has. It was like that when he killed that guy in Kansas City. He didn't realize what he was doin'. He just got mad and killed him with one blow."

"Not with a knife," said Nash. "Was he in the habit of carrying a knife when you knew him out in Kansas City?"

"Well, I wouldn't like to say. I—don't remember," Barnell answered hesitantly.

"And now let's have the truth," said Nash. "What

did you tell Solari about Mrs. Green beside where she was?"

"Nothin'—not a thing. I've just been trying to back up what he said I said, to protect him."

"I see." Nash rose abruptly. "Now I think we'll give Solari an inning. It's only fair that he should have an opportunity to deny your charges against him—deny it or explain it, if true."

"I hope to Heaven he can explain it," said Barnell fervently. "Nobody would be better pleased than what I would. I've said all along I don't believe he's guilty, and I've done my best to protect him. I kept still as long as I possibly could about what I knew against him."

"You didn't keep still very long to Green," said Nash. "How did that happen? Why did you tell him?"

This question Nash considered crucial, and he had waited to ask it until he had heard Barnell's replies to every other. Now as he spoke he watched the actor's face closely, but if his shot had hit a vulnerable point Barnell did not betray the fact. He answered promptly and calmly.

"I let it out without meanin' to," he said. "I was so excited when he told me about the murder that I blurted it out—about Solari bein' guilty, I mean; and then he said if I didn't tell him all I knew he'd go to the police and tell them I knew somethin' about the case that I wasn't tellin'. And I wanted to protect Vince, so I made him promise he wouldn't tell, and then I told him."

"I see," said Nash. "That will do for the present. Smith, take Mr. Barnell somewhere to wait until he's wanted."

"Now, Burnham," continued the inspector when Smith and his charge had withdrawn, "call up the Winsonia, will you, and tell Kernan to bring Solari to the Evremonde."

"The Evremonde?" echoed Burnham in surprise.

"Yes. I'm going to stage the next act of this drama there. I want Green in it."

"You'll have trouble getting to Green. I've told you he won't see anybody."

"He'll see us. We'll take along a warrant for his arrest, and, if I'm not much mistaken, we'll make good use of it."

CHAPTER XXII

A NOTABLE GATHERING

WHILE waiting for the necessary preparations to be made for the visit to Green's hotel, Nash spent a few minutes in reviewing the situation and clarifying his ideas and impressions. And at the end one question still stood out in his mind as paramount in importance.

Why had Barnell told Green of his being at the Winsonia at the time of the murder?

It was a highly incriminating admission, and Barnell must be perfectly aware of the fact, although he had given no sign of such awareness in repeating the admission just now. His attitude was that of a man above suspicion and anxious only about his friend Solari. A magnificent attitude and well carried off, but the fact remained that he had been in the Winsonia at the time of the murder and therefore might have committed it.

That he understood this, was proved by the haste he had confessed to in quitting the hotel, and by his care not to be seen doing so. Yet a few hours later he had told the story to Green. Why?

Barnell's answer to that question had been anything but satisfactory; it had indeed been ridiculous.

No, that was not how Green had come by the knowledge of the midnight visit to the Winsonia. The truth was that Green already knew, that he and

Barnell had planned the murder and Barnell had committed it.

Arriving at this opinion, Nash took up his telephone receiver. "I want Geiger," he said and hung up. In half a minute the man he wanted appeared, a man of the inspector's own physical type, but younger.

"Geiger," Nash said, handing the detective a paper with an address written on it, "go to that address and search the room of one of the lodgers there, a man named Barnell. Search thoroughly, and report to me as soon as possible. It's that Winsonia case, you know." Nash added a few necessary details.

So soon as word came that Green was at the Evremonde, Kernan, at the Winsonia, was notified to start for the Evremonde with Solari, and immediately afterward a police car started uptown with Barnell, Nash, Burnham, and Smith.

It was not until Nash joined the party at the car that he saw Barnell again, and he was struck by a change in his appearance. He looked, Nash thought, much paler, and there was a different expression in his eyes and about his mouth. The society of his own thoughts appeared to have had a depressing effect on his spirits.

The run uptown to the Evremonde was a short one at that hour, when the downtown streets were almost free of traffic, but the car from the Winsonia was first to arrive, and Kernan and Solari were waiting in a reception room when Nash and his party entered the hotel. As they did so, they met Wainwright, the Greens' lawyer, who stopped with a forbidding frown at sight of Nash.

"Good evening, Mr. Wainwright," said the latter

immediately. "You're just the person I want to see. We've discovered some important new evidence against Solari, and I'm anxious to talk it over with Mr. Green and you. Is he in?"

Wainwright's eyes had lighted at the news given him, but his pale, stern face did not relax as he replied that Green was in, but that it was doubtful whether he could be seen. He had been suffering from a severe headache ever since his return from the funeral.

"It's very important. And my not seeing him will delay any action we might otherwise take against Solari." Nash always used diplomacy rather than force when possible, and he preferred gaining access to Green without using the warrant of arrest.

"What is the new evidence?" inquired the lawyer, his tone implying that he doubted that there was any.

Nash drew him aside. "Solari was seen leaving Mrs. Green's room the night of the murder," he whispered.

Wainwright looked incredulous still. "Who saw him?"

"Barnell, her cousin."

"Barnell?" The lawyer stared. "What was he doing there?"

The detective narrowed his eyes significantly. "That's what I want to find out," he answered. "Solari and Barnell are both here. And I propose to bring them face to face and see what comes of it."

"Was it necessary to bring them here for the purpose?"

"There are some Kansas City incidents involved that Green knows about and will be able to back up

Barnell," improvised Nash, whose imagination rarely failed him.

"Very well," said Wainwright, "if you consider it necessary to see Harlowe, I will permit you to go up, provided I accompany you."

"By all means," agreed Nash.

It was a silent party that entered the elevator. Watching Solari, Nash noticed that he nodded slightly to Barnell, and that Barnell did not return the greeting. The Italian's face had thinned markedly in the forty-eight hours which had elapsed since Nash had seen him for the first time, and his eyes appeared larger than ever, and more somber. He had a tragic look, Nash thought, for all his dignity and self-possession—a look of hopelessness.

The contrast between him and Barnell was striking. Side by side with Solari, the actor's good looks appeared showy and loud and cheap. And so, thought Nash, must Rosa Barnell's personality have seemed beside Solari's, though, doubtless, her beauty had blinded him to the fact. There was no question that he had gone far astray when he followed her and her kind. One saw at a glance that his kind was different.

If a change was noticeable in Barnell and Solari, it was doubly so in Green, who looked quite ill—due to the headache from which he was said to be suffering, perhaps; but, whatever the cause, he was an unhappy sight. His sallow, weak, unprepossessing face was sallower and weaker and more unprepossessing even than before. Plainly, the two days since the murder of his wife had not been easy ones for him. And now at the intrusion on his privacy he advanced a peevish protest to Wainwright, who

swept it aside without ceremony. It was the latter who assumed the duties of host.

At his invitation, every one sat down, and then he said to Nash.

"Proceed, inspector. This is your affair."

Nash addressed himself to Green, who returned his polite glance with a frown of suspicion. He sat in a deep armchair, his thin body occupying hardly a third of it, his chest sunken, his head lowered. He had looked once at Barnell and at Solari on their entrance, and since had kept his eyes fixed on Nash.

"We have made a very important advance to-day, Mr. Green, in our investigation of the murder of your wife, and I naturally felt you should be the first to be informed of it," Nash began. "Besides, our new information involves several puzzling contradictions, and the best way to clear things up seemed to be for us to get together and talk them over."

Nash paused a moment for some response from Green and, receiving none, continued:

"The first point I'd like to touch on is one that concerns Mr. Solari—vitally, for which reason I have asked him to come here this evening. A certain person, whom it is not necessary to name at present, has declared to us that he saw Mr. Solari leaving your sitting room at the Winsonia night before last, just before his telephone message to the office was received; which, of course, contradicts Mr. Solari's own statement that he did not at any time that night enter your wife's rooms. Now we naturally want to hear what Mr. Solari has to say about this charge."

At the first mention of his name, the Italian had

moved slightly; then, as Nash went on, he had straightened sharply in his seat, and at the first pause he exclaimed, half-rising:

"Who makes the charge?"

"That is not the question, Mr. Solari," Nash answered. "The question is, is the charge true?"

"My question is," returned Solari, his dark eyes flashing, "who makes the charge? That is my right to know."

"What difference does it make?" said Nash. "Either you were or you were not in Mrs. Green's rooms that night. Which is true?"

Solari made no reply for a moment. He settled back in his chair, and his face resumed its masklike calm, which for a moment it had lost.

"I was not," he said with perfect deliberation.

"You were not," echoed Nash, looking intently at the young man.

"I was not," repeated Solari as deliberately as before.

"Your story is, then," Nash went on, "that Barnell told you that Mrs. Green wished to see you and asked that you take a room at her hotel, on her floor, if possible, and then wait there for her to come to you. You waited, and, when it was nearing midnight and you had had no word of any kind from her, you went down the hall to her room. As you approached it, you heard a man's voice in her bedroom. Thinking it was her husband, you hurried back to your room. You waited there for a few minutes for her, and when she still did not come you returned to her door. This time you heard a woman's voice in her sitting room, a woman groaning. You knocked and called, then tried the door and

found it locked, and, fearing that something was wrong, you went back to your own room and notified the office. That is your story, is it not?"

Solari inclined his head in assent.

"You still hold to it?"

Another silent assent.

"And you insist that you did not at any time that night enter either of Mrs. Green's rooms?"

"I did not."

Nash gave his little nod, then turned to Barnell.

"Mr. Barnell," he said.

"Yes, inspector," said the actor.

"Mr. Barnell, did you tell Mr. Solari that Mrs. Green wanted to see him, that she wanted him to take a room at her hotel and—the other things that he claims you did?"

"No, inspector, I didn't."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him where she was stoppin', that's all I told him."

"And why, when you were questioned before, did you say that you did tell him what he says you told him?"

"Because I was tryin' to back him up, to shield him."

"Why?"

"Because—I was a friend of his." For the first time Barnell faltered, just perceptibly. He had not looked at Solari nor Solari at him while either was being questioned. Both gazed fixedly at Nash. They appeared unconscious of each other's presence.

"Now, Barnell," said Nash, "you have heard Solari's account of his movements the night of the murder. Kindly give us an account of yours."

"Yes, inspector," said the actor, and without hesitation he repeated the story he had told shortly before at police headquarters, looking as before at Nash, never at Solari. And the Italian heard the story with a set face, never once turning toward the accusing voice, never once moving, his somber eyes still fixed on Nash.

"Well, Solari," said the detective. "You wanted to know who had seen you the other night. Now you do know."

"I have known it before," said Solari simply.

Nash stared a moment. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I have known from the first who the murderer was," said the Italian, "but I could not speak until he had spoken first, until I had heard him say with his own lips, before witnesses, that he was there that night."

At this turn of the table, Barnell sprang up. "Are you talkin' about me?" he demanded in a tone of astonishment, as if he could hardly credit his hearing.

Solari ignored him and continued to Nash: "All is very simple, I think. He told me she wished to see me, that she wished me to take a room in her hotel, and it was a lie. It was a trick to get me there, quite near to her, so that when he had killed her I should be suspected, because once I had said I would kill her. But am I a fool? Would I—if I wished to kill her—have gone to her hotel and taken a room for myself, as Vincent Solari?"

"That was all part of your scheme," put in Barnell. "You're no fool, no. No fool could have made fools of the police the way you have."

"Sit down, Barnell," ordered Nash.

"You've had your say. Now I want his story. Go on, Solari."

The Italian gave a shrug of his heavy shoulders. "I have nothing more to say," he replied. "A trap was set for me, and I walked into it. You have not arrested me, no—but I see very well what you think. If I could have gone through that transom, you would have arrested me. It is only that I am too big that you do not."

"Well, could I have gone through the transom?" cried Barnell.

Solari again ignored him. "I have told you all I know about this affair. I believe that he is the murderer, because no one else knew I was at that hotel. And it was he who has told me to go there. And he was there himself. He has admitted it. All here have heard him."

"Nobody saw me comin' out of that room," argued Barnell.

"And no one saw me," was the retort.

"I saw you."

"So you say. I can say the same of you, if I like."

"What did I have to gain by killing Rosa?"

Solari shrugged his shoulders again. "What did I? A prison cell." He turned his somber eyes on Nash again. "Do you think a man who has lived five years in a cell will do what will send him back to a cell. Good Lord!" he exclaimed with sudden passion, "I would let myself be killed but never would I kill and go back to a cell."

"That's the sort of talk you give me to get me to tell you where Rosa was, and I fell for it," said Barnell bitterly.

"We seem to have arrived at a deadlock," observed Nash, putting an end to the fruitless discussion. "Both of you young men were, by your own admission, at the Winsonia at the time of the murder and therefore might have committed it. Neither of you, however, could have escaped through the transom. Which again leaves you on an equal footing. In short, the honors are even, and we have arrived nowhere. I had hoped that talking things out might prove profitable, but it has not, so I suggest that we try, instead, thinking things out."

He paused as if for replies and, receiving none, went on: "I think I am justified in claiming that I have probably done more serious thinking about the case than any one here, so you will perhaps find my conclusions interesting. There were various small discrepancies and contradictions between the statements of the different persons I had questioned, but for all, with one exception, I could find a plausible explanation. That exception was the groans heard by Mr. Solari."

Nash paused again, with a glance toward the Italian, then continued: "A woman's groans, Mr. Solari said, coming from the sitting room. Who could the woman have been, I asked myself. And why was she groaning? The idea that it might have been Mrs. Green groaning after she had been stabbed, was untenable, because, if Mrs. Green had been in the sitting room when she was stabbed or afterward, there would have been bloodstains there. And there were none. Now the murderer, it appeared, had escaped by the transom, and so, I reasoned, must have been a woman or a very small man; but would the murderer have advertised her

presence by groaning so loudly as to be heard by passers-by?

"Then a curious thing came to light. No one but Mr. Solari appeared to have heard the groans. Several persons in the hotel testified to having passed the Greens' rooms shortly before midnight, but no one but Mr. Solari seemed to have heard any groans. That strange circumstance, coupled with the inexplicableness of the groans themselves, led me to wonder whether they had not been Mr. Solari's invention.

"Now, mind you, I am not saying that they were, I was merely trying out the idea to see what I could make of it. Naturally, the first question that arose was: Why should he have invented them? As a pretext for notifying the office that he thought something was wrong in Mrs. Green's rooms? But, if he had invented the groans, what reason had he for thinking something was wrong? Something was wrong, but how did he know it? Or, if he didn't know it but only thought so, why did he think so? Or, if neither, why did he want the matter investigated? For he did want it investigated. He asked the night clerk to send up some one at once; in fact, he was urgent about it. And when the hotel detective, Morrison, went up, what did he find? He found a light in Mrs. Green's sitting room and none in her bedroom. He found both doors locked on the inside, and—he found a pearl earring lying in the side hall at the bedroom door."

CHAPTER XXIII

NASH SCORES

NASH closed his eyes for a moment, as if to think the better, and when he again went on he kept his gaze fixed on the wall a little to one side of Solari's head. The Italian had been listening with an unmoved face. If he had any cause to be disturbed by the direction the detective's speculations were taking, he gave no sign of it.

"Now let us look at that earring for a moment—with our minds' eyes. Its being at that door may have been an accident, and it may not. It may have been dropped there by the murderer in going through the transom—and it may not. We don't know how it got there. Morrison's idea was that Mrs. Green might have had it in her bag and pulled it out by accident in removing her key; but he was mistaken, because the key that Mrs. Green carried was the one to the sitting room.

"Now note this: Until Morrison picked up that earring, he had found nothing that seemed to him even to justify his knocking at Mrs. Green's door. She might be asleep, he thought, and merely have forgotten to turn out the light in the other room. He hesitated to disturb her and was just on the point of going around to Solari's room to question him when he found the earring. That gave him an excuse for knocking. And—we may note in passing—it prevented his going to Solari's room. When his

knocks brought no response, he tried having the telephone bell rung and then called the porter, forced a door, and discovered the murder. And then——

"But no, I'm wrong there," Nash said, interrupting himself. "He did not discover the murder. It was not until the police arrived a few minutes later that the case was found to be murder. Morrison took it for suicide; and why not? Any one would have, at first glance. The doors were both locked on the inside, there was a knife wound in the breast and a knife on the floor near by, and the stab in the back had been concealed by moving the body so that the blood on the carpet from the back wound was covered by the woman's dark skirt. At first glance, any one would have taken the case for suicide; but the minute Smith came along and took a closer look he discovered the wound in the back and knew it was murder.

"The deception, proved to have been deliberate by the moving of the body, had not deceived very long and could not have been expected to. But why had it been resorted to at all? That was a very puzzling question. If, I reasoned, the murder had been deliberate and the murderer had planned ahead to give it the appearance of suicide by locking the doors on the inside and making his get-away by the transom, he would most certainly not have stabbed his victim in the back; but he had stabbed his victim in the back. Therefore, though the murder might have been deliberate, I concluded definitely that the attempt to make it look like suicide had not been thought of until afterward. But why had it been thought of at all? Why attempted?

"I confess I was stumped. Then into the darkness

came a sudden ray of light. The testimony of Hines, the young man occupying the room just opposite the Greens' bedroom, convinced me that the pretense of suicide had not been made by the murderer, but by some one else, because Hines had found the bedroom door unlocked after the murder, and he had found the lights on in the bedroom and off in the sitting room. Just the opposite, you see, from what they were when the body was discovered. The change, then, plainly had a purpose.

"Now I'm not going to bore you with too many details." Nash glanced about the circle of his listeners, all silent and intent. "A line of reasoning is usually more interesting to the reasoner than to any one else. Suffice it to say that what I learned from Hines started me on a new track. I've already mentioned my doubts about the groans Solari claimed to have heard, and Hines' experience suggested the idea that Solari might have had a similar one. I mean that he, too, might have opened the bedroom door and seen Mrs. Green's dead body on the floor. Why not? It is a much more plausible supposition than that he heard groans, and a better reason for his asking for an investigation than that. Don't you agree with me?"

No one replied to the question, which was addressed to the audience in general, for every eye was on Solari, as though something were expected from him. But nothing came. He continued as before to look fixedly at Nash.

"It was, however, only a supposition," Nash went on, resuming his thoughtful stare at the wall. "But when I was considering it I remembered something Solari had said to me. It was most unfortunate for

him, he said, that he happened to be there at the Winsonia at the time of the murder. He meant, of course, because of his previous acquaintance with Mrs. Green, and especially because of the threat against her life that he was known to have made. It was only natural, as he realized, that, being in the hotel when she was murdered, he should be suspected of the crime.

"Well, I gave my reasoning faculties a rest for a while and put my imagination to work. I pictured to myself just what I should have done if I had been Solari and had gone to Mrs. Green's rooms that night, expecting to have a little friendly conversation with her, and had found her dead—murdered.

"Well, what could I have done? Gone back to my room to wait for events to take their own course. Left the hotel and disappeared. Notified the office of my discovery, and when the police arrived told them the truth, which they would not have believed. Those were the three things I could have done, and all three would have led to the same result—my arrest for murder. I felt quite sure that I—being Solari or myself—would have tried to think of something else that I could do.

"But what else was possible? I could think of only one possible way of escape, and that was so desperate that I doubted if any man would have dared to try it under the circumstances; but, I believe now, that Solari did."

So gradually had the detective made his transition from the realm of the hypothetical to that of reality that probably few of his hearers realized the change. But he was very conscious himself that he was mak-

ing a direct charge against Solari, and he looked squarely at him as he continued.

"I believed that he arranged the body so as to hide the stains on the carpet, that he placed the earring outside the door, that he wiped the dust from the transom to give the impression that some one had gone through it, that he turned out the light in the bedroom and turned it on in the sitting room—so that that room should be the one that the investigators entered first; and, having locked the bedroom door on the inside, I believe that he went out of the sitting-room door, as Barnell testifies, and to his own room and immediately telephoned to the office. Then I believe that he went back to 919, locked himself in, and waited for the door to be broken open."

At this astonishing declaration, every one in the room moved—except Solari. He looked as if incapable of movement, as if petrified. His face had turned a grayish white, and his big, dark eyes seemed to have sunk farther back into his head. No one uttered a word of any kind, and Nash went on again.

"It was a desperate plan, but it worked. The earring at the bedroom door led, as we have already seen, to the forcing of the door, and the flimsy pretense of suicide served its purpose, also. Had Morrison seen at a glance that the case was murder, he might have rushed back into the lighted sitting room to the telephone, in which event he might have been in time to see Solari stealing from his hiding place, the closet, to the hall door. Deceived by appearances into thinking it merely a case of suicide, he stopped to turn up the lights in the bedroom and take another look at the dead woman, which gave Solari the time he needed to make good his escape.

"But even then, I think, his troubles were not over, for why did he not go to his room, instead of stopping at the door and knocking? I can think of only one explanation. As he stepped into the hall, he saw some one coming and, not daring to go on or to go back into the room, he stood still where he was and knocked on the door, to give the impression that he had just arrived there, both to the person passing outside, and to the two men in the adjoining room. It was a clever ruse that succeeded perfectly."

His face pallid and drawn, the Italian still stared at Nash, but he did not speak until directly questioned.

"Well, Solari, what have you to say?"

"Nothing." He gave his heavy shrug. His voice was firm. "It is not true," he added. "It is all of your imagination. The idea would not have come to me of such a thing."

"A man who has been in prison five years," returned Nash, "has heard from his fellow prisoners of many bold ways of escape. I have no doubt you had been told of some one having used such a scheme as you employed, and that you remembered it when the need arose."

"I did not hear of it, and I did not employ it," said Solari.

"There's one thing certain, at least," put in Wainwright at this point, "no man would have taken such a desperate risk but the murderer."

"That's what I say," Green muttered, encouraged by his lawyer's opinion. Barnell was silent. He gazed at Nash as if under a spell he could not resist. The others in the room, the detectives, also, watched Nash, expectancy in their faces. They knew from

experience that he never started anything he could not finish.

"The question as to who the murderer is," said Nash, "we shall now consider. To begin with——"

He stopped abruptly. The telephone bell was ringing. Green made a start to rise to answer it, but Wainwright, who was seated nearer to it, said: "I'll answer," and did so. Then he turned to Nash. "For you," he said and handed over the receiver.

The inspector's conversation was brief and conveyed nothing whatever to those who heard only his end of it. "Yes?" he said in a questioning tone, several times. Then simply: "All right," and he hung up.

"That's fortunate," he said as he turned from the telephone. "Now we shall be able to discard speculation. The question is settled as to who the murderer is. Barnell is the murderer, and Green is his accomplice."

"What!" It was Wainwright who uttered the one sound that answered Nash's abrupt announcement, and with the word the lawyer rose. Trembling and white, Green, too, came unsteadily to his feet. Barnell did not move. He seemed petrified.

"What?" exclaimed Wainwright again in a less astonished but more indignant tone.

"You don't know, do you," said Nash, "that Green had two wives living day before yesterday?"

"What?"

"Ask him."

With eyes of amazement and horror, the lawyer turned and looked at Green, but he did not speak. Green's face was livid and terrified. His lower jaw hung a little. Nash continued:

"He married a girl named Nora Murray in New York two or three years ago, under the name of Harold Gray, and later he deserted her. She turned up day before yesterday and told his second wife about his previous marriage. The second wife threatened to send him to prison for bigamy, demanding a million dollars as the price of her silence. That was his motive for hiring Barnell to murder her. They got together in the afternoon, and that night Green was careful to arrange a perfect alibi for himself.

"By Barnell's own admission, and Green's, too, Green went up to see him immediately after hearing that the murder had been done. Barnell told him Solari had committed it. That was Barnell's scheme, to do the killing himself, knowing Solari would be the one on whom suspicion would fall. Not even to Green did he admit his guilt. I haven't the slightest doubt that Green really believes Solari is the murderer."

Green had sunk into his chair, unable to keep his feet. His face was twitching, his hands shook. Barnell had not moved.

"Green had the key to his bedroom at the Winsonia. He gave it to Barnell," Nash went on rapidly. "Barnell no doubt expected to let himself in with it and murder his cousin in her sleep. But he found her still up, and just what excuse he made to get himself admitted, I don't know. But I know that he killed her. He admits that he was there and——"

"Yes, but I didn't kill her." Barnell sat grasping the arms of his chair. "I wasn't even in her room. I didn't kill her. And you'll never prove I did."

With speech, some of his former bravado had returned.

"That telephone message I got just now," said Nash, "was from one of the men that I sent up this evening, after my talk with you at headquarters, to search your room. Under a board in your floor they found Mrs. Green's pearls and other jewelry.

"As for you, Green," Nash continued, "every word of your conversation with Mrs. Gray this afternoon was heard and taken down in shorthand. Where's the transmitter, Burnham?"

Without replying in words, Burnham walked across the room to the steam pipes, ran his hand down behind them, and brought into view a round, black object that looked like a telephone receiver without the mouthpiece.

"That," said Nash, addressing Green, "is a dictograph transmitter. Wires run from it to the instrument in the room below. Two men down there heard what you and your first wife said to each other, as distinctly as if they had been in the room with you at the time.

"And now," Nash concluded, turning to Smith, "arrest them."

At the order a choking cry burst from Green's lips, a cry inarticulate and wild with fear; and as Smith neared him, he staggered to his feet, then toppled over unconscious on the floor. Wainwright immediately hurried to him, and Smith and Kernan knelt to pick him up.

"Take him into the bedroom. We must have the doctor," said Wainwright.

The detectives obeyed, but as they laid their bur-

den on the bed they exchanged a silent glance. Then Smith looked at Wainwright.

"He's dead," he said.

At police headquarters, after Barnell had been locked up, Solari finally admitted that Nash's deductions concerning his part in the affair were true—with one exception. He had not placed the earring outside the bedroom door. The mate to it was found among some other valuables hidden in Barnell's room, and it was concluded that he had dropped it by accident in leaving the scene of his crime.

THE END

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