

THE  
WIDDINGTON  
CIPHER

BY  
WILLIAM JOHNSON



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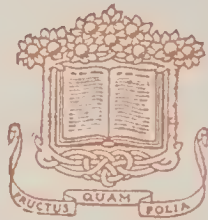
THE  
WADDINGTON CIPHER

*Books by William Johnston*

“LIMPY”: THE BOY WHO FELT NEGLECTED  
THE APARTMENT NEXT DOOR  
THE FUN OF BEING A FAT MAN  
THE HOUSE OF WHISPERS  
THE MYSTERY AT THE RITSMORE  
THE TRAGEDY AT THE BEACH CLUB  
THE WADDINGTON CIPHER

# The Waddington Cipher

By  
William Johnston,



Garden City      New York  
Doubleday, Page & Company  
1923

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES  
AT  
THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

*First Edition*

SEP 25 '23

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## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A CALL FROM THE PAST . . . . .	I
II. THE BEST-LAID PLANS . . . . .	18
III. STRANGERS IN THE DARK . . . . .	38
IV. INSIDE THE FENCE . . . . .	53
V. A WOMAN LISTENS . . . . .	70
VI. A STORY OF HATE . . . . .	85
VII. WHAT MR. JESSUP KNEW . . . . .	100
VIII. BURIED TREASURE . . . . .	115
IX. SEVERAL MORE PUZZLES . . . . .	132
X. PLAINLY AN ERROR . . . . .	148
XI. THE WADDINGTON WAY . . . . .	163
XII. ONE PLAN UPSET . . . . .	178
XIII. A DEAL IS PROPOSED . . . . .	191
XIV. A JOURNEY IS PLANNED . . . . .	203

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XV. AN EXCITING EVENING . . . .	213
XVI. BUT WHERE WAS ANNE? . . . .	227
XVII. AT THE JOURNEY'S END . . . .	243
XVIII. A SECRET IS TOLD . . . . .	255
XIX. A FAMILY CONCLAVE . . . . .	267
XX. THE CIPHER SOLVED . . . . .	279
XXI. DISCOVERED—THE GHOST . . . .	289

# THE WADDINGTON CIPHER

## CHAPTER I

### A CALL FROM THE PAST

**F**ATE'S Messenger, disguised as a half-grown boy from the telegraph office, arriving at the Studios Building at three o'clock in the morning, found nothing to stop his progress or to hinder the carrying out of his portentous mission. The elevator attendant, long habituated to the tenants' custom of turning night into early morning, after a mere casual glance at the address on the yellow envelope, sleepily took the urchin to the twelfth floor and silently pointed to a door on the left.

The boy, a cigarette butt in his yellowed teeth, the envelope clutched in one grimy hand, rang the bell once, twice. He could hear from within the

babel of many voices, the laughter of women, the tinkling of ice in glasses, and the notes of a piano. As his ring brought no answer, and noting that the door was slightly ajar, he pushed it boldly open.

Hardened though the youngster had become by night service, the scene of hilarious revelry he saw through the entry hall in the great room beyond so shook him from his blasé stoicism that he stood there for a moment gaping.

“Some party!” he muttered.

In one corner stood a table littered with a profusion of what had an hour or two before been a variety of good things to eat. A ragged quarter of a great birthday cake, its guttering candles now carelessly heaped beside it, symbolized the occasion of the merriment. Bottles and glasses were everywhere. At the piano sat a somewhat wobbly youth pounding out the latest jazz while half-a-dozen couples in evening dress wriggled and jigged about the room. Others, already exhausted by the strenuous revelry, most of both sexes manifestly affected by the profusion of stimulants, sat about in too intimate groupings, laughing shrilly

at inane jokes, talking thickly, bantering each other, aiming many shafts of early morning wit at their host.

“Mix us another one, Waddy,” a girl from the Follies called out. “It’s your twenty-fifth birthday. Let’s have twenty-five apiece and make a night of it.”

As the boy stood taking in the scene a tall blond chap scrambled up from the hassock on which he had been sprawled, revealing as he did so a height of fully six feet. His face, handsome enough in its way, at the moment had a bored, world-weary expression, and while his well-cut clothes revealed a vigorous frame, there were dark circles under his eyes that told plainly of far too many other nights spent as this one had been.

“Here, boy,” he called out. “What is it?”

“Mr. Hurd,” said the messenger, extending his telegram.

“I’m Mr. Hurd,” he answered as he carelessly tore open the envelope.

As he glanced at the yellow slip it had contained a puzzled look crept into his face. He stood look-

ing at the bit of paper as if trying to comprehend its meaning. The music had stopped and the dancers, as they paused, caught sight of their host's face and noted his apparent confusion.

“What's it all about, Waddy?” one of the girls cried out, as she did so snatching the telegram from his hand. “Why such a gloom?”

Thinking it merely some belated message of birthday congratulation, the rest of the party came crowding around.

“Read it out loud,” someone called.

“Yes, go on. Read it,” came in chorus from the rest of the merry-makers.

Her forehead puckering into a puzzled frown the girl obeyed, reading it slowly, word by word, as if trying to decipher its meaning.

JAMES WADDINGTON HURD

If you would prevent murder being done come at once to Ortonville.

HENRY T. JESSUP.

“Why, Waddy,” she exclaimed as she finished reading it. “What a funny message to get! What does it mean?”

“Yeh, what’s all the shooting for?” gurgled the youth at the piano, laughing inanely as if it was something original and witty that he had said.

For a moment Hurd did not answer. Puzzled as he had been on his first reading of the message, he had been even more perplexed to account for the amazing effect its reading aloud had produced on one of his guests. She had happened to be sitting in a corner just within the line of his vision as Jessie Bray had read it. As Jessie had neared the end of the message—he thought it was at the word Ortonville, perhaps at the signature, he couldn’t be sure which—a startled look, almost of fear, had sprung into this one girl’s eyes. With a quick motion she had crushed her handkerchief against her lips as if to stifle a scream, and now white-faced, plainly terrified, she was sitting there in the corner, bolt upright, watching him intently.

The rest of the crowd came thronging about him, their curiosity aroused, plying him with eager questions, but still Hurd stood there paying little heed to them, wondering about that girl and why the reading of the telegram had so startled her.

Who was she?

Someone—he could not remember who—had brought her to the party. There was nothing unusual about that. Informality was the rule at these affairs. It was not at all uncommon for a dozen guests to be present who had never even seen the host before. Any group or groups that might have accidentally assembled at any one of the supper clubs was just as likely as not to have someone say:

“Come on, let’s all go over to Waddy Hurd’s place,” and that was all there was to it. Most of the time nobody even bothered with introductions after they arrived. If any one had presented him to this girl or had told him her name he had failed to remember it.

Several times during the evening he had found himself studying her curiously and wondering about her. In some way she had seemed to him different, out of place.

A slender little dark creature, with brilliant brown eyes, more distinctively dressed than most of the others, he had noticed that practically all



of the time she had sat shyly alone in her corner taking nothing to drink as various liquors were passed around. Once, though, he had glimpsed her dancing with one of the men, and seeming to be vivaciously enjoying it.

There was something different about her. It was nothing she had done or said that had impressed him, for he was certain he had not talked with her. Just looking at her made him think of outdoors, of the woods, of the clean, bracing air of the open. Her very presence there seemed to have aroused in him a vague but growing distaste for the company, its conduct and the sort of life it typified. Were revels like this, he found himself wondering, really worth while? Were they even amusing? He told himself that he was sick of it all, night after night the same senseless repetition of many other nights—dinner with some of “the bunch,” an evening at some silly musical show, a supper party afterward, dancing and generally too much to drink, and the next morning—or more often noon—nothing left of it but a bad taste in the mouth.

Meanwhile inquiries were being flung at him:

“Who’s it from?”

“Where’s Ortonville?”

“What’s it all about?”

“Who’s Henry T. Jessup?”

At last Hurd raised his hand for silence and a hush fell over the group, broken only by the crash of a glass knocked over by the pianist.

“I’m just as much puzzled as any of you,” he announced. “I have no idea who Henry T. Jessup is and I have never been in Ortonville. I haven’t the slightest notion whose life it is that is in danger. I hope it isn’t mine.”

“It’s a joke someone is trying to pull on you. That’s what it is,” the pianist announced. “We should worry. Come on, gang, hit it up.”

But somehow the message—perhaps it was the sinister hint of murder that it mentioned—had put a damper on the merriment. No one responded to the pianist’s invitation and presently the girls began slipping away to the dressing room for their wraps. A few minutes later the party was all over and Hurd found himself at the door, absent-

mindedly receiving the adieus of his departing guests. As by twos and threes they slipped out with the conventional words of parting, he found the little dark-eyed stranger at his side.

For just one instant her hand was slipped into his as she looked up into his face.

“You’re going there—to Ortonville, of course?” she questioned in a tense whisper.

Utterly taken back at the unexpected query, Hurd stammered confusedly as he gazed down into her upturned face, looked into those wonderful brown eyes of hers just now lighted up with eager interest.

“Why—why—” he began—“you see—I don’t understand—I don’t know—I haven’t thought anything about it. I don’t know whom the telegram came from nor what it means.”

Steadily her eyes held his—held them challengingly, almost tauntingly.

“If I were a man——” she breathed.

“I’m going,” Waddy blurted out hastily, much to his own surprise, his decision hardly forming before it was on his lips. “Of course I’m going.”

Before he realized it, she had freed her hand quickly from his and had vanished into the hall, slipping away quickly as another group of departing guests descended on him with their good-nights. Rudely disregarding everything they were saying, he stood for an instant stupidly staring in the direction in which the girl had gone, then crushing through the throng about him he ran to the elevator with the intention of intercepting her.

He was too late.

She had gone. The car already had descended, carrying her away from him. Impetuously he started back to his rooms with the intention of telephoning down to have her stopped in the lower hall. He must speak further with her. He must find out what she meant. Then all at once it came to him how ridiculous such a proceeding as he had contemplated would be. He did not even know her name. With difficulty recovering his composure he turned again to his duties as host, though all the while he was thinking of her. He must find out who she was. He must ascertain in what way she was concerned in the strange telegram that

had come to him. He must discover why she had been so eager, insistent even, that he should obey the mysterious summons.

Impatiently he waited for the departure of the two or three who lingered after the others. He wanted to be alone, to be rid of them all. He wanted to have time to think what it all might mean. A sense of relief, of freedom came to him. As the door closed on the last of them, with a quick, disgusted glance at the reeking disorder his guests had left behind them, he hastily turned off the lights as if to shut out the unpleasant sight and entered his bedroom.

Throwing off his coat and freeing his tired feet from his pumps, Hurd dropped down on the edge of the bed and sat there for many minutes pondering over the last hour's strange occurrences. He had been entirely truthful when he had told his guests that the name of Henry T. Jessup was nothing to him and that he had no idea what the telegram meant. The suggestion that it might be an attempt at a joke he dismissed as unworthy of consideration. The very brevity of the message

and its simple wording seemed evidence of its sincerity.

“Ortonville!”

As he repeated the name aloud it seemed to him somehow vaguely reminiscent, as if years and years ago he might have heard it occasionally in some rather intimate connection. He could not for the life of him have told where the place was, whether East or West. He had no idea in what state it might be located, though his impression persisted that at some time he had heard the place mentioned, heard it often, in conversation. It seemed to be associated in some dim way with his long-distant early boyhood, when both his parents were still alive, when their home had been a brown-stone house just off the Avenue. The longer he pondered the more active seemed the little tracers that his brain began sending out to scour the shelves of memory. Two or three times he thought he remembered, but always it escaped him.

But even more important than this quest, there loomed up in his mind another, a still more dif-

ficult one, in which memory seemed powerless to aid him. Who was this strange girl whose personality had so insistently impressed itself upon him? How was he to find her again?

Mentally he began listing all the men of his acquaintance who had been present at the party. Surely some one of them must know her, some one of them must have brought her. The first thing in the morning, he decided, he would begin calling them all up and keep at it until he succeeded in locating her. Discussing with himself in what manner he might best describe her, he found himself delighting in the vision that the memory of her presented. She had seemed so wholesome, so different from the rest, not exactly pretty, but with wonderful, compelling, interesting eyes, and the blackest hair he ever had seen. There was something, too, reminiscently familiar, in her looks, as if he might at some time or other have seen a picture of her.

But more puzzling still did he find it to account for her perturbation when the telegram was read aloud and for her eagerness to learn his intentions.

It seemed incredible—yet she must have comprehended the significance of that message. Could it be possible, he wondered, that it was she who had contrived to have it sent? Had she managed to get included in his party in order to observe what effect it might have on him? Certainly she had been anxious to learn what he was going to do. She had all but challenged him to go to——

“Ortonville!”

In a flash it came back to him. No wonder the name had seemed familiar to him. He had heard it on many occasions in his childhood. That was the town from which his maternal grandmother had come. She had been Anne Waddington of Ortonville. It had been for her father, his own great-grandfather, that he had been named—James Waddington Hurd. It was this grandmother’s money, he recalled gratefully, that had been the basis of the family fortune, the fortune that enabled him now to maintain his life of luxurious idleness in this comfortable apartment.

Vivid memories of his grandmother came crowding back into his brain, although he had been only



seven or eight when she died. He visualized her easily, a commanding figure, erect, white-haired, up to her very last days an imperious grande dame, demanding and receiving respect from all about her. There came to his mind, vaguely at first, and then more vividly, recollections of those dread occasions when, dressed in his best, he would be taken to see her, conducted in state through the long drawing room, stiff and ugly with its horsehair chairs and sofas, with its rows of forbidding-looking portraits, into a smaller room in the rear where, sitting in state in a rustling gown of depressing black silk, she would ask him unwelcome questions about his progress at school.

On the heels of these memories came others, pleasanter memories, of his mother, adoring and adored, who had died when he was ten; of his father, charming, polished, a man of the world, who on his wife's death had gone abroad to live, taking his son with him. There had followed school days in Switzerland, in Paris, broken now and then by delightful roamings with his father on all parts of the Continent, a father who indulged

him in everything, who treated him always more as a man friend than as a son. Then, while he was in Oxford—had come the war. Commissioned in the British army, he had had five years of it. It was while he was in Mesopotamia that word had reached him of his father's death in New York whither, after demobilization, he had returned to look after his investments. The death and carnage about him when the message came not only had dulled his grief, but had minimized his loss. By the time the war ended he had become accustomed to the idea of being alone in the world.

Parentless, homeless, "Waddy" Hurd, summoned by the estate lawyers, had returned to his native city almost a stranger to find himself at least in possession of a comfortable fortune. Naturally enough, after his years of army hardship, the city's lures had quickly led him into its gayest circles. From the highway had flocked roystering companions to join him in the pleasure of spending his money. For two years scenes like that of the evening just ended had been his nightly habit. And until now he had been content

to take life as it came, almost convinced that he was enjoying it.

Ortonville!

Like a call from the past it came to him now, a compelling call that a man's duty to his forebears made him obey. As Hurd at last settled himself between the sheets his mind was firmly made up. He was going to start at once for Ortonville, wherever it might be, whatever it might hold in store for him. He was glad, too, that he had told the stranger girl of his intention. He felt in his heart that that was what she had wished him to do, even though he could not comprehend her motive.

But who was she? And how was he to find her again?

## CHAPTER II

### THE BEST-LAID PLANS

**A**RISING earlier than he had any day for many weeks, Hurd put into effect his plan for the first step in his adventure. He went downtown to call on his lawyer.

In spite of the habitual air of self-control in which he long had trained himself, Elwood Parsons started and turned a sickly gray when his client's name was announced. A visit unannounced, indeed without an urgent summons, was an event so unusual that the lawyer could construe it as having only one meaning—trouble.

Yet he asked himself, his scheming mind now doubly alert, how could Hurd have found out? Hurd, so far as his lawyer knew—and he made it his business to know practically everything the young man did—had been devoting himself strictly to a life of riotous pleasures.

Only a moment before, Parsons, at peace with the world, had been sitting contentedly at his desk laying plans for the future, reviewing as he did so his career from the time he had entered the law office as its humblest clerk, until to-day when it was his name that led the rest, Parsons, Peck, Blakely & Cohen.

It had been a long, hard, devious climb. Now, in the late fifties, he had reached that position where the arduous details fell to the lot of his associates and clerks. This particular morning the subject of his cogitation had been Frieda, his motherless daughter. Looking back he counted as always his early marriage as the one mistake of his career. Attracted by the fresh blonde beauty of a Swedish girl, a mechanic's daughter, he had married her when he was in the twenties. Had he only waited, he often told himself, he might have wedded much more advantageously, married some girl whose money would have made his climb to the heights of success much less difficult. Fortunately—he could not view it otherwise—his wife had died years ago, leaving as her only heritage a five-year-old golden-haired daughter. Scheming always for

the future, Parsons had done his best to obliterate all traces of his daughter's plebeian origin by surrounding her with luxury and providing for her the best of training, spending recklessly, extravagantly, always beyond his growing income. Frieda, at twenty-two, was a haughty, cultured, somewhat spoiled beauty, looking the aristocrat to her slim pink finger-tips.

Frieda, Parsons had decided, was to marry Waddy Hurd, then all would be well. Ever a skilful strategist, he had not tried to force things with either of them. When Hurd had returned to America after the war, and was busy with the settlement of his father's estate, Parsons frequently had had him to dinner, observing with approval that his daughter seemed much attracted to him. An invitation each summer to his Adirondack camp had further cemented the friendship. That Waddy recently had cast his lot among the wild Broadway crowd rather than among those of better social position had not worried Parsons in the least. When reports of the young man's all-night revels reached him he only smiled.

“The harder he goes,” he said to himself sagely, “the sooner he will tire of it and be ready to settle down.” The comparison Hurd would make sooner or later between the associates of his revels and Frieda assuredly would be in Frieda’s favour.

Frieda! All at once Parsons recalled that she had announced her intention the evening before of dropping in to go to luncheon with him. How fortunate! Glancing at the clock, he saw that she was due in a few minutes. If only she would arrive while Hurd was there—whatever he might want.

As the young man entered, Parsons saw at once from his face that something was amiss.

“Well, young man,” he greeted him, assuming a manner of friendly joviality, “what brings you down here? Is your bank account overdrawn or are you being sued for breach of promise?”

“Nothing like that,” grinned Waddy cheerfully enough, although the smile quickly vanished. “I’ve just come down here to ask a question or two.”

For a moment the two of them studied each

other appraisingly. Parsons, knowing what he did, secretly was aghast at the possibilities of the situation, hardly daring to wonder what the questions might be.

Waddy Hurd, looking at Mr. Parsons, was wondering if he dared make a confidant of him. How he wished that there was someone to whom he could tell everything—about the strange girl at his party and the thoughts that she had inspired in him, about the telegram and her peculiar interest in it. He had found himself that morning wishing that his father was alive, or his mother—some one of his own kin to whom he could go and lay bare his heart. Never before had he realized how alone he was. But now, as he studied Mr. Parsons, he did not feel encouraged to self-revelation. After all, there never had been any real intimacy between them.

“I understand, then,” said Mr. Parsons, “that you have come here for some legal advice—our opinion, perhaps.”

“Hardly that.”

“What, then?” Mr. Parsons’s manner again in-



dicated mystification. He was rapidly running over in his mind all the affairs connected with the Hurd estate.

“What I wish to ask is this,” explained Waddy. “What do you know about a place called Ortonville? Where is it?”

Amazedly the lawyer inspected his youthful client, wondering what possible occurrence could have sponsored the question, yet feeling greatly relieved at the course the conversation had taken. He could conceive of nothing in Ortonville that should cause him alarm.

“It is a little village about one hundred miles upstate. Why?”

“Have I any kinsfolk living there?”

Slowly the lawyer shook his head, the idea forming that perhaps someone from Ortonville might have written to Hurd, claiming to be a relative and asking financial aid.

“You have no near relatives that I know of. Your father was an only son of an only son. Your mother had no brothers or sisters and her parents died shortly after her marriage.”

“What about my Grandmother Hurd?”

“She came, I believe, originally from Ortonville. Of course she has been dead for many years, but when she was alive I personally handled her affairs. I used frequently to see her, and in all of our association I do not recall that she ever spoke of any kinsfolk in Ortonville except her father. Your great-grandfather, James Waddington, had an estate there. I do not know whether you are familiar with your family’s history or not.”

“I know nothing whatever about it,” said Hurd almost apologetically. “You see, I have been away from this country so much and Dad never talked about it. I know nothing about it at all.”

Mr. Parsons nodded understandingly. He now had entirely recovered his assurance.

“Naturally you have had little opportunity. Well, your great-grandfather, James Waddington, coming to this country from England when he was quite a young man, set himself up in the city here as a silversmith and jeweller. In twenty years he managed to accumulate a large fortune, and, be-

coming naturalized as a citizen, for a time was quite prominent in municipal affairs and in the city's social life. He seems, however, to have brought with him the true Briton's desire for becoming the owner of a landed estate. When he was in the forties he retired from business and purchased five hundred acres in or near the village of Ortonville. He built a mansion and thereafter made his home there, rarely coming to the city.

“As a matter of fact”—Mr. Parsons pressed a button summoning one of his clerks, and pausing, directed him to fetch a certain steel box—“you are still the owner of the mansion in which your great-grandfather lived.”

He paused again for a moment to run through the file of papers that the steel box contained.

“Yes, here it is.” He spread out on his desk for Hurd's inspection some of the papers he had removed. “Here are copies of the deeds for the property, or at least a remainder of it, some eighty acres on which the old mansion stands. When your grandmother died seventeen years ago she bequeathed all her property, real and personal, to

your father. He in turn, on his death more recently, bequeathed everything to you.”

“You have never by any chance been in Ortonville, have you? You don’t know what the old place is like?”

“I was there only once, years ago. From these papers it appears, in your grandmother’s time, some local man was appointed as her agent there and we never had occasion to disturb this arrangement. We are represented there by this same agent, a man named Jessup.”

“Henry T. Jessup?” exclaimed Hurd, excitedly.

Mr. Parsons glanced at him surprisedly, meanwhile referring to the papers to make sure of the name.

“Yes, that is the man—Henry T. Jessup.” He had mentally decided now that the occasion for Hurd’s inquiry must have been a letter from this man Jessup. While he could not conceive what purpose Jessup could have in writing, the decision was forming that he must arrange at once to have him replaced. It was unthinkable that an old busybody of an agent should be permitted to com-

municate direct with Hurd instead of through the office of his attorneys. There was no telling where it would lead. Meanwhile, he continued his inspection of the papers.

“It appears, Mr. Hurd, from these records, that the house has been unoccupied for many years except by caretakers. In these envelopes you will find receipts for sums paid as yearly wage as caretakers to ‘Mr. and Mrs. H. Cupps, caretakers,’ and in the last five years, to Mrs. H. Cupps alone, her husband apparently having died. Here, also, are records of the transfer of deeds, tax receipts, and all other expenditures for the property, forwarded to us by Mr. Jessup.”

“What sort of an old bird is this Jessup?”

“I do not recollect that he ever has been in this office. All our business with him has been by correspondence.”

“Do you know,” asked Hurd, explosively, “if he has a daughter?”

A knowing look crept into Mr. Parsons’s face. He thought he understood now. Naturally, if Henry T. Jessup had a daughter she would be more

or less informed about James Waddington Hurd and his fortune. The minx must have found some excuse for writing to Hurd and his interest had been stirred.

“It is quite within the range of possibility that Mr. Jessup has a daughter,” said Mr. Parsons, “but I regret to say that I know nothing of his domestic relations. Has his daughter written you?”

“Oh, no, nothing like that,” said Hurd, quickly. “I don’t even know that he has a daughter. I know nothing about him whatever.”

“I’m afraid,” said the lawyer, “I have told you all I can about Ortonville. It really is very little.”

“It’s a lot,” said Waddy, enthusiastically. “You have enlightened me on a most important subject. Here was I considering myself as a homeless wanderer on the face of the earth, without kith or kin. You have provided me with a home, a home I never suspected that I had—an ancestral home, if you want to look at it that way.”

“Such appears to be the case.”

“And what’s more,” Waddy announced, blithely, “I’m going up there right away and look it over. It has been years and years since I have had anything like a home. If you’ll just let me have those papers to establish my identity, and my claim to the place, I’ll run along. What’s a home for if one doesn’t live in it?”

“I fear you may find this mansion of yours in sad disrepair. A place left to caretakers for so many years as this has been will hardly be habitable.”

“I’ll take a chance on it.”

“In any event,” suggested Parsons as he handed over a selection of the documents, “I would advise you to motor up. If you are disappointed when you arrive, you can easily get away. I doubt if there is good train service. It is an out-of-the-way place.”

“That’s a good idea. I’ll do that very thing. Motoring will be much pleasanter. But don’t worry about my not being able to rough it. I had lots of it in the Peninsula.”

About to make his farewell and rush away, he

paused politely as Parsons inspected a card a page had handed to him.

“It’s Frieda, she’s here,” said the lawyer, as he directed that she be admitted at once.

He watched eagerly as the young people a moment later exchanged greetings, trying to read in their faces the secret of their hearts. Waddy assuredly seemed glad to see Frieda and his daughter’s face lighted up with a flush of pleasure.

“Why, Waddy Hurd!” she exclaimed, extending her hand. “I haven’t laid eyes on you for an age. Why haven’t you been to see me?”

“You’re too popular. It’s awfully hard to find you at home,” lied the young man politely.

“Now I’ve got you, I’m not going to let you escape. As a penalty for neglecting me you shall stay and lunch with Dad and me at the Bankers’ Club.”

“Sorry,” said Waddy, firmly, “I’d like to, but I can’t. Something awfully important has happened and I must attend to it right away.”

At his abrupt departure both father and daughter looked dismayed. Parsons, his first fears al-



layed, had been regarding Waddy's interest in Ortonville as a mere passing fancy, but now he did not know what to think. There was some mysterious motive that he found himself unable to fathom. As Waddy left the room both father and daughter were looking after him puzzledly, neither of them knowing quite what to make of it.

When Frieda turned toward her father, there was anger, disappointment, mortification in her face, and something more, something that told her father that she was in love with Waddy Hurd. Yet the knowledge, although it was what he had hoped for, did not satisfy him now.

"Come, let's go to luncheon," he said, casually. "Damn the young whelp," was what he was saying to himself. "I don't care what's up. I'll make him marry Frieda yet. He must marry her."

Although there was fear in his heart, although he knew that if his plans miscarried it meant ruin for him, his long years of duplicity had taught him to mask his feelings. Little did his daughter, troubled

as she was with her own affairs, suspect the existence of the fires of rage and fear that were consuming her outwardly calm parent.

Meanwhile Waddy, all unconscious of the perturbation he had aroused, was heading uptown as fast as possible. He was eager to be off for Ortonville at once. He had risen that morning in a mood entirely foreign to his habit, with two fixed purposes in mind. Hitherto he had gotten up to drift aimlessly along with whatever currents of amusement or revelry happened to exercise their influence. But to-day was vastly different.

Two problems confronted him:

Who was the girl?

What had that peculiar message meant?

Before going to Mr. Parsons's office he had spent a long time at the telephone. Not one of the men he had called seemed to have had any recollection of the girl or had been able to give him any clue to her identity. Two or three of his guests, awakened by his telephoning, vaguely remembered that in the groups in which they had come were some girls whose names they did not know. When they

asked him to describe the girl about whom he was inquiring, all that he seemed to remember about her was that she was little and dark, and differently dressed, and had wonderful eyes.

As he was packing for his journey, and still thinking about the girl, Waddy was interrupted by a caller, Conway Mason, one of his guests of the evening before. Mason looked at the shirts laid out and the waiting bag.

“For heaven’s sake, Waddy, what has happened? You get me out of bed this morning to ask me a lot of fool questions about some girl, and now it looks as if you were planning a hasty flight—or is it an elopement?”

Hurd turned a laughing face to him. He realized how absurd his questions must have sounded, but there was no use in his explaining it all to Mason. At any rate, he was too full of the idea of his voyage of discovery to his newly found home.

“You remember, Mason, that queer telegram I got last night?”

“Rather. Some sort of a joke, wasn’t it?”

“I don’t think so. I remembered having heard

that name Ortonville when I was a kid, so I went down to see my lawyer this morning, to see what he knew about the place. My people, it seems, came from there. My great-grandfather, the man for whom I am named, had a big estate there once, and my lawyer tells me I still own the old house. Think of it, I've got a home of my own that I had no notion existed! I'm going up there this afternoon and I'll probably stay a few days. Better come along."

"Let's see that telegram you received," said Mason.

Thoughtfully he read the paper that his host extended, finding it just as puzzling as it had sounded the night before.

"What did your lawyer say about it—this murder business?"

"I didn't tell him anything about that. If there's any sort of mystery about the place I want to dope it out for myself."

"If there's a mystery to be solved," said Mason, "that's where I shine. All the time you were digging ditches for his Majesty of England, I was one

of Uncle Sam's intelligence officers. I've had a lot of experience running down things."

"Behold the boy sleuth! Just the man I want. Well, then, let's go," cried Waddy. "There are a lot of things to be found out: why Jessup sent me that telegram instead of sending it to my lawyers, and who is going to murder whom, and what he expects me to do to prevent it."

"How long do you expect to stay?"

"I've no idea. I've never tried to prevent a murder before. I don't know how long it usually takes."

"Ha, ha," echoed Mason in hollow imitation of mirth. "You ought to write for the funny papers. But I'll accept your invitation. Fed up on these parties."

"All right, go pack a bag. We are going to motor. I'll pick you up in half an hour."

Hurd, left once more to himself, quickly finished his packing. As he looked into a drawer to see if he had forgotten anything, he saw something lying there and for a moment or two regarded it thoughtfully. At last, nodding his head slowly as if as-

suring himself that he was doing the right thing, he picked up the object at which he had been gazing, inspected it carefully, and then threw it into the bag.

“Who knows,” he said to himself, “it might come in exceedingly useful.”

“It” was the automatic that he had carried all through his military service, a weapon in the use of which he had become most proficient.

His bag stowed in his car, he was about to climb in himself, when a new notion struck him.

Suppose the stranger girl should try to communicate with him again? She would not know how to reach him through his lawyers. No one but Mr. Parsons and Conway Mason knew where he was going. He turned back into the lobby of the apartment building.

“If a lady calls me on the telephone or comes here to see me,” he said to the operator, “please tell her that I have gone there.”

“Gone where?” asked the puzzled operator.

“She will understand the message. Just say, ‘Mr. Hurd left word to tell you that he had gone

there.' Please see that the night operator gets the word, too."

"I'm to tell any lady who calls up that you have gone there. If there's more than one lady, am I to tell them all the same thing? Is it any particular lady? Hadn't you better give me her name, so that I'll be sure the right party gets your message?"

Any particular lady!

How was he to identify her for the telephone operator when he did not even know her name? He might say that she had the most wonderful eyes in the world, but that would hardly do.

"No," he said, "that's all. If *any* lady calls up, give her that message."

And as he climbed again into his car and threw in the clutch he comforted himself with the thought that if any other girl got the message it would be meaningless to her.

If the right girl got it, she'd understand.

## CHAPTER III

### STRANGERS IN THE DARK

**I**T WAS nearing ten o'clock. Puzzled as to their whereabouts on the unfamiliar road, Hurd had stopped his car while he climbed out to inspect a wayside sign by the aid of an electric torch from his motor kit.

"It's the place we're looking for, all right," he called out. "'Village of Ortonville, Speed Limit 15 miles. By order——'"

"Yes, I know," sighed Mason. "I'd even be glad to see the selectmen." From his place in the car he peered ahead, vainly trying to discover what lay ahead of them. Accustomed as they were to the glare of the city streets, habituated to well-lighted boulevards leading to shore resorts and country clubs, the monotonous blackness of the unlighted country roads that they had been traversing for the last two hours had had a depressing effect on both of them.



“Some burg,” Mason declared, scornfully. “They don’t even seem to have street lights.”

“Quit your sniffing at my home town,” retorted Waddy, as he climbed back into the motor, a feeling of elation that his quest was nearing its end quickening his spirits. “We’ll drive on a bit and probably we’ll come to Main Street. Then we can ask our way.”

“I don’t suppose there’s such a thing in the place as a decent hotel,” grumbled Mason, dolefully.

“Hotel, my eye,” scoffed Waddy. “Even if there was, we wouldn’t stop there. Do you think I have come this far in search of a home of my own to pass it up at the last minute because it happens to be dark? Know all men by these presents that it is the firm intention of James Waddington Hurd to sleep this very night under his own roof-tree, where he expects you to be his guest within the ancestral walls.”

“Provided he is able in this pesky darkness to find the aforesaid walls,” growled Mason, although he made no further protest.

Presently, as they drove cautiously along the road, the lights of the car marking a pathway ahead, ghostly shapes of dwellings, for the most part set well back from the road, became more frequent, but in none of them was any light visible. They came to a tiny frame church, recognizable by the spire silhouetted against the sky above the tree-tops and by a row of hitching posts along the roadside. A little distance beyond the church a descending turn in the road brought them into what even in the absence of lights they recognized as a sort of public square. Although it appeared to be almost surrounded by buildings only one light was visible. This came faintly from a building that had the unmistakable appearance of a country "general store."

"I'll say there's not much night-life here," said Mason, as Hurd steered the car in the direction of the lighted windows. Just as they reached the place the windows went dark, and a bearded man, emerging with a lantern in his hand, closed the door after him and locked it with a great key.

"Hey, there," Waddy called out.

"I ain't got no gasoline, if that's what you're after," the man answered surlily, deliberately turning to stare at them, after he had made sure the door was safely locked.

"We've plenty of gas, thank you," said Waddy, politely. "I just wanted to ask the way."

"Goshen's straight ahead, about twenty-eight miles. Just foller the road."

"But we're not going to Goshen."

"Land's sakes," said the storekeeper, for the first time manifesting any interest or curiosity. He raised his lantern to the level of their faces and, holding it at arm's length, peered curiously at them. "Where do you think you're going, then?"

"This is Ortonville, isn't it?"

"It's Ortonville, all right, but nobody ever stops here. There's nothing here for them to stop for."

"We're trying to find the Waddington place." Waddy's simple announcement seemed to have a strange effect on the villager. So sudden was the start he gave that he all but dropped the lantern.

"The Waddington place?" he echoed, disbelief manifest in his tone.

“Yes,” said Hurd, almost sharply. “Isn’t there anybody of that name around here?”

“It would be better for everybody if there wasn’t,” the man said, not with bitterness, but rather with the intensity of firm conviction, mingled perhaps with a trace of fear. Both Mason and Hurd, puzzled by his obvious perturbation when the name first had been mentioned, were now even more perplexed by his words and manner. His whole attitude seemed to express aversion, distrust, and mingled with it something of terror. Waddy, recalling the strange telegram he had received, the message that told of an impending murder, began to wonder if he had arrived too late. As he sat trying to frame a question that might lead to further information, the storekeeper came at him with a question that was a total surprise to him.

“Which of the Waddingtons was it you were looking for?”

“Is there more than one Waddington place?” asked Hurd, eagerly.

“There’s two,” the storekeeper answered, curtly,

“and that’s two too many. But what are you going there for if you don’t know the Waddingtons, if you don’t even know there’s two of them?”

“It’s just a matter of business—private business,” said Waddy, regretting now that his incautious question had betrayed his ignorance in regard to the Waddington family.

“Well, take it from me, young man, whatever your business might be, I’d go mighty slow about getting mixed up with either of them.”

“Ask him if there’s a hotel here,” said Mason in an undertone. “Maybe we had better wait until morning.”

“Nothing doing,” Waddy whispered back in reply.

“In fact, I’m warning you,” the villager continued, “that you ain’t safe trying to go on up there to-night. It ain’t safe for any one to be messing around in the dark with them crazy old varmints.”

“Look here, Mr.——” said Waddy, hesitating at the name.

“Mr. Cupps,” the storekeeper obligingly volunteered.

Memory came quickly to Waddy’s aid. He recalled the names he had read in those musty old accounts in the lawyer’s office earlier in the day.

“You’re not by any chance related to Mrs. Cupps, Mrs. H. Cupps, are you?”

“Yes and no. I’m related in a sort of a way, if you might call it that. Hosity Cupps was my grand-uncle and the widow was his wife. I reckon she’s my grand-aunt by marriage, though I never have thought about her as bein’ kinsfolk.”

“Well,” explained Waddy. “It wasn’t either of the Waddingtons I was trying to locate, but Mrs. Cupps, Mrs. H. Cupps, that I wish to see.”

“Oh, that’s different,” the storekeeper replied in what seemed to be greatly relieved tones. “It’s the *old* Waddington place you want.”

“I suppose so, if that’s where Mrs. Cupps lives.”

“She sure does. She’s lived there for so long, with none of the Waddingtons or their heirs ever coming back to the place, that for years everyone hereabouts has been calling it the Cupps’ place,

and at first I forgot about its rightly being a Waddington place. What was it you was wanting to see Mrs. Cupps about?"

"Sorry," said Waddy, "but my business with her is private."

"Well, don't tell me if you don't want to," Cupps retorted, testily, "though being a sort of relative of hers I reckon I might have a right to know. I'll warn you, though, it won't do you a mite of good to go up there to-night to see her."

"Why not?"

"There ain't no why about it, I'm just warning you."

"Tell us where the old Waddington place is," said Mason, impatiently. "That's all we want to know from you."

"All right," said Cupps, unruffled, "but, remember, I warned you. If you get into trouble it's on your own heads. Keep right on up this way"—he indicated a road to the left with a sweep of his arm—"for about half a mile, maybe it's nearer three quarters. Right on the brow of the first big hill you come to there's a big house.

You can't miss it even in the dark. There's a high iron fence all about it. That's the old Waddington place. But," he called out after them as they started off, "look out for yourselves."

Conway Mason, twisting around in his seat, sat for a moment with his eye on the villager who still stood with lantern held aloft, watching their departure.

"I'll say, Waddy," he observed as he settled back in the seat, "the neighbours around here don't seem to think much of the Waddington family."

"Their opinion is nothing to what the Waddington family, or at least this member of it, thinks about them, if that ruffian is a sample," retorted Waddy, crossly.

James Waddington Hurd was tired out. His long-continued nights of dissipation had sapped the stamina that had carried him to honours in athletics and in the army, far more than he had realized. The long drive alone had tested his strength, and now culminating as it had in this darkened village, with the storekeeper's outspoken hints of



family skeletons, his frazzled nerves were being tried to the utmost. What was it, he was wondering, that the village folk held against his people? Who were these two Waddingtons—"crazy old varmints," Cupps had called them—who had places somewhere in the vicinity? They must be kinsfolk of his and yet his lawyer had seemed to think that he had no living relatives.

Perhaps it had been foolish of him to set out so impetuously on this quest. When he received that telegram, what he should have done was to turn it over to his lawyers, as he did with everything else, and let them find out what it was all about. That was what Parsons was paid for. It is what he should have done—would have done—if——

Yes, he admitted it to himself. It was that girl who had inspired his rash journey. It was her challenge, "If I were a man," that had called him back to courage and action, in what on the spur of the moment he had conceived to be his duty to his family name.

"I say," Mason's voice broke in unpleasantly

on his train of thought, "suppose this old caretaker, Mrs. Whatever-her-name-is, doesn't recognize you or admit your identity and refuses to let us into the house, what are we going to do? I'm dog-tired. I wish we'd asked the old chap back there about a hotel."

"We'll get in all right," said Waddy, determinedly. "It is my home. I own the house, and I have the credentials to prove it. I'm going to sleep there to-night if we have to break in."

They had reached the hill their guide had mentioned and Waddy, slowing down, took it on second speed in order to make a better survey of their surroundings. Presently the light from the car's lamps revealed a fence of tall iron pickets, paintless, rusted, weather-beaten, the typical enclosure by which the millionaires of the 'seventies served notice on their neighbours of their desire for exclusiveness. Veering the car this way and that, in order that the glare of the headlights might light up the fence, they discovered two great iron gates that seemed to mark the terminals of a circular driveway.

In the ghostly darkness they could make out what appeared to be tall rows of ancient trees lining the driveway, but from their mysterious black depths no light came, no sound, nothing to indicate that in their shadows a house might be hidden.

“Gosh,” cried Mason, “this place gives me the shivers.”

“Here,” said Waddy, extending a flashlight, “take this and see if you can get one of the gates open, so we can drive in.”

Mason dropped out of the car, and with his way lighted by the tiny beam approached the south gate. Waddy, peering after him, heard the clanking of a chain.

“Nothing doing,” Mason called out. “The gate is fastened with a regular log chain and padlocked on the inside. Welcome home, old dear.”

Waddy’s retort was a vicious, prolonged honk of the motor horn, the notes of which, reverberating through the stillness of the night, produced a most startling effect. Waiting for a moment, and

hearing no response of any sort, he renewed the honking, continuing it at intervals.

“Careful,” mocked Mason, “or you may wake up your dear dead ancestors.”

“I’m going to wake somebody up. That old Mrs. Cupps, the caretaker, must be in the house somewhere.”

“Maybe she is so old that she can’t hear anything,” suggested Mason, facetiously. “It is a long time since any of the Waddingtons have been home, you know.”

Waddy’s only answer was to repeat the honking, and this time it apparently was to some effect. Back through the trees, perhaps three hundred feet away, a light appeared showing dimly at an elevation as if it might come from a lamp or lantern held at an upper window.

“Hello, the house,” Waddy shouted loudly, springing from the car.

In the darkness both of them stood listening, their eyes glued on the light, waiting some response. Presently Waddy shouted again.

There came the sound of a window being cau-

tiously raised. As they listened, awaiting an answering hail, Waddy's lips were forming to shout again, when through the stillness, a woman's voice, strident and shrill, raucous with age and wrath, called out:

"Get out. I don't know which one of you it is, nor what tricks you're up to this time, but I am ready for you. I warn you."

"Mrs. Cupps," Waddy called out. "Oh, Mrs. Cupps, this is——"

Before he could finish his sentence there came from behind the trees a burst of flame, followed by the roar of a shotgun. Off to the left they could hear the patter of shot. They heard the window shut with a slam although the glimmer of light still remained.

"Damn it, Waddy," Mason cried, amazedly, "the old girl is shooting at us. Come on, let's get out of here."

"Nothing doing," said Waddy, stubbornly. "It's my home. It is going to take more than an old woman with a blunderbuss to keep me out of it."

But though he spoke bravely, in his heart he was sick with anxiety. Not that he was afraid of old Mrs. Cupps' erratic shotgun. What gave him pause was the evidence of some dread secret about the Waddington family that made the people in the vicinity speak of them with such loathing. What hidden peril was it that would drive a helpless old woman to use firearms? More than ever he realized that the telegram had been sent to him in good faith, that there was murder in the air.

But as he pondered his fears vanished and his heart thrilled, for the thought came back to him now again more strongly than ever. In some way the stranger girl was linked with this place of mystery. He was glad, whatever might happen, that he had come.

## CHAPTER IV

### INSIDE THE FENCE

**W**HAT next?" asked Mason, quizzically, his fear vanishing and his spirits rising with the prospect of some action against a tangible foe.

"I'm going over that fence," replied Waddy, who had been standing stock still beside the car, peering into the depths of darkness about the old mansion.

"And get shot at again?"

"That's the best thing I do. They pinned a medal on me for it," he answered, laughingly.

"All right," said Mason, "go ahead if you want to. It's none of my business. It isn't my ancestral home. I'm going to wait right here in the car ready to carry off your mangled remains."

"Bah!" snorted Waddy, "afraid of a frightened old woman?"

“You said it. Scared women are the worst kind.”

While they talked the light at the upper window had continued to glow dimly, but evidently the occupant or occupants of the house had descended to the lower floor, for now there appeared through the trees several other spots of light nearer the ground as if some or all of the first-floor rooms had been lighted.

“Looks as if the old dame might be lighting up to repel an attack,” suggested Mason.

“I’ll soon find out what’s going on,” said Waddy making a running leap for one of the gates. He succeeded in gripping the top bar and by the exercise of his full strength managed to draw himself up and over, although he had to use the utmost caution to avoid being impaled on the sharp pickets. Balancing for a breathing spell on his perilous perch he let himself down on the inner side and dropped safely into the driveway.

Cautiously he began to work his way toward the house, slipping with hardly a sound from tree to tree, waiting for a moment behind each to make certain that his presence there had not been dis-



covered. As he crept on through the darkness all sorts of strange thoughts crept into his brain. He could hardly believe that it had been only yesterday that he had been one of a merry party enjoying all the luxuries that wealth and residence in a large city can bring. Here, everything was different. Time might have stopped fifty years before. There were no clanging street-cars, no electric lights, no taxi-cabs. He wondered if there were even telephones. The unfriendliness of the village storekeeper, the rusted iron fence over which he had just come, even the tall trees behind which he was skulking, all seemed to belong to another and a forgotten generation.

And over it all hung a baffling air of mystery. First there was the strange message that had come to him with its hint of impending murder. There were the outspoken hints that Cupps had given of the unpopularity of the Waddingtons, and now here at the home that was rightfully his, where he might reasonably have expected a welcome, his greeting had been a charge of birdshot. It seemed to him that all at once he had been set down in a

dark forest where something hidden lurked and menaced him from all sides.

Yet, chuckling to himself at the very absurdity of his own thoughts, he recalled that it was the year 1922, that he was hardly six hours by motor away from New York. Strange, dark deeds no longer had a place in civilized communities. It was ridiculous even to think of hidden mysteries in such enlightened times so near a large city.

Boldly he stepped out from among the trees and with firm step strode across the porch of the lighted house. As he reached the door and began feeling around for a bell of some sort, he listened but could hear no sound from within. His searching fingers at last encountered an old-fashioned knocker and, raising it quickly, he sounded it loudly several times. Twice more he sounded it before there came a response.

“Who’s there?” a woman’s quavering voice called out. It might have been the same voice that a few minutes before had shouted an angry warning, but now it sounded weak, old, tired, frightened, vastly different.

“It is James Waddington Hurd,” he answered, speaking slowly and distinctly. “I have come home, come to take possession of my house.”

Listening with his ear pressed almost against the door, he thought that a stifled scream came from within. Impatiently he waited as he heard the scuffling of feet, and then the rattle of a bunch of keys. Slowly the door opened, and from behind it there peered out at him a quaint figure, a slender wisp of a woman bowed with great age. She was dressed in the simplest of black, a kerchief about her neck fastened with a great cameo at the lower end of the “V” it made. On her whitened hair was a lace cap from which two broad black ribbons fluttered. The wrinkled hands that were holding up a lamp were trembling violently and the ancient face turned inquiringly on him was the texture of old parchment, but the eyes that met his were keen and bright.

“Who did you say it was?” the old woman quavered. There was doubt, incredulity in her tone, rather than fear.

“I’m James Waddington Hurd,” he answered,

removing his cap. "I have come home. Here are papers to establish my identity."

She stood for a moment inspecting him, absently taking the packet of legal papers Hurd pushed through the door into her hand. She gave these a baffled glance and then returned to her study of the young man before her.

"Yes, yes," she muttered, "it is Mr. Hurd. He's every inch a Waddington. But it's all so strange. Come in and welcome, Mr. Hurd," she finally said, opening wide the door and dropping him a curtsy that might have done credit to Queen Victoria's court. "Ah, it's high time you came back to look after your own, with all the strange goings on here. High time."

She paused to fling back a furtive glance over her shoulder and then, as if remembering her manners, curtsied low again, exclaiming:

"Come in, Mr. Hurd. You'll find everything just as it was left forty years ago, everything waiting for you."

Home! With a strange choking in his throat, with an unwonted sense of loneliness all at once

possessing him, Waddy stood in the doorway, his eyes curiously roving the great hall that lay revealed within. In the rear a wide staircase descended and at one side was a great stone fireplace topped by a lofty panelled mantelpiece. It was all his—his home, the home where his people had dwelt. Thrusting back his shoulders as if he would shake off the memories of his years of homeless roaming, he was about to step across the threshold to claim possession when from the darkness without there came a cry.

“I say, Waddy, what’s happened?”

“Oh, Mrs. Cupps,” cried Waddy. “I almost forgot. I left a friend in the car outside. Could you let me have the key to unlock the gates? I had to climb over the fence.”

“Wait,” she said, “I’ll get it.”

She was gone hardly a second and when she reappeared with the key she was carrying a lighted lantern.

“I’m afeerd there’s no place for the car,” she apologized. “The barn floor ain’t as strong as it might be and it’s all cluttered up.”

“That’s all right,” Waddy called back as he hastened off to admit Mason. “It won’t hurt it to stand in the driveway.”

“Be sure you lock the gate again,” she called after him.

When a few minutes later Mason and Waddy recrossed the porch with their kit-bags they were surprised to find that in their brief absence the door had been locked behind them, but Mrs. Cupps evidently had been standing behind it awaiting their return, for before they could knock it was flung open to them. As they entered they found the whole lower floor ablaze with light, the caretaker having apparently been occupied all the time they were gone in setting out candles and lamps.

“Mrs. Cupps,” said Waddy, “this is my friend Conway Mason.”

“Good thing there’s two of ye,” she said, curtsying again. “There’s two of them to contend with, drat them.”

“Two what?” asked Waddy, perplexed.

“You’ll find out soon enough, never fear,” she answered, shaking her head dolefully. “It ain’t

for me to be talking about what ain't my business, though many's the time I've been hard put to it, keeping them off till you came home."

"But I don't understand," cried Waddy, "what's it all about?"

"Oh, shucks, Waddy," said Mason, crossly, "let's let explanations wait till morning. I'm all in for lack of sleep, and I could do with a bite to eat."

"Begging your pardon, sirs," the old woman said. "I'm forgetful. Young gentlemen always are hungry. Just wait you here a minute."

Tired out from their trip they flung themselves, as she vanished in the direction of the pantry, into two great armchairs placed before the fireplace, looking curiously about them at the great engravings framed on the wall, at the old muskets that hung here and there between mounted trophies of the hunt.

"Great old place, Waddy, I'll say," said Mason, yawning, "even if we did have a time getting in."

But Waddy did not answer him. He was staring curiously, reminiscently, at a strange design he

had discovered in the tall mantelpiece. In a rough plastered place between two carved wooden panels three great links were firmly imbedded. The fragment of chain seemed to be of metal of some sort and bore the appearance of having at some time or other been gilded or bronzed, although now it was badly tarnished. Overcome with curiosity about it, Hurd had risen to inspect it more closely as the old housekeeper returned with a heaping plate of ginger cookies and a huge pitcher of cider.

“What is this; these links here?” Waddy asked as Mrs. Cupps set her supplies on a table beside Mason, where he fell to without ceremony.

“That,” said Mrs. Cupps, her face lighting up with pride, “that is the very identical sign that hung for so many years in front of the Waddington shop. When your grandfather—no, bless me, I’m forgetting, it was your great-grandfather—James Waddington closed up the silversmith shop where he had made his fortune, he took down the sign and brought it up here, and set it there with his own hands, that proud of it he was, and good reason he had to be. The Waddington silver-



smith shop in its day, I've heard my own father say, was the grandest place of its sort in the whole United States, right on Broadway it was, below Fulton Street, although I can't say just where for I never saw it with my own eyes."

"*Some* cider, Waddy, better get aboard," called Mason, and Waddy, his eyes still lingering on the sign, joined him in the ginger cookies.

"If you'll excuse me now, young gentlemen," said the old woman, beaming at Conway's praise of the refreshments she had set out, "I'll be seeing to your beds. I'm afraid—" she paused apologetically—"both of you will have to sleep in one room to-night. There are two beds there. It's the only room in the house where the beds are made up. For forty years, Mr. Hurd, my husband and me have kept that room waiting for the owner to come and occupy it, waiting first for your father, and then for you, waiting, waiting, waiting, till it seemed you'd never come. And after Cupps died, I kept right on, leaving everything just as it was, and always the master's room ready."

“I’m sorry,” said Waddy, touched by such old-world faithfulness. “I’d have been here long ago only I never heard until to-day that this house was mine.”

“Yours it is, sir, and every stick and stone in it, but you understand, I wasn’t expecting that you might bring a guest with you.”

“Don’t worry about me,” Mason mumbled, cheerfully, his mouth full of cookies. “I can sleep anywhere to-night.”

“There’s two beds in the room,” Mrs. Cupps repeated. “And the first thing to-morrow I’ll redd up one of the other front rooms.”

“That will be fine,” Waddy called after her as she ascended the stairs to fulfill her mission.

Somehow he was strangely touched by his reception. The knowledge that all these years the faithful old couple had kept the house in readiness for the owner’s return, his return, gave him a queer little thrill. The sense of ownership laid hold of him. How wonderful it was to have a home, a home of one’s own, a house where one’s family had lived! And to think that all the years that he had

been wasting in revelry and debauchery this wonderful old place had been his and he had known nothing of it, might never have known of it had it not been for the telegram he had received and for the stranger girl's challenge!

There were a hundred questions that he wished to ask, a score of things to be explained, but tonight it was all too wonderful just as it was. His questions could wait till the morning. Both he and Mason were worn out and would be better for a good night's sleep, so complacently he obeyed as Mrs. Cupps, returning, bade them each take a candle from the hall table and follow her up the great staircase to the floor above. Preceding them, she turned at the head of the stairs, pausing a moment to look furtively about, and led them up the hall to a great room on the right in the front of the house.

"This," she said, holding up her candle that they might look about, "is the master's room, the room where old Mr. Waddington himself used to sleep. Good-night, young gentlemen, I hope you'll find it comfortable."

As the door closed behind the old woman's bent little figure Waddy and Mason looked interestedly about. At the front and side were four great windows the rusted outside shutters of which had evidently just been flung open. Against the rear wall were two bedsteads of black walnut, canopied above and curtained below, high old four-posters gaudy with their covering of many-coloured patch quilts. Between the windows in front was a great flat walnut desk, and at the side of the room stood an old-fashioned secretary, its shelves and cubby-holes suggestive of all sorts of secret hiding-places. On the wall was an engraving or two, time-stained and faded, and framed over the flat desk was a sampler in the corner of which Waddy by the aid of his candle made out in straggling embroidered letters: "Anne Waddington, her work"—his grandmother's sampler.

Although the night air, pure and cool, was streaming in from the windows that Mrs. Cupps had flung open, over everything hung an air of mustiness—the odour that dwells in rooms long unused.

“It won’t take me long to get to sleep,” said Mason, hurriedly preparing for bed.

“Nor me,” said Waddy, reluctantly abandoning his explorations and setting down his candle. “I’d no idea how tired I was until I got up here.”

“We’ve both been hitting it up pretty hard,” said Mason, climbing into bed. “It won’t do either of us any harm to have a little of this quiet country life.”

Waddy, in pajamas, and about to blow out his candle, was just going to say something in assent, when the stillness of the night was broken by a terrific racket on the floor below.

“What’s that?” cried Mason in alarm, sitting up in bed.

“God knows,” cried Waddy, picking up his candle and making a dash for the door. “I’m going to find out. It sounded as if it came from the back of the house.”

As, candle in hand, he reached the head of the stairs, there came a second crash, apparently almost directly below where he stood, a nerve-racking noise, like the smashing of a lot of tin-

ware. He hesitated there, remembering the automatic he had thrust in his bag and wondering whether he had not better return for it. As he stood, undecided, peering into the hall below, all at once the crashing stopped. He heard a man's muffled curse, the slamming of a door, the sound of footsteps outside the house as if someone was running away, and on top of it all came an exclamation of wrathful dismay from a voice he recognized.

"Mrs. Cupps," he called, excitedly, as he dashed down the stairs, "what is it? What's happened?"

"Don't worry, Mr. Hurd," said Mrs. Cupps, suddenly appearing before him, clad now in a flannel wrapper, coming apparently from the back of the house. "You can go right back to bed again. Nothing more will happen to-night. I set a trap for him"; she chuckled viciously, "piled up a couple of dishpans at the pantry window for him to stumble over if he tried again to get in that way. I knew that one or t'other of them would try it again. Drat them, they're both getting desperate, they are."

“What on earth are you talking about?” cried Waddy. “Who’s getting desperate?”

“Go on to bed,” the old woman insisted. “There’s nothing you can do to-night and it’s too long a story to be starting now.”

“But who was it?” persisted Waddy. “It was somebody trying to get in—who was it?”

“Well, if you must know,” said the old woman, tartly, “it was your great-uncle Matthew.”

## CHAPTER V

### A WOMAN LISTENS

**T**HE studio was on the top floor of an old-fashioned residence just off Fifth Avenue below Fourteenth Street, a mere box of a place, a work-room with one great north window and a cubby-hole listed by the landlord as a bedroom and bath. Its only advantage lay in the fact that, being comparatively inaccessible, four flights up and no elevator, it was comparatively inexpensive. Before the window at an easel a girl—a black-haired girl in a gingham smock—sat fighting the fading light as she tried to complete the colouring of some costume sketches before the darkness came.

From time to time she glanced at a wall clock to note the hour, as if conscious that the time was flying and she soon must dress to keep an engage-



ment, but as a matter of fact her mind was neither on her work nor on the time.

Strive as she would Anne Sevigne could not keep her thoughts from wandering to her adventure of the evening before. How had she ever dared, she wonderingly asked herself. On the spur of the moment, as she was passing a restaurant—it had been nearly midnight—she had heard a merry group announce their destination as Waddy Hurd's apartment. *Waddy Hurd!* Trusting that each might think her a friend of the others, she had joined them, and, undiscovered, had shared in the birthday revel, marvelling to herself that all the while no one had bothered to ask her who she was.

Though her cheeks reddened even now at the thought of her temerity, and although it appalled her to picture her own discomfiture had she been publicly denounced as an uninvited intruder, still she was gloating that she had done what she did. She recalled that several times she had noticed her host looking in her direction and she was inclined to believe that he at least suspected that she was there unbidden, yet he had said nothing. He had

not seemed in the least to resent her speaking to him as she had at her departure. He had seemed rather interested than otherwise.

But had he accepted her challenge? Had he really gone to Ortonville as he had promised? She must try to find out.

There came a knock, a familiar double knock, on her studio door.

“Oh, bother,” she exclaimed, looking again at the clock. “He wasn’t due for a full hour yet.”

As she rose to open the door the look of annoyance that had darkened her face quickly vanished, and a smile of welcome greeted the young man standing there.

“Why, Dave,” she cried, “you’re early. I didn’t expect you for fully an hour. I’m not dressed yet.”

“Sorry, Anne,” said her caller. “I only dropped in to make my apologies. Something’s turned up and I can’t take you to dinner to-night.”

“It doesn’t matter in the least,” she assured him.

“It’s a rotten trick to play you, to call it off at

the last minute, but it can't be helped. Just as I was leaving the office to-night the boss called me in. He seemed all worked up about something and asked me if I could dine with him to-night at seven at the Trianon."

"Mr. Parsons, you mean?" she asked. In the six months she had known David Blaine he often had talked with her casually about the men in the law office where he was employed, so that she knew most of them by reputation.

"Yes, old Parsons. I can't figure out what he has up his sleeve. He said something about sending me off on a confidential mission and wanting to talk with me."

"Of course you have to dine with him under the circumstances. Don't give me a thought."

"He probably won't keep me later than nine. Maybe I could see you then and we'd have a bite of supper somewhere."

"Telephone me and I'll meet you."

"Fine, and now I must be off to dress."

"It's the Trianon where you're dining, isn't it?" the girl asked, her face lighting up.

“Yes,” Blaine called out as he hurried away.

For a moment after he had departed Anne Sevigne stood at her door buried in thought. A daring idea had come to her. The Trianon was where Maggie Noonan was hat girl, Maggie, whose mother had been her own nurse. Maggie would do anything for her. She must try it.

A little before seven, simply dressed in a dark frock, she was holding a whispered conference with her hat-girl friend at her station at the entrance of the basement restaurant.

“Sure,” said Maggie, delightedly, “you can slip right in there between the two coat racks and never a soul will lay eyes on you. I’ll fix it with Jules, the head waiter, when the two of them come to plant them at one of the little tables over there. There’ll be nothing between you but the lattice that holds the coats and you can hear every word they say. Hey, Jules.”

Gravely the head waiter listened as Maggie explained her idea, his Gallic soul delighting in the intrigue the plan suggested, and his Gallic heart delighting in Maggie.

“My friend here,” explained Maggie, “will give a little cough when she sees them come in, and I’ll hold up two fingers like this and you’ll know it’s them and put them at that table over there.”

“She will say nossing, do nossing.”

“Not a word out of her. She just wants to hear what they’re talking about. She’s secret service,” whispered Maggie, who was not without imagination.

The head waiter nodded understandingly and when Elwood Parsons arrived with David Blaine, they promptly were located at the table selected, where Miss Sevigne, secreted among the coats, by straining her ears could hear their conversation.

“I suppose, Blaine,” said the elder lawyer, as soon as the dinner order was disposed of and the waiter had left them, “you have been wondering what’s up.”

He was still nervous and overwrought although he was doing his best to conceal it from Blaine. His mind was now more firmly made up than ever.

Hurd must marry Frieda. He was determined henceforth to keep closer watch than ever on his client and at all odds he must thwart the risk of discovery.

“You said something,” answered Blaine, “about sending me off on some sort of a confidential mission.”

“Yes. You know young Hurd—James Waddington Hurd—one of our clients?”

The listening girl behind the screen drew a long, excited breath. She had guessed right.

“Of course I know about him. Everybody knows about him. I have seen him in the office once or twice.”

“Has he ever seen you? Would he recognize you if he saw you anywhere?”

“No, he’s never seen me. He wouldn’t know me from Adam.”

“That’s fine. Have you ever heard of a man named Henry T. Jessup?”

“I have seen the name in papers at the office. I never have laid eyes on the man himself.”

“Have you ever happened to sign any letter ad-

dressed to him? Would he recognize your name if he heard it?"

"No, certainly not. I have never handled any of that correspondence."

"One more question. Have you ever been in a place called Ortonville?"

"Never. I have heard the name, but I don't even know where the place is."

"That's fine, Blaine. You are just the man for the job."

"Thank you," said the young man, palpably pleased with the compliment. "Just what is it you wish me to do, Mr. Parsons?"

"That's the devil of it. I can't give you any definite instructions. There's something mysterious going on, and I haven't been able to get a line on it. Here's young Hurd playing around town with never a thought of anything. All at once he comes down to my office and asks a lot of questions and dashes off to Ortonville."

"Why Ortonville?"

"He has some property up there, the home where

his great-grandfather lived, but so far as I know he never even knew he owned it until yesterday. A local agent, this man Jessup, has looked after the property for us for years. Young Hurd's sudden interest in the place, his dashing off there, needs explaining. There's something wrong somewhere. I want to find out what it is. I want you to go up there and keep tabs on him. Without letting either Hurd or Jessup know who you are, I want you to go up there and stay until you discover what's up. Watch every move Hurd makes and report it to me."

"Certainly, Mr. Parsons, I'll do it, but——"

"But what?"

"This Ortonville, I understand, is a small country village. It is going to be rather hard to find an excuse for staying there without arousing suspicion."

"That's up to you."

Miss Sevigne, behind the screen, decided that she had heard enough for her purpose. Slipping quietly out, with a whispered word of thanks to her confederate, she hurried home to change her



costume for a brighter one and to be ready when Blaine telephoned her.

Ten o'clock found her with Blaine in a little French restaurant they occasionally visited.

"Would you like to dance?" Blaine asked as they took their seats.

"If you don't mind, Dave," she said, "I'd like a bite to eat first, and let's talk."

"You poor thing. I forgot, you've had no dinner."

"I didn't mind," she answered. "I was busy—working."

"Now tell me," she demanded, as she sat eating, "about this soft snap Mr. Parsons has picked out for you."

"It isn't going to be any snap that I can see," said Blaine, gloomily. "He wants me to go up and camp in a little country village and keep tabs on one of the firm's clients without letting any one in the village know what I'm there for. That's going to be some job. You know how gossipy these country places are with everybody poking their noses into everybody else's business."

“Yes, indeed, I know,” said his companion, emphatically. “I grew up in a place like that.”

“I’ve got to think up some plausible reason for staying in the blamed place and darned if I can do it.”

“What’s the idea of it all, anyhow?”

“Sorry, it’s confidential stuff. It concerns one of our rich clients.”

Anne took the plunge. “I’ll wager it’s that Mr. Hurd—James Waddington Hurd,” she said.

“How on earth did you guess it?” asked Blaine, blankly.

“He’s the only one of your clients I ever have heard you talking about. He’s young and rich, and every once in a while I see his name in the papers about some crazy sort of thing he has done. I just guessed at it.”

“Well, since you know that much, I don’t see what harm there will be in telling you the rest of it.”

Forthwith he proceeded with the story that Mr. Parsons had unfolded to him at the dinner table, concluding with another complaint about the dif-

ficulty of finding a plausible excuse to account for his presence in Ortonville.

“There’s one way,” said Miss Sevigne, mischievously.

“What?” he asked, eagerly.

“Suppose you knew a girl living there and went up there to see her. The village would think nothing of it and the longer you stayed the more certain they would be that the girl was the reason for your staying.”

“But,” protested Blaine, “I don’t know any girl there.”

“Yes, you do,” said his companion, softly.

“Who?”

“I come from Ortonville.”

“*You!*”

He looked at her in astonishment.

“You don’t mean it?”

“Yes, indeed, I lived there for years. It’s funny, but I have just been thinking of running up there for a holiday. I haven’t seen my grandfather for a long time. If I were there you could come up to see me.”

“That would be simply grand. Can’t you arrange to go and then I can come up there on a visit?”

A shade fell across the girl’s face.

“I am afraid,” she said, hesitantly, “I cannot ask you to visit me at my home. My people are old and not accustomed to company, but you could stay in the village, and we could let the villagers see us together often enough to get their tongues wagging and mask the real purpose of your visit. There’s a Mrs. Tucker who takes in boarders when she can get them. You can stay at her house.”

“I say,” said Blaine, a sudden suspicion coming into his mind, “you don’t know this Hurd chap, do you?”

“He’s never been in Ortonville before that I know of. It is years and years since any of his family have lived there, although I know where the home of the family is. Everybody in Ortonville knows it. It’s called the old Waddington place, but generally they speak of it as the Cupps’ place. That’s the name of the caretakers.”

“Funny you never mentioned anything about it all the times we talked about young Hurd.”

“Nobody would ever think of him in connection with Ortonville. It’s the sleepest, stupidest old place in the world.”

“But you will go up there, won’t you, and help me cover my tracks?”

“I’ll go right away—to-morrow, in fact.”

“Fine. We can go up together.”

Firmly Miss Sevigne shook her head.

“That would never do at all. I will go up there to-morrow and you can come up the following day. The neighbours then will have it that you followed me up there. They’ll all regard you as my ardent suitor.”

“As far as that goes, you know, Anne, that I——”

“None of that, David,” the girl answered, quickly. “Remember, it is part of our pact of friendship that you are not to propose to me again.”

“But——” he began.

“No,” she interrupted. “I mean it. If we are

going to continue to be friends you must stop trying to make me marry you. There are reasons why I can't marry you—why I can't marry anybody."

"Well, at any rate, you'll dance with me," said the young lawyer, unabashed. The argument between them was too ancient even to affect his spirits, and with the effervescence of youth, casting aside all thoughts of the mysteries that confronted them, they continued to dance merrily until midnight.

But that night, as Anne Sevigne, alone once more in her studio, crept into bed, thoughts of Ortonville, of strange gray old men, of gloomy houses, of bitter words, of an unsolved mystery, kept coming into her head and troubling her thoughts in wild, weird dreams that disturbed her throughout the night.

## CHAPTER VI

### A STORY OF HATE

**W**ADDY HURD'S face, as he began hurriedly to dress, wore a troubled look entirely foreign to its usual aspect. Although, tired from his long motor trip and the previous night's dissipation, he had slept soundly enough, the minute he awoke there came to his memory the puzzling occurrence of the night before, apparently an attempt on someone's part to gain surreptitious entrance to the house. He and Mason, discussing it for an hour before they fell asleep, had been utterly unable to arrive at any sort of a logical theory to account for it.

It was unlikely, both had agreed, that there was any great amount of money in the house, nor had they seen any indications of anything else in the way of valuables that might tempt a thief. They had been equally certain that their arrival had had nothing to do with the invasion. Mrs. Cupps ap-

parently had been anticipating the burglary and had been positive that she knew the identity of the intruder.

“It was your great-uncle Matthew,” she had said to Waddy, but beyond that not a word of explanation would she make.

Burglar though his relative might be, Waddy, as he meditated on the events of the night before, found himself rather delighted at the notion of having discovered at least one kinsman. Perhaps he might find that there were others of his blood living in the vicinity. A glow of friendliness toward these unknown relatives took hold of him. After having believed for so long that he was without a living relative, it was fine to realize that he was not the sole remainder of the Waddington stock after all.

His toilet completed, he cast a glance toward the bed where Mason was, and was rather delighted than otherwise to discover that he was still asleep although it was after nine and Mrs. Cupps had twice knocked on their door. It was just as well, Waddy decided. He would go down and



see what the possibilities for breakfast were and while alone have it out with Mrs. Cupps. He was firmly determined to wring from her everything she knew about his kinsfolk.

As he descended to the lower hall fragrant odours led him to a dining room in the rear where he found awaiting him home-made sausages browned in great cakes, new-laid eggs, steaming coffee, and as he seated himself the old housekeeper appeared with a heaping plate of buckwheat cakes hot from the griddle. Ordinarily breakfast to him was just a bitter thought, but now to his own amazement he found himself eating everything that was put before him and eating it with a relish.

“Mrs. Cupps,” he said as she finished waiting on him, “won’t you sit down and have a cup of coffee with me? There’s a lot I want to ask you.”

As she served him he had been studying her appearance. She was a quaint figure, but even in broad day there was an air of mystery about her. She had an odd habit, too, of stopping right in the middle of a sentence to listen—to listen apprehensively as if for some unwelcome sound.

“Thank you, Mr. Hurd,” she replied, “I had my breakfast a good three hours ago.”

“Sit down, anyhow,” he urged, “and tell me what you know of my great-uncle Matthew, and why he tried to break into this house last night.”

Stiffly the old woman sat down on the edge of a chair, her perturbation showing in the nervous way in which she kept wrapping and unwrapping her wrinkled hands in the folds of her gingham apron, a defiant gleam coming into her eye, and her thin bloodless lips setting themselves into a firm, hard line.

“Fifty years I’ve been with the Waddingtons, as my mother was before me,” she said, “but it is not for me to be talking about the family. Long ago I learned to keep my mouth shut about what went on here, and it’s well that I did.”

“But don’t you understand,” pleaded the young man, “that I know nothing whatever about my family history? I have lived abroad most of my life and both my parents are dead. I did not learn until yesterday that I was the owner of this house. I did not even know it existed. I never even knew that I had a great-uncle Matthew.”

“Small loss,” ejaculated Mrs. Cupps, her eyes flashing, the words seeming to escape her in spite of her determination to reveal nothing.

“At least you can tell me where he lives.”

“The two of them”—she paused in that queer way of hers—“live just down the road at the foot of the hill, in two brick houses just alike.”

“Two of them!”

“Yes, two. Your great-uncles Matthew and Mark Waddington.”

“Great!” cried Waddy. “Two uncles, two relatives I never even suspected that I possessed. I am going off this very minute and call on them to introduce myself.”

“Oh, Mr. Hurd,” cried the old woman in alarm, rising in her excitement, her eyes darkening with a look of fear, “whatever you do, you mustn’t think of going there. No good can come of it.”

“Why not?”

“It’s not for me to be telling you. You’ll find out soon enough.”

“Tell me,” threatened Waddy, “or I’ll go down there right away.”

“Oh, no, Mr. Hurd,” she cried, in her desperation seizing the lapels of his coat in both her hands. “You mustn’t. That’s the one thing you shouldn’t do. Promise me that you won’t, at least not until you have seen Mr. Jessup. It wouldn’t be safe for you, what with them both desperate with hate, a hate they’ve carried these forty years.”

“Hating each other—what for?”

“Even if I knew, and I’m not saying I do, it isn’t for me to tell you. Always the Waddingtons, all of them, have been close-mouthed, secretive, keeping things to themselves and grieving over it. I doubt if even Mr. Jessup knows what it is all about, but if any one does it’s Mr. Jessup. See Mr. Jessup before you do anything; promise me you’ll see him.”

“Where does Mr. Jessup live?”

As Waddy asked the question his mind was again busy with the sinister chain of events that had led him to this movement, trying in vain to connect in some satisfactory way the perturbing links. First there had come that telegram, hinting of impending murder, then there was the manifest

antagonism toward the Waddingtons that he had encountered when he stopped at the village store. There was the faithful old housekeeper, evidently living in dread that the house would be invaded, firing at him and Mason before she learned their identity, setting dishpan traps to snare midnight intruders, and now her frightened anxiety lest he should undertake a visit to either of his great-uncles. What, he wondered, could be the meaning of it all? What was this strange pall of mystery, of hate, that hung over the Waddington family in this village community that had been their home for more than half a century?

“Mr. Jessup lives down in the village,” Mrs. Cupps was explaining. “It’s just across the public square and a bit beyond. You’ll have no difficulty in finding his place. You must have passed it coming here last night. It’s the first white-painted big frame house you come to. Any one can tell you where it is.”

“All right,” said Waddy, yielding, “I’m off to see Jessup.”

“And you promise you won’t go near the Wad-

dingtons, not till you've seen him?" the old woman urged, still clinging to his coat.

"I promise," said Waddy, gently freeing the grasp of the wrinkled hands, and hastening out to his car. He was glad that Mason was not yet up and that he could set out on his quest alone. Until he found out just what this mystery was about his home and his kinsfolk, he did not feel like taking any one into his confidence. He was almost sorry now that he had invited Mason to accompany him. Whatever this tragedy of hate might be that had come with his legacy, wherever it might lead, the feeling had taken possession of him that it was something not to be lightly discussed with others. The spell of the Waddingtons, "who always had been close-mouthed," seemed to have laid hold of him, to have sobered him, to have sealed his lips.

As he flung open the front door and strode across the broad porch to the driveway, he paused and turned to look about him. In the sunlight the air of neglect that he had sensed in the darkness was everywhere manifest. Even the walls of

the old house were covered with lichens and moss. The great trees on the driveway here and there showed wind-broken branches. What might have once been a lawn now was overgrown with tall weeds among which some rose-bushes, long since turned wild, struggled for existence. Circling the house were odd-looking rows of little mounds of earth, some of them freshly dug. Surrounding it all, the tall, unpainted fence of iron pickets seemed almost to give it the air of a deserted prison. As he stood there Mrs. Cupps came running out with the key for the padlock on the gate.

“Hereafter,” he ordered, “leave it unlocked.”

“As you say, Mr. Hurd,” she answered, shaking her head dolefully. “My responsibility has ended, thank God.”

The sight of her, a little frail old faithful servitor, breathing hard from her exertion, filled him with sudden compunction.

“Look here, Mrs. Cupps,” he said, kindly, “you must have some help here. It is too much for you to do alone. The very first thing to-day, I want you to go to the village and hire a couple of maids,

or a maid and a man to help you in the house, some one to do the heavy work and the cooking.”

“Very well,” she assented without protest. “I will—that is, if you are going to stay.”

“Of course I’m going to stay,” said Waddy, emphatically. “It’s my home.”

“For how long, do you think?”

“Until,” he hesitated for an answer, “until everything is settled, till everything is cleared up. I’m going to stay,” he concluded, firmly, “until I’ve found out what it’s all about if it takes the rest of my life.”

“And your friend, Mr. Mason?”

“I don’t know. Probably only a few days.”

With a wave of his hand to the pathetic old figure who stood watching him, he drove off, wondering as he did so how long Mason would be content with the simple life. There was nothing to keep Mason in Ortonville, or to hold his interest. It was not at all unlikely that Mason would be wanting to leave at once, Waddy reasoned. Well, the sooner the better. The desire to be alone, to work the thing out for himself, had seized him.



As he drove slowly down the hill he had no difficulty in recognizing the two brick houses that Mrs. Cupps had spoken of, the homes of his two great-uncles, Matthew and Mark. Side by side they stood, two square, solid-looking mansions perhaps a hundred feet apart, undoubtedly more recently built than the old house he just had left, yet showing the same air of neglect. Their mansard roofs, with small round windows, their closely shuttered windows on every floor, gave them something of the appearance of twin fortresses. Stopping his car, Waddy studied the buildings curiously. Neither of them showed any sign of occupancy. Had it not been for what Mrs. Cupps had told him he would have been inclined to believe that both of them had long been unused as dwellings. The shutters with their rusted hinges, their paling fences, unpainted, broken here and there, their weed-grown yards, gave them the appearance of being tenantless. But as he looked he noted between them an object, or rather two objects, that caused a whistle of astonishment to escape his lips.

At a point exactly between them arose an old brick wall, or rather two walls, side by side, one extending upward fully eighteen feet, and the other topping it by at least six inches, each effectually shutting off from the other house all possibilities of a view. From their weather-beaten appearance both walls had been standing there for many years.

“It’s a spite wall,” said Waddy to himself “—walls of hate! How my esteemed great-uncles must love each other!”

Overcome with a feeling of depression that he could not throw off, he speeded up his car and quickly passed the houses, but when he was fifty yards away he could not resist a backward glance at them. As he looked he saw the shutters of a rear window on the ground floor of the house nearest him thrust cautiously open. He had just a glimpse of an old man’s bearded face peering out at him, a face twisted for an instant with a look of incredulous surprise that quickly gave way to a malevolent glare, an almost demoniac look of hate, that, as the shutters were pulled quickly to, seemed to convulse the old man’s whole face.

“I wonder,” said Waddy, giving a little shiver, “whether that was my great-uncle Matthew, or was it my great-uncle Mark?”

But whichever of them it might have been, he was wholly at a loss to account for the evil look bestowed on him. His kinsmen might hate each other, but why on earth should they hold any spite against him? He was still puzzling about it when he reached the public square, where he decided to stop at the same place as they had the evening before to ask his way. The storekeeper, seeing him, abandoned a customer on whom he was waiting and hastened to the door, a look of incredulous amazement on his face.

“How’d you get here?” he asked. “I thought sure when you didn’t come back last night that you must have driven on over to Goshen. You don’t mean to say the old woman let you into the house last night?”

“Of course she did,” said Waddy, tartly, not at all inclined to start a conversation.

“Well, that beats me. I wouldn’t have thought it. What on earth did you say to her?”

“Nothing. I just told her my name.”

“And you slept there last night?”

“Certainly.”

“And didn’t nothing happen?”

“No, nothing happened,” lied Waddy. “What did you expect might happen?”

“You never can tell,” the storekeeper answered, shaking his head dubiously. “All sorts of queer things have been happening lately up there on the hill.”

“Well, what I want to know,” said Waddy, “is where Henry T. Jessup lives.”

“Just up that road apiece,” said the storekeeper, pointing the direction. “The first big white house you come to. If he ain’t home his sister’ll be there and she’ll tell you where to find him.”

“His sister?” echoed Waddy, blankly. “Isn’t Jessup married?”

“Nup, neither one of them is. What did you ask that for?”

Waddy’s only answer was to start his car, leaving the storekeeper standing there gaping after him. A theory that had been forming in his mind

had been rudely shattered. He had been striving in some way, some logical way, to connect the stranger girl who had been at his party with the arrival of the telegram and with Ortonville. It had been quite within the bounds of reason, he had decided, to suppose that Henry T. Jessup might have a daughter and that she was the girl who had challenged him to come here. Jessup's daughter naturally would know a lot about the Waddington affairs. While it still did not explain her presence in his apartment, it at least would account for her interest in the telegram. He had hoped, in locating Jessup, to get some trace of her.

But Henry T. Jessup wasn't married. That disposed of the supposition that the girl was his daughter. He was still on a blind trail as far as her identity went.

Who could she be? What could be her interest in the tangled, troubled affairs of the Waddington family? And why had that look of fear come into her eyes as the telegram was read aloud?

## CHAPTER VII

### WHAT MR. JESSUP KNEW

**T**HE big white house was set square in the middle of a big plot of ground around which ran a white paling fence, and by the gate was a one-story building, also painted white, with an entrance from the street. The door stood open, revealing a desk littered with many papers, a shelf of law-books, and a tall, clean-shaven, white-haired man. His air of dignity and self-importance marked him at once as the person described by a tin sign above the door as "Justice of the Peace and Commissioner of Deeds."

"Mr. Jessup," said Hurd, entering unannounced, "my name is James Waddington Hurd. You sent for me."

"Well, well, well, pleased to meet you, Mr. Hurd," the old man said, rising and extending his hand cordially. "You've come sooner than I

thought you would, but you've come none too soon at that."

"The way you put that telegram I didn't dare delay. You seemed to think my coming might prevent a murder."

"So it might, and then again it mightn't. There's no telling what them Waddingtons will do. Maybe your coming will only make matters worse. Still, it seemed only right to wire you. I got your address from a New York newspaper."

Waddy stood regarding him with a mystified look on his face. To whichever side he turned, here in Ortonville, it seemed there was always some blind, mysterious reference to something, relating to his family or his kinsfolk, although everybody seemed reluctant to explain what it was all about.

"Look here, Mr. Jessup," he said with decision, "what's up? I've got to know all about it. Remember I have been living abroad most of my life, and know practically nothing about my family. I didn't even know until yesterday, when Mr. Parsons told me, that I owned the old homestead here. I had no idea that there were any Wadding-

tons alive. I thought I was the last of the stock. I had never heard of my great-uncles Matthew and Mark.”

“How did you hear about them so quick?” asked Jessup, evidently surprised. “Didn’t you just get here?”

“No, I motored up and slept last night in the old house.”

“Well, well, well,” the old man ejaculated, amazedly. “Did anything happen?”

“Somebody tried to break in during the night. Mrs. Cupps said it was Great-uncle Matthew. She was too much for him. He got all tangled up in a dishpan trap she set for him and raised a devil of a racket. He ran away without getting caught, but what he was after, I have no idea.”

“I know,” said the old man, nodding his head, vigorously. “I know what it was. Sit down and I’ll tell you all about it. It’s a long story. You say you know nothing of your family history?”

“Very little,” said Waddy, seating himself in a chair opposite Jessup’s. “I remember my Grandmother Hurd. I used to be taken to see her oc-



asionally when I was a kid. I know that her name was Anne Waddington and that she came originally from Ortonville. I have been told that her father, after whom I was named, was a silversmith in New York, who when he retired settled here.”

“That’s right so far,” said Jessup. “It was your great-grandfather Waddington who built the house in which you slept last night. I remember him well. I used often to see him when I was a boy. A fine type of an old Britisher he was, for all the years he had been a naturalized American. A conservative he was, regular Church of England man. There’s a story round here that he hoped for many sons and planned to name them after the twelve apostles. Anyhow, he started off with Matthew and Mark, and that’s all there ever was excepting the one girl, your grandmother.”

“Was she the youngest?” asked Waddy.

“No, she was a daughter by his first wife. She was about ten years old when he came up here to live. He had just married again, a woman much younger than himself. She bore him the two boys

about two years apart, and then she died. Well, old Mr. Waddington was a very positive character, always trying to run everybody and everything about him. Failing in his hope for a big family he set out to plan the lives of his sons for them. He set aside a generous dower for his daughter and announced his intention of dividing the rest of his estate equally between his two sons. His own house he planned to keep, with eighty acres about it, as the home of the Waddingtons, to belong to his daughter and her heirs, with the idea that it was to be always kept up by the estate. For his sons he built twin brick houses at the foot of the hill, the rest of the estate being split into two portions to go with each house. The houses were to be the homes of Matthew and Mark when they married."

"I've seen the houses," said Waddy, as Mr. Jessup paused in his narrative. "Did the sons marry?"

"You bet they did," said Jessup, reminiscently, "and that's where all the trouble started. You see, Mr. Hurd, in those days life was far different from what it is to-day. There were not nearly so

many things to distract and amuse people, and they got to looking at everything all out of proportion. They took such things as politics and religion most seriously. A Republican wouldn't think of trading at a Democrat's store and Presbyterians and Methodists hardly considered each other fit to speak to. Neither one of them would have anything to do with a Roman Catholic.

“It was all very well for the old man to plan out the lives of his two sons, but Matthew and Mark, as they grew up, just naturally took to pulling apart and going separate ways. When Matthew paraded for Tilden, Mark he up and began making speeches for Hayes. A shouting Methodist came along holding revival meetings, and Matthew got converted and became a shouting Methodist. It must have been a great blow to the old man, but with all his stiff-neckedness, he was peace-loving and he made the best of it. Then a few months later a French family—French-Canadians they were and Catholics—settled here. There was a girl in the family. Mark Waddington fell in love with her and took her off to Albany and

they were married by a priest, he becoming a baptized Catholic. Right away he brought his bride back here to live, and though it must have been a bitter pill for the old man to swallow, he gave him the house he had set apart for him. Then Matthew, as if not wishing to be behind his brother, he up and married, and of course he picked a Methodist girl.

“And there they were, living side by side, hardly a hundred feet apart, one a shouting Methodist and the other a Roman Catholic, and both of them being converts, twice as bigoted as if they’d been born to it. Every Sunday, as long as the old man was alive, they all went together to the big house to dinner, but all Ortonville knew that outside of that they didn’t have anything to do with each other. There was no visiting back and forth, and when the womenfolk met anywhere they turned their backs on each other and even the two brothers passed each other like strangers.

“Whether or not there were any stormy times at the big house nobody knows, for the Waddingtons never were any great hands for talking over

their affairs, but it doesn't seem likely. There was the old man's fortune to be considered, and it seems more than likely that for the sake of the money both families tacitly buried the hatchet while in the old man's presence. For all that, everybody knew about the two families hating each other. The daughter Anne, they say, made several attempts to bring them together, but failed. Then she married and went away, the old man settling a hundred thousand dollars on her. She only came back here once after that, just for her father's funeral."

"How long ago was that?" asked Waddy, who had been giving an attentive ear in an effort to keep his family's history straight in his mind.

"It was exactly thirty-nine years, eleven months and two days ago," said Jessup.

"You seem to have kept rather exact track of it," said Waddy, amazedly.

"There're darned good reasons why I should have," said the old man, vehemently. "When I show you a copy of your great-grandfather's will you'll understand why."

Rising from his desk he knelt before a large old-fashioned safe, and after a five minutes' struggle with the combination, succeeded in opening it. From within he produced a japanned tin box that he set on his desk. Meanwhile, Waddy sat silently looking on, busy with his own thoughts, trying to visualize life in the old days in Ortonville. What did people do with themselves? It must have been a drab, dull time to live in. No wonder the people of those days took their politics and their religious prejudices so seriously. Doubtless it was almost the only way they had of getting any excitement.

"Here," said Jessup, unfolding a time-stained document on his desk, "is a certified copy of the last will of James Waddington, Esq."

Interestedly Waddy began its perusal, reading every word carefully, right from the beginning paragraph:

IN THE NAME OF GOD. AMEN. I, JAMES WADDINGTON, of Waddington Towers, in the village of Ortonville, in the State of New York, and late of the City of New York in the state aforesaid, being of sound and disposing mind, do

hereby declare and affirm that this is my last will and testament.

It was a holographic will, written in long, sweeping shaded strokes by a careful penman, the ink as rich and black almost as on the day it had been drawn more than four decades before. There was a paragraph setting aside a generous sum for the maintenance of the Waddington lot in the village cemetery and directing the sum that was to be spent for a tombstone. There followed certain specified gifts to old friends, to various charities and hospitals, a bequest of ten thousand dollars to the Protestant Episcopal church of Ortonville. Followed a paragraph bequeathing to "my beloved daughter, Anne Waddington Hurd, wife of Henry Taylor Hurd," the homestead, Waddington Towers, and eighty acres surrounding it, with the expressed hope that she would maintain it always as the family home of the Waddingtons, the paragraph concluding that, "whereas she has already received her dower, she is to have no further share except such as may revert to her in

my estate, excepting the homestead heretofore mentioned, *and all that it may contain.*”

The last six words were underscored, as if it had been the intention of the writer to call particular attention to them.

“And here,” said Mr. Jessup, pointing to the next paragraph, “comes the joker that started all the trouble.”

It had been my intent and desire to divide equally between my two sons, MATTHEW and MARK WADDINGTON, all the residue of the real estate of which I die possessed, in the hope that they and their families might dwell side by side in unity, but with grief in my heart at their unfilial conduct, observing that they no longer regard each other with affection and brotherly love.

*I do hereby* will, and direct that they and each of them shall have the use and occupancy of the house he occupies with the two hundred acres set apart for it, as indicated in the plan hereto attached, but I direct and charge that the title to these properties shall not pass to them, or either of them, until such time as the two of them with their families, publicly kneeling together in brotherly love, shall have confessed their sins and have been received into the communion of the Protestant Episcopal Church of America, and furthermore, in the event that this shall not have taken place within forty years after the date of my death, it is



my wish and will that the two properties aforesaid, with the houses thereon, shall on that date revert to my estate, and shall be inherited by my beloved daughter, Anne Waddington Hurd, her heirs and assigns, excepting that during the aforesaid period of forty years death shall have claimed one or the other of my sons, thereby terminating their quarrel, in which event the surviving son shall inherit both properties and both houses and the other provisions of this paragraph shall be of no effect.

And finally, I do give and bequeath to each of my beloved children a golden token, which will be found in a drawer in my secretary, these being replicas of the three golden links that for many years formed the sign at my place of business, the originals having by me been set into the mantelpiece in the hall of Waddington Towers.

When these be joined in unity  
To make a perfect chain,  
The pathway to prosperity  
Will be exceeding plain.

“What a funny will,” exclaimed Waddy, as he finished reading the document.

“It may be funny,” said Jessup, grimly, “but four sets of courts have decided that the old man knew what he wanted to do with his property. Both of his sons have had a couple of tries at break-

ing it, but it didn't get either of them anywhere. Only cost them both a pile for lawyers. But do you see what a regular invitation for a killing it is?"

"I don't understand what you mean."

"Read that tenth paragraph again," said Jessup, pointing it out with his finger. "Don't you see that if either one of them dies the other one gets *all* the property?"

"That's so!"

"Of course the old man put in that paragraph with the best of intentions, hoping that he could make his sons friendly again, but he figured that if either one of them died, of course it wouldn't be needed. What he didn't figure on was the inducement he was offering to Matthew and Mark to put each other out of the way."

"And that's why you sent for me?"

"That's the idea. You see there's only twenty-eight days left, and both of those tarnation fools will lose everything unless they make up. They've been hating each other for forty years and more, living there side by side, hating till they're both

desperate, and now that they face the prospect of losing their homes in the next few days there's no telling what they won't do."

"And as I read the will," said Waddy, thoughtfully, "if they don't get together pretty soon, I get it all."

"That's right. And there's another thing, if anything were to happen to you, you being the last surviving heir of Anne Waddington, there'd be nobody else left but the two old fellows to inherit everything. If I was you I'd be mighty careful when I'm around where either of them is."

"But I don't want to take their homes from them. Isn't there some way I could deed them back to them?"

"They probably wouldn't take it if you did. They're both stubbornner than sin. They've spent so much fighting each other, letting their places go to rack and ruin, that about all either of them has left is the Waddington pride, and both of them have a lot of that."

"Henry," said a voice at a door that led into the yard, "your dinner's ready."

Waddy, turning at the sound, saw a tall, angular, white-haired spinster staring curiously at him.

“Susan,” said Jessup, “come in. I want you to meet Mr. Hurd,” and as she approached nervously, wiping her hands on her apron, he presented them: “My sister Susan—Susan, this is Mr. Hurd, Mr. James Waddington Hurd.”

“My land,” exclaimed the woman, “another of the Waddingtons after them buried jewels!”

“Buried jewels!” exclaimed Waddy.

“That’s another story, Mr. Hurd,” said Jessup, “you’d better come in and have dinner with us, and I’ll tell you about that.”

“You just bet I will,” said Waddy, enthusiastically, feeling that he was getting far more thrills out of being in Ortonville than he had had any right to anticipate.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BURIED TREASURE

**N**O MATTER how rich a man may be, there is something about the thought of buried treasure that sets his heart to beating faster and fires his imagination with the desire to discover it. When Waddy Hurd bade old Mr. Jessup and his sister good-bye two hours after their mid-day meal was finished, he felt that at last he had found a mission in life. He was going to discover the hiding-place of his great-grandfather's collection of jewels.

It was not, he told himself, that he wanted the jewels for himself. When he had discovered them, if he was successful in his search, he would divide them equally with the other heirs, with his step-great-uncles. For that matter they could have all of them. It was the idea of the search that appealed to him so strongly. At last

he had something to do, something really worth while.

“You see,” old Mr. Jessup’s parting words still rang in his ears, “for forty years both of them, Matthew and Mark, have been searching everywhere for those buried jewels, digging up the ground all over the place, and trying their best to ransack the house, with old Mrs. Cupps doing her best to fend them off. And to this day neither one of them, nor nobody else, has the slightest clue to where old man Waddington hid them.”

“Haven’t you yourself any idea where they might be?” Waddy had asked him.

“Yes and no,” said Mr. Jessup, after a moment’s thought. “Often and often I’ve read and re-read the old man’s will, and always the last paragraph has puzzled me—that bit of poetry right at the end. I’ve often wondered if that wasn’t some sort of a cipher giving a hint as to where the jewels were.”

“Do you mind if I take that copy of the will with me?” Waddy had asked. “I’d like to study it over carefully.”

“Certainly, take it with you,” Jessup had an-

swered. "There's nobody has a better right to it than you."

And now, as Waddy drove away, the copy of the will safe in his inside pocket, he was pondering over the strange story that Mr. Jessup had unfolded.

When James Waddington had retired from business it was during the general financial depression that had followed the Civil War. While he had managed to find a purchaser for his business, money was scarce and he had been unable to obtain satisfactory prices for a large collection of diamonds, rubies, and pearls that he had amassed. It may have been, as often happens with dealers in precious stones, that he had become so attached to his treasures that he was loath to part with them. At any rate, he had brought them with him to Ortonville, a really valuable collection.

"Some say there was a hundred thousand dollars' worth of them, and some say nearer a million," had been Mr. Jessup's phrase in describing them.

From time to time, according to Mr. Jessup, old Mr. Waddington had exhibited his collection to a

favoured few, although to no one had he ever revealed the secret hiding-place in which he kept it. Its existence was fully established by several credible witnesses. Jessup himself, as a young man visiting Waddington Towers with his father, who had been his predecessor in looking after the Waddington affairs, had seen the jewels with his own eyes.

“I remember it as well as if it was yesterday,” Mr. Jessup told Waddy. “Father and I were sitting on the front porch talking with the old gentleman. He was over seventy then and getting to be pretty feeble, although his mind was as active as ever. Father mentioned the jewels and asked if I might not see them. Mr. Waddington got up and went into the house. He was gone for maybe ten minutes. When he returned he was carrying a metal box like a document box, only made of heavier metal. He opened it up with a key. Inside it had a lot of velvet-lined trays, a tray for each kind of jewel. It was the grandest collection of diamonds, rubies, and pearls I ever laid eyes on. There was one big diamond that he



said was worth over ten thousand dollars. There was a big pearl necklace, too, all big fine stones perfectly matched up. He told my father that he had been twenty years collecting the pearls for that and that they had cost him over one hundred thousand dollars.”

“But are you sure that he did not dispose of the collection before his death?” Waddy had asked.

“He couldn’t have. It was only a day or two after that that he had a stroke, and after that he was never out of his house again until he died, and there was no one came to see him who might have bought them. If he had sold the collection my father would have known it. He handled all the old gentleman’s financial affairs.”

“Maybe,” suggested Waddy, “he might have given them to his daughter, to my grandmother.”

“No. After she was married she never came back here again, and never saw him again until she came for the funeral and saw him lying dead in the coffin.”

“She might have found them after the funeral and carried them away with her.”

“No chance of that. When she arrived her two step-brothers were already in the house, ransacking the place while their father’s body still lay there. She put them out and gave strict orders that they never were to be let in the house again. Cupps was the butler, a determined sort of chap, and my father put him in charge to carry out her orders, and neither of them has been knowingly admitted to the house since, for Mrs. Cupps since her husband’s death has been just as watchful as he was. She’s been too much for old Matthew and Mark. There’s another thing, if your grandmother ever had had those jewels she would have worn them. No woman would have a hundred-thousand-dollar pearl necklace and not put it on once in a while.”

“That’s true,” said Waddy. “I inherited some jewels of Grandmother’s, but I’m certain there was no pearl necklace among them.”

But where then could the jewels be? To Waddy’s mind, as he drove slowly homeward, there recurred the odd bit of verse at the end of old Mr. Waddington’s will. Was Mr. Jessup right about it? Did they form some sort of cipher that

gave a clue to the hiding-place of the treasure? As he passed through the village and reached a spot where there were no houses in sight he stopped the car and, taking the will from his pocket, slowly read over its last paragraph aloud:

“When these be joined in unity  
To make a perfect chain,  
The pathway to prosperity  
Will be exceeding plain.”

As he sat there reading and re-reading the words, trying to discover some hidden meaning in them, his attention was attracted by an odd-looking procession coming along the road behind him. There were five persons in it, and to his amazement he saw that the tiny figure in advance, apparently marshalling the others, was his housekeeper, Mrs. Cupps. Curiously he waited until she came up with him.

“Why, Mrs. Cupps,” he called out, “who are these?”

“Well, sir,” she said, “but you instructed me to get some servants and I have, a butler, a waitress,

and parlour maid, a cook and an upstairs girl, the same as we had in your great-grandfather's time."

"But where on earth did you get them all so soon?" asked Waddy, marvelling at the old woman's unsuspected capabilities.

"My cousin, over to Goshen, was to housekeep in a summer hotel and she had written me that they was to open this week, but it wasn't ready. So I went down to the village and got her on the telephone and she sent me these people. Driggs, here, was hired as the head-waiter, and Mrs. Driggs was the cook, so they know their business. The two maids here are all right, my cousin recommended them."

"Fine," cried Waddy. "All of you get into the car and I'll run you up to the house. Mrs. Cupps, you get in here beside me. I want to talk to you."

As with the car full Waddy started on again, he turned curiously to the little figure beside him.

"Mrs. Cupps," he asked point blank, "do you know where my great-grandfather hid the jewels?"

"How should I know?"

"You have heard about them?"

“Everyone hereabout has heard of them.”

“Did you ever read a copy of the will?”

“Many’s the time.”

“Do you think that last paragraph, that poetry, means anything?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised. The two of them always thought so.”

“What did they think it meant?”

“If you’ve read it, you’ll remember it says something about ‘a perfect chain.’ Them two, Matthew and Mark, always figured that referred to the distance at which the jewels was buried.”

“A chain!” cried Waddy. “I’ve forgotten what that is, although it seems to me that when I studied arithmetic there was some such measure.”

“That’s one of the things that Matthew and Mark has been quarrelling about all these years. There’s two kinds of chains. A regular surveyor’s chain is a hundred feet long, but there’s what they call ‘Gunter’s chain’ and that’s only sixty-six feet.”

“But where do you suppose it was to be measured from?” asked Waddy, puzzled.

“Did you happen to notice, all about the house, a circle of little mounds, like as if the earth had been dug up, or rather two circles?”

“Come to think of it I did, and was wondering about them.”

“Well, old Mr. Waddington every day, winter and summer, used to sit for hours in a big chair on the porch, and that chair always was placed in the same spot. One or the other of the brothers got the idea that the jewels might be buried ‘a perfect chain’ away from that chair, and he started slipping up at night and digging. The other one, figuring a chain to be sixty-six feet, started digging nearer the house. Two or three times in the past forty years they’ve had spells of digging. About a month ago they started at it again.”

“Have you tried to stop them?”

“No,” said the old woman, grimly. “My orders always has been to keep them out of the house, and that’s as far as I’ve gone.”

“Then you think the jewels are hidden in the house?”

“I can’t say as to that. It’s just that I have had

enough trouble keeping them out of the house without looking after the grounds. Anyhow, I figured that they hadn't ever found anything or they wouldn't have started digging again."

"Haven't either of them ever got into the house?"

"Never for long. Both of them has tried it time and again, but I've been too much for them. If the old man hid the treasure in the house, it's still there. You can count on that."

"Then it was the hidden treasure that my grand-uncle Matthew was after last night when he tried to get into the house?"

"They try it every once in a while—both of them," the old woman answered with a vicious chuckle. "Lately they've been at it worse than ever."

"How do you account for that?" asked Waddy, carrying on his conversation with his housekeeper in as low tones as possible, for he did not wish the newly hired servants back in the tonneau to overhear their remarks.

"Mr. Jessup read you the will, didn't he?"

“Yes, of course.”

“That part about them having to give up their homes unless they had a public reconciliation.”

“Silly old fools!” cried Waddy. “Why don’t they wake up and carry out the directions of the will? Then everything would be all right.”

“It ain’t the Waddington way,” old Mrs. Cupps answered with a sigh. “The Waddingtons are great for sticking to their word.”

“Damn it all, if I didn’t owe it to my great-grandfather’s memory to do my best to carry out his wishes, I’d give them both a quit-claim deed and be done with it. God knows I don’t want to take their homes from them.”

“I doubt if either of them would take anything from you. Fact is, I’m thinking they’ll both be hating you worse than they do each other as soon as they find out you are here.”

“But why should they hate me? I’ve done nothing to them.”

“You’re a Waddington, and that’s enough. They’ve been hating so long that——”

Her words died on her lips, and Waddy, too, in



blank amazement, jammed his foot down on the brake, bringing the heavy car to such a sudden stop that the frightened servants behind them were flung together in a promiscuous heap and old Mrs. Cupps was all but hurled into the road.

Down the road, directly toward them, running at full speed, her face white and drawn with fear, came a girl—Waddy's stranger girl—and in her hand she was carrying a great heavy axe, a blood-stained axe.

“My God—she—here!” gasped Waddy.

Straight on past them she sped, an unseeing look in her frightened eyes—running as if fleeing from Terror itself.

Too surprised for speech, Waddy sat for a moment staring after her, his brain in a turmoil. Who was this girl? What was she doing here in Ortonville? What could have frightened her? What could she be doing with that blood-stained axe? A sudden movement at his side attracted his notice.

Mrs. Cupps, recovering from the position into which she had been thrown by the unexpected stop, had risen from her seat and was standing up,

looking after the fleeing girl, her old eyes kindling with anger, as she muttered to herself: "It's her. It's that French hussy come back."

As Waddy, more puzzled than ever, debated which of two courses was most advisable, whether to spring out of the car and hurry after the girl to see if he could be of some assistance to her, or whether first to question old Mrs. Cupps as to the girl's identity, the old woman at his side turned toward him, her voice rising almost to a shriek.

"For God's sake, Mr. Hurd, get us home as quickly as possible. There's been mischief done. It's come at last. There's murder there. Hurry, hurry!"

"Murder!" cried Hurd in amazement.

"Hurry," she begged him, offering no further explanation.

Under the spell of her excited entreaties he jammed on the power and the car shot forward, making the rest of the distance in hardly more than a minute. At the sight of the front door standing wide open there came from Mrs. Cupps another frenzied outcry.

“Look, Mr. Hurd, look! The front door standing wide open and Mr. Mason promising he’d keep it locked. There’s murder, I tell you.”

“Nonsense,” Waddy answered, even though something of her terror found echo in his heart. “Mason has just gone out for a stroll about the place and forgotten to close the door. That’s all.”

Raising his voice, he shouted, “Oh, Mason, hello. Where are you?”

He waited, but no answer came. He shouted again. Still there was no response. As he brought the car to a stop before the open door, Mrs. Cupps’ fears had taken strong hold on him. There must be something wrong. If Mason was anywhere about, why did he not answer?

The minute the car stopped Mrs. Cupps was out of it and making for the open door, and Waddy quickly followed, leaving the wondering servants gaping after them.

“Look,” screamed Mrs. Cupps, as together they entered the house, “what did I tell you?”

She pointed excitedly to the great staircase lead-

ing from the lower hall. Plainly outlined on its polished wood was a thin trail of red, a trail of drops of blood.

Now, really alarmed for his friend's safety, Waddy sprang up the stairs, crying out Mason's name. Close at his heels came Mrs. Cupps. In the upper hall, their steps guided by the little red trail, they hurried toward the bedroom that he and Mason had occupied the night before. In the doorway Waddy stopped short and a horrified gasp escaped at what he saw. The secretary was smashed and Mason's body was lying motionless on the bed, his hands and feet tied, a cruel gash in his skull just behind the temple showing where the axe had struck him.

"It was her—that girl—she's killed him," came a shrill cry from Mrs. Cupps just behind him.

Quickly Waddy made his way to the bed and put his hand on Mason's heart, delighted to find that it was still faintly beating.

"Quick," he cried, turning to Mrs. Cupps, "get a doctor at once. He's still alive. Perhaps we can save him. Or wait," he added, remembering

that there was no telephone, "I'll take the car and have a doctor here in a jiffy."

Running downstairs, he flung aside the frightened servants who clustered about trying to question him, and springing into his car, dashed off toward the village.

As at perilous speed he dashed on, his mind was in a turmoil. He found it all but impossible to believe what his eyes had seen. There was Mason lying there all but lifeless, his skull gashed with a heavy instrument. There was the girl he had seen running away with a bloody axe in her hand. There was Mrs. Cupps' statement that it was she—"the French hussy come back"—who had done it.

Yet in spite of everything, he could not, would not believe it.

Whoever it might have been that had attacked Conway Mason, whatever the motive that inspired the attack, James Waddington Hurd instinctively knew that it could not have been his stranger girl who had done it.

## CHAPTER IX

### SEVERAL MORE PUZZLES

**A**FROWN gathered on Anne Sevigne's face as she waited at the station gates for the nine o'clock train to be announced. It was a slow train, stopping at every freight shed, but it was the only one connecting with the Ortonville Branch. Tiresome as the trip would be she had hoped to make it alone. She was not at all certain what conditions awaited her in her former home, and she had judged it best to arrive a day in advance of Blaine to get her bearings.

And now she saw Blaine approaching through the throng. The bag in his hand indicated that he was planning to take the same train and not merely coming to see her off.

"Good morning," he called out, cheerily.

"You weren't to come up till to-morrow," she said, reprovingly. "That was our agreement."

“Couldn’t help myself,” he answered, “and I can’t see that it makes much difference, anyhow. Old Parsons seems all wrought up over this affair. He called me on the phone this morning, almost before I was out of bed, to insist on my taking the first train there was.”

“But it doesn’t suit my plans at all,” protested Anne.

“I’d think you’d be glad of my company—of anybody’s company,” retorted Blaine. “It’s a tedious trip. I’ve just been looking at the schedule.”

“It isn’t that.”

“Well, what’s the matter, then?” asked Blaine.

“I—I—I haven’t been up home for five years, not since I was eighteen,” said the girl. “It’s—it’s a queer sort of a place and I’m not sure how I will find things.”

“Well, don’t worry about it,” said Blaine, picking up her bag as the train was announced, “we’ll find out when we get there.”

Escorting her to a seat, he ensconced himself beside her without waiting for an invitation, and

began ineffectual attempts to start a conversation.

“It gets me why old Parsons is so keyed up. I guess he must have a line on what Hurd is doing up there, something he didn’t confide to me. What do you suppose it is?”

“I haven’t the slightest idea,” said Anne.

Blaine was quite aware that for some reason his presence on the train had perturbed her, but, pretending not to notice it, he rattled on about the curious mission on which he had been dispatched. Since she had told him that Ortonville had once been her home he could not but suspect that Anne knew far more about James Waddington Hurd than she had admitted. In all probability, he decided, she could make a good surmise as to what the nature of the business was that had taken him to Ortonville. But if the purpose of his chatter was to draw Anne out of her silence it failed utterly. She sat there, seemingly preoccupied with her own thoughts, apparently giving little heed to what he was saying, and giving him monosyllabic answers only when he put a question to her direct.



One thing Blaine noticed about her that puzzled him. Always heretofore when he had seen Anne Sevigne, whether in her studio, on the street, or in a restaurant, she had affected rather bright colours, but now she was garbed in the plainest of black tailor-mades that seemed to bring to her a sombre, almost depressing note.

After several more ineffectual attempts to interest her in his conversation he gave it up, and she buried herself in a magazine—or her own thoughts. Not until after they had changed to the branch train and were nearing their destination did Anne speak to him.

“When we get off,” she said, abruptly, “we’ll have to separate at once. There generally are at least two hacks at the station. Put me in one of them and you take the other and drive to Mrs. Tucker’s and see if you can arrange to board there.”

“But,” cried Blaine, “when am I to see you, then? Remember, you suggested that I make the village think I was a suitor of yours so that my real mission wouldn’t be suspected.”

“Meet me to-morrow,” said Anne, after a mo-

ment's thought, "at the post-office. The mail gets in on this train and there's always a crowd there at this hour. If we meet there and walk away together the whole town will know it before dark."

"But," protested Blaine, "can't I come to your home to see you?"

"Oh, no," Anne cried, quickly. "Whatever you do you mustn't do that. No! That's utterly impossible."

"That's a shame," began Blaine.

"There's one thing more," said Anne, hastily, interrupting him as the train came to a stop at their station. "Up here everyone knows me as Waddington—Anne Waddington."

"Then your name isn't Sevigne?"

"Yes, that's my real name—but it's too long a story. I can't explain it now. But don't forget. Call me Miss Waddington."

"You're related to the Waddingtons, then?" said Blaine, accusingly. "Why, you're a relative of James Waddington Hurd!"

"No," cried Anne, vehemently, "I'm not.

Thank God, there's none of the Waddington blood in me."

Much mystified by this sudden revelation, and eager to question her further, Blaine had no opportunity to do so. The minute she was off the train Anne hopped into the least disreputable of two ancient automobiles waiting for fares and was off without a word of farewell, off so quickly that Blaine had not even a chance to hear her whispered instructions to the driver about her destination. More puzzled than ever at her manner, and utterly unable to account for the frightened, furtive way she was acting, he slowly got into the other taxi and was driven to the boarding house of which Anne had told him.

His arrangements for a room quickly completed and his luggage deposited in it, Blaine's mind reverted to the mission on which Mr. Parsons had sent him to Ortonville. Realizing that there was little opportunity or likelihood that he would see Anne until the next day, he decided to pay a visit to the old Waddington place to inspect it and get an idea of its surroundings. If he was to carry out

his employer's instructions conscientiously, as was his intention, he felt that it behooved him to start at once in search of information on the activities of James Waddington Hurd, and as a first step he intended to familiarize himself with the domicile of his quarry.

Recalling the fact that Anne had told him that the people of the neighbourhood generally spoke of the Waddington home as "the Cupps' place," he asked his landlady for directions as to how to reach it.

As he put the question to her, speaking quite casually, he was amazed at the effect his apparently idle query had on her. She gave a quick start and looked at him, manifestly with suspicion in her eyes. There seemed to come into her face something of fear, too, and she opened her lips as if to speak some word of warning to him, but, hesitating, apparently changed her mind. In an expressionless tone, that carried with it in spite of her effort at suppression a hint of an inward struggle, she gave him the information he sought.

As he set out on his quest he turned back to look

at his new boarding place, not with any intention of spying, but merely to make sure that he would be able to recognize the house on his return. He was startled to see the frightened face of his landlady peering after him from between the curtains. As he looked she raised her hand, as if to call him back, then let it fall again, although she kept watch on him until he was out of sight.

Her confusion of his simple question, coupled with the other mysterious circumstances he had encountered, filled Blaine, as he climbed the hill toward Waddington Towers, with a strange sense of apprehension. What, he kept asking himself, could be the secret that he had been sent here to discover? Why had Mr. Parsons been so insistent on his immediate departure and why had Anne been endeavouring to delay his coming? What motive could young Hurd have had in coming here so suddenly? And why was Anne so uncommunicative about it? Surely she must know far more about the affair than she would have him believe. If the people hereabout called her Waddington, she must be in some way connected with

the family even though she had so vehemently denied relationship.

As he advanced on up the hill he had no difficulty in recognizing the place of his search. The iron picket fence, the only one of its kind in the vicinity, made an excellent mark of identification. He walked slowly along the road, gazing curiously at the great old house, now in the daylight clearly visible among the trees, marvelling at its untenanted appearance and the general air of neglect about the spacious grounds.

Wishing to get a better view of the place, yet not caring to have his surveillance observed by the occupants of the house, Blaine kept on up the hill until he came to a place where the iron pickets turned off at a right angle, marking the boundary. Glancing about to make sure that no one was observing him, Blaine cautiously climbed the fence and let himself down into the grounds, trusting to the thick underbrush to screen him from the sight of any one passing along the road. Working his way among the trees he succeeded in reaching a point hardly two hundred feet from the front door

where a small hillock gave him an excellent post of observation. Screening himself behind a thickly foliated bush, he peered out for a closer inspection of the premises, but drew back quickly as the front door opened and a man emerged. Never having seen Conway Mason, Blaine did not recognize him.

Fearful that an attempt at flight would reveal his presence, Blaine sank back behind the bush, though keeping a watchful eye on the person who had emerged. His first thought had been that the man was Hurd, but on second glance he saw it was no one he had ever seen before. What was this stranger doing here? If Mr. Parsons had known of any one having come up with Hurd he surely would have mentioned it.

Much puzzled, Blaine from his hiding-place watched the stranger as he strolled about and observed him curiously as he speculatively studied a double circle of little mounds of earth that surrounded the house, mounds that Blaine himself had noted and had been wondering about. Presently the man he was watching turned about suddenly and went into the house. Blaine, feeling

that nothing more was to be gained by his vigil, was about to take a stealthy departure when a movement at the end of the front porch, the end away from him, attracted his attention.

Two faces—men's faces—suddenly appeared there.

From their furtive expression and the stealth of their approach, Blaine, excitedly watching their every move, decided that they must have been lying in wait there for—what? Waiting just long enough for a survey of the porch, the two men sprang up and made a dash for the open door. The leader, Blaine observed, was a thin, weazened, white-haired little man, who, despite his apparent age, moved swiftly. The man who followed was a villainous looking hunchback with an unintelligent cruel face. In one of his powerful arms the hunchback was carrying an axe.

Spellbound by what he had seen, Blaine watched and waited. Who could these men be? What was going on in the house? The suspense was almost more than he could stand. He was tempted to rush from his hiding-place and follow them through



the open door. But if he should enter the house he would be hard put to it to explain his presence there. In all probability Waddy Hurd was in the house. It might even be that these were some of the estate employees come for orders.

But——

The thud of blows and the crashing of splintering wood reached Blaine's ears. Once more his curiosity prevailed over his discretion. Keyed up to the point of springing out from his hiding-place and making a dash for the house, just as he started, something else happened, something so startling, that he drew back in sheer amazement.

Someone was coming through the gate—someone running.

As the runner emerged among the trees of the driveway, Blaine gasped in amazement. It was Anne—Anne Sevigne. She evidently had run all the way up the hill at top speed, for her breath was coming in short, painful gasps and her pretty cheeks were red from her exertions. Looking neither to the right nor left, giving no sign that she had seen Blaine, who was standing out in the

open gaping at her, the girl ran straight on, up on to the porch and through the open front door.

What should he do now? Blaine, utterly bewildered by this new development, entirely at a loss to account for Anne's presence there, stood pondering on a plan of action without reaching a decision. The thud of blows had ceased. All in the great old house was silence. Worry about Anne's safety had seized him. Those two men who had entered looked like desperate characters—at least one of them did, the hunchback. Was Anne safe in there with them?

A scream, a woman's scream, came from the house, from somewhere on the second floor. Blaine ran for the open door. That was Anne's voice. If Anne was in peril he must go to her rescue, but before he reached the porch he stopped short in his tracks.

From the front door there burst out the two men whom he had seen entering a few minutes before, the hunchback, now without his axe, in the lead. The faces of both were white with terror. They seemed to have but one object in mind, to get as

far away from the house as quickly as possible. Although Blaine was standing right by the porch in plain sight neither of them paid the slightest attention to him. He doubted if in their haste and fear they even saw him. Running as fast as they could they both vanished through the gate and disappeared down the hill.

Once more, Blaine, in perplexity, hurried back to his hiding-place, trying to put two and two together, to picture to himself what might have happened inside the house. His first thought had been that Anne, surprising them in some act of vandalism, had put them to flight. Certainly they had the aspect of being terrorized as they ran away. But—a new and terrible thought seized him—suppose their terror was inspired by a crime they had committed? Suppose Anne——?

Once more Blaine ran for the house, reproaching himself that he ever had wavered, fearful lest entering he might find Anne stricken down by the hunchback's axe, lying lifeless on the floor.

But before he reached the house out came Anne herself.

Like those who had preceded her she was running. In one hand she was carrying the hunchback's axe. In her eyes was the same look of terror as in the eyes of the two men who had preceded her. She, too, as Blaine stood there staring at her, made for the gate and vanished down the hill.

"Anne, Anne!" he cried, excitedly, running after her.

If she saw or heard him she gave no heed, and Blaine, hesitating for a moment whether to return to his hiding-place or to follow her, finally decided on the latter. When he reached the gate she was already hidden by a turn in the road.

Blaine stood staring for a moment or two in the direction she had gone, then turning sharply made off in the other direction away from the village. He was possessed with a desire to get away, far away from everybody. He wanted to try to think it out.

For hours and hours, alone in the solitude of the country roads, he pondered over the afternoon's strange happenings, with each step he took growing more puzzled.

Not until it was dark did he turn his steps toward his boarding place, and even then he had contrived no theory that would account for the amazing events to which he had been a witness. There was nothing he could do, he had decided, but wait—wait until to-morrow when Anne said she would meet him at the post-office.

He dared not investigate further alone. He was afraid.

## CHAPTER X

### PLAINLY AN ERROR

**T**O EXPLAIN the strange matters at Waddington Towers it is necessary to go back a little to when Conway Mason, left alone in the old house and although ordinarily a man of steady enough nerves, quickly found himself succumbing to the spell of its mysteries. The stairs began to creak as if with the passing of unseen visitors. Wind-rattled shutters made strange sounds, and swaying trees gave forth sobs and sighs enough to terrorize the stoutest heart.

It was through no contriving of his own that Mason had found himself in solitude. It had been nearly one o'clock when Mrs. Cupps' determined knocking had finally awakened him. As he had opened his eyes to the unfamiliar sights of the faded wallpaper, to the stately old black walnut furniture all about him, it had taken him a mo-

ment to realize where he was. It was Mrs. Cupps' voice outside his door that brought him to himself.

"Mr. Mason, if you want anything to eat you've just got to get up. Mr. Hurd wants me to go to the village and there's no one else here to wait on you."

"Coming this minute," called Mason, beginning to scramble into his clothes, conscious all at once that the fine mountain air that had lured him into such sound slumber had also given him a wonderful appetite, and that he was very hungry.

Puzzled as to what had become of Waddy, and eager to continue with him the discussion of the mysterious events of the night before, as a few minutes later he sat down to his breakfast, he inquired from Mrs. Cupps as to the whereabouts of his host. She evidently was not in a communicative mood.

"He didn't say where he was going nor when he would be back."

"You had a nocturnal visitor—a burglar—just after we retired last night, I understand," he tried again.

“Did we?” asked the old woman, tartly.

“Yes, Waddy told me all about it when he came upstairs. His great-uncle Matthew, I think he said it was.”

“If he said so, I s’pose it was so.”

“What do you suppose he could have been after?”

“Didn’t Mr. Hurd tell you?”

“No,” admitted Mason, “he didn’t. The fact is, I don’t think he knew. Maybe you can enlighten me.”

“Well, if he didn’t tell you, I ain’t a-going to.”

“Don’t you know?” asked Mason, pointedly.

“I ain’t saying I do and I ain’t saying I don’t,” Mrs. Cupps replied. “All I’m saying is that I ain’t telling what I know and what I don’t know except to them as has the right to hear it.”

“But, you see,” Mason urged, “I’m a friend of Mr. Hurd. He brought me up here with him to help him find out what was the matter.”

“Then ask him,” the old woman retorted. “All I know is that you’d better hurry up and finish eating. Mr. Hurd ain’t coming back for dinner or



he would have been here by now. If he and you are going to have anything to eat to-night I have got to get down to the village right away."

"I'm all through," said Mason. "Don't let me keep you."

"I'll be going, then," said Mrs. Cupps, vanishing into the kitchen to return a few seconds later adjusting the strings of an old-fashioned bonnet. "You won't be going out anywhere while I'm away, will you?" she asked, anxiously. "I'll lock all the doors after me like I always do. 'Tain't safe otherwise."

"Going to lock me in!" cried Mason, half amused, half annoyed.

"This house has got to be kept locked up now more than ever," she said, determinedly. "The key to the front door's there, right in the lock, if you do have to go out, but if you do, for God's sake see that the door's locked tight behind you."

The real terror in her tones impressed Mason in spite of his inclination to laugh. What was it or who was it that she feared? Why did she insist on the doors being all locked?

“If it will make your mind easier,” he said, “I’ll promise you that I won’t leave the house until you return, and I’ll keep the doors locked.”

“It’s better that way,” the old woman answered. “There’s no telling what they mightn’t do if they got in.”

After she departed, Mason, sitting with his cigarette, finishing his coffee, sat pondering over her words and the strange chain of events which had started with the interruption of Waddy’s party by Jessup’s telegram. As he sat there, trying to figure it all out, he became conscious of an uncomfortable tingling of his nerves. He seemed to be hearing odd, unfamiliar noises and there came to him a creepy sensation as though he were being watched by unseen eyes.

“Gosh, but it’s quiet. The little old subway would cheer me up about now,” he muttered.

With a shiver he got up from the table and strolled out into the great hall. The huge brass key in the lock of the front door attracted his notice, and unlocking the door he stepped out across the porch and onto the driveway. He

stood there surveying the old house and his surroundings, observing curiously a series of small mounds, two rows of them, at a uniform distance that seemed to surround the entire place. His first impression was that they might be some sort of gigantic ant-hills, but the regularity with which they were spaced indicated that they were of human contrivance.

His curiosity aroused, he walked over to inspect one of them, finding that the mound came from a deep excavation recently made. He tried in vain to conjecture for what purpose the holes had been dug. They were far too large for post-holes, and this refuted the theory that the old woman might have had them dug with the idea of erecting a double row of defenses of some sort.

But out in the air and the sunshine his feeling of oppression quickly vanished, and his spirits revived.

“Oh, pshaw,” he said to himself, “the old dame living here alone so many years has gone dotty. That’s all there is to it.”

The thought struck him of how amusing it would

be to his friends and Waddy's if they could see them both and the extraordinary lives they were leading. He decided to go back into the house and dash off some notes telling about it. It would kill the time until Waddy got back. As he reëntered the house, forgetting all about the warning to close and lock the door, he stood in the hall wondering where he would find some stationery. Then he recalled that he had observed paper and pens on the old secretary in the room where they had slept, and started upstairs.

He was writing his fourth note when he was interrupted by a slight noise behind him, a hardly audible sound, as of someone moving stealthily across the carpeted floor. He raised his head to listen, without turning his head, wondering if his nerves had tricked him again into imagining he was hearing things. Maybe it was Waddy, planning to give him a fright.

All at once two great powerful arms gripped him from behind, wrenching his arms sharply backward and pinning them together in an iron grip. At almost the same instant a thick red handker-

chief bandaged his eyes and some sort of an improvised gag was forced roughly between his teeth. Before he had recovered from his astonishment at the unexpected attack, before he had had time to make any sort of a struggle, he found himself picked up bodily and flung on to the bed, his assailant, whoever he was, apparently being a man of almost superhuman strength.

Blindfolded, bound hand and foot though he was, and roughly handled, the gag hurting him terribly, Mason nevertheless kept his wits about him and resolutely set to gathering in everything he could with his ears, hoping to discover why he had been assaulted and who had done it.

As he listened, he became aware that there were two men in the room. One of them from his voice—old, almost quavering—was an elderly man, evidently a man of some culture. The other—and he judged this must be the one of the pair that had trussed him up—had a rough, heavy voice, like that of a farmhand. This much he could judge, even though they spoke in guarded whispers and he could hear hardly more than the sound of their

voices. From other sounds Mason judged that they must be busy ransacking the secretary at which he had been sitting. There was much rustling of papers and the noise of drawers being pulled out and flung on the floor.

"There's a secret drawer somewhere," he heard one of the men whisper.

"The easiest way to find it is to smash it," the rougher voice answered.

To Mason's ears as he lay helpless on the bed there came sounds that indicated plainly that the advice was being followed, the thud of heavy blows, the splintering of wood, more blows, an excited cry from the older man.

Sensing that the attention of the intruders would be given entirely to their work of destruction, he ventured to shift his position, trying to get into some posture from which he could see out from under the bandage over his eyes. At last, rolling and twisting and turning, all the while moving hardly an inch at a time so as not to attract attention, he was rewarded by finding his head where he could dimly see a part of what was going on.

Only the backs and legs of the two men were in his limited range of vision, but one discovery that he made thrilled him.

One of the men in the room was a hunchback.

He could make out a great, broad, misshapen back and over-long, powerful arms. It was this man who was swinging an axe that rapidly was reducing the black walnut secretary to kindling. As the men paused in their work of demolition, apparently having discovered the secret drawer for which they had been searching, Mason, helpless though he was to interfere, and conscious, too, that he had only himself to blame for his plight for having neglected Mrs. Cupps' warning to keep the doors locked, nevertheless was experiencing a feeling of jubilation at the prospect of being able to identify one of the intruders. The description he would be able to give of the hunchback's appearance surely would lead at once to the man's arrest.

The rustling among the papers continued. Evidently the contents of the secret receptacle were being subjected to a thorough examination. An

exclamation of disappointment came from the old man.

“Ain’t it there?” asked his helper.

“There’s nothing there, nothing worth while,” the old man answered, his voice shrill with anger and disappointment. “It isn’t hidden here, after all.”

Apparently they had forgotten all about Mason, for all discretion cast aside, they were talking in ordinary tones and he could hear every word they said.

“My God, where could he have hid them? They must be in the house somewhere,” the old man cried out, desperately.

“Maybe they’re buried in the cellar,” the other suggested.

“No, they can’t be. I spent a whole month of nights in the cellar, going over it inch by inch, and her”—the old man chuckled viciously—“never even suspecting I was in the house.”

“Maybe they’re downstairs somewhere.”

“We might look, but I can’t think of any place they’d be.”



“What are you going to do with him?”

It was the hunchback's voice. Anxiously Mason waited for the answer to come. There was a moment of silence as if the old man were debating his fate. Even through the bandages over his eyes, it seemed to Mason that he could feel the malevolent glances turned in his direction.

“Damn him,” the old man cried, his voice shrilling with rage, “you might as well crack him on the head and have done with him. It's all his fault, anyhow. If he was out of the way, I could handle the other one all right. There'd be one less to fight. He'll be after us for this, if we leave him here alive.”

“But he ain't never seen us,” the hunchback objected. “He don't know who done it.”

“Maybe he might guess. It's better to put him out of the way now. It'll mean we won't be kicked out of our home like dogs when the time's up. Go on, smash him on the head and finish it up.”

The merciless malignant tone chilled the very marrow of Mason's bones. He realized that the

old man, desperate and determined, meant what he said. Bound up as he was there seemed no possible hope of his escape. He shuddered at his impending fate, to be struck down without even a chance to fight for his life. Despair seized him, as he waited for the blow to fall.

“I’ll do it,” the hunchback said, craftily, “for half—half of everything.”

There was silence for a moment—a silence during which Mason could feel the cold sweat pouring out of the palms of his hands and his forehead. He made a desperate effort to fling himself off the bed. At least he would go fighting. The hunchback’s great brute hands seized him and flung him roughly back on the bed.

“Half—half of everything,” the hunchback demanded again, “and with him gone, your home is saved for you.”

Still there was silence. Mason, ceasing to struggle, lay there wondering why they were determined to kill him. It must be that they had mistaken him for Waddy Hurd, but even so, why were they so eager to have Waddy out of the way?

He could conceive of no possible reason why any one should want to murder his friend. Yet, desperate as his plight was, he found himself puzzling over the whole mysterious affair. What could it be that they were making such a desperate search for? Did Waddy know about it? Was that why he had come up here? How would Waddy's death save the old man's home? Waddy would be the last person in the world to turn any one out of his home. It was all a mystery to him. Why didn't the hunchback strike and get it over with?

Perhaps the old man, Mason decided, desperate and ruthless as his actions appeared, balked at actual murder, or perhaps he was hesitating at pledging himself to give up half—half of whatever it was—to the hunchback.

“All right,” he at last heard a quavering voice reluctantly say, “half of everything.”

He felt himself suddenly freed from the hunchback's grasp. A second intervened in which his imagination painted vividly the scene in the bedroom, the old man standing timorously by watching him with malevolent eyes, the hunchback

standing over him, a grotesque, gorilla figure of a man, with the heavy axe poised above his head in those powerful arms. Despairingly, hopelessly, he waited for the blow to fall.

But instead there came from the doorway a startled cry—a woman's voice.

“Stop! Amos, what are you doing?”

To Mason's confused brain there came the sound of muttered curses, the rustle of skirts, the sound of running feet, and the woman's voice again, “That's not Mr. Hurd, I tell you. It's someone else.”

Followed the thud of a descending axe—and blackness.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE WADDINGTON WAY

**N**O," came explosively from Hurd, "I won't have it. I'm not going to let you call in any constable."

"But," urged the amazed Mr. Jessup, "according to your own account of it it is a plain case of attempted murder, to say nothing of breaking and entering. You and Mrs. Cupps and the rest of the people in your car saw the girl running away with a bloody axe. You entered the house and found Mr. Mason lying there all but dead with a big gash in his skull. It's as plain as the nose on your face that it was the girl who did it."

"I'm not going to have her arrested," said Waddy, doggedly. "She didn't do it."

"Then who did?" exclaimed Mr. Jessup with the triumphant air of having propounded an unanswerable question.

It was the next morning after the mysterious assault on Conway Mason. He lay, still unconscious, on the bed where they had found him, bound and senseless. The doctor from the village whom Waddy had brought back with him had been there all night and only a few minutes before had gone home for a much-needed rest. Mason's injuries, he had decided, were not likely to prove fatal. There did not seem to be any evidence of a fractured skull, although the smashing blow had produced a severe concussion of the brain. The coma, he said, might continue for several days, or at any minute consciousness might return to him. It was impossible to tell in cases of this sort.

After summoning the doctor Waddy's first thought had been to get hold of Mr. Jessup as soon as possible, but it happened that, right after Waddy had left him the afternoon before, Jessup had driven over to the county seat on some legal business. He had not returned until nearly noon the next day, and his sister, immediately on his arrival home, had informed him that Hurd wished to see him at once. Yet not even to her had

Waddy told of the mysterious attack on Mason. Charging everybody in the house, the doctor, Mrs. Cupps, and the servant, to say nothing to any one, he had awaited Mr. Jessup's coming before deciding on any course of action.

Mystifying as the whole occurrence had been, the only possible explanation that he had been able to find for it was that the intruder or intruders into Waddington Towers had mistaken Mason for him. But even so, why should any one want to kill him? Damning as the evidence against the girl appeared, he utterly refused to believe that she was in any way concerned in it, even though Mrs. Cupps seemed positive that the girl they had seen running away was Mason's assailant.

Also Mrs. Cupps' attitude about it was really most puzzling. When she had found that Hurd disagreed with her theory, she had firmly shut her lips and refused to say anything about it, declining even to tell him who the girl was.

"If you want to know anything about her, you can ask Mr. Jessup," she said. "I'm through

talking even to you about the Waddington family's private affairs. I've said too much as it is."

Not another word could he get out of her on the subject, even though he had done his best to convince her that it was impossible for a frail girl to have wrecked the old black secretary and then to have bound Mason hand and foot. Yet to everything he said she only closed her lips more firmly, though her furtive old eyes showed that she still stubbornly disagreed with him.

Convinced though he was, by intuition rather than logic, of the girl's innocence, it puzzled Waddy as to why he found himself so ardently defending her. She was nothing to him. He never had seen her but twice in his life. The only conversation he had had with her had been a few whispered sentences the night of his party. She meant nothing whatever to him, he told himself. Yet in spite of the reassurances he endeavoured to give himself there had been almost constantly in his mind the picture of her as he had observed her that night at the party. He kept scoffing to himself at any idea that he might have fallen in love with her,



yet he could not forget her personality. There was something about her, her sparkling black eyes, the sheen of her wonderful hair, the vivacious glow of health and purity about her that had caught his fancy and held it. Whatever the evidence might be against her, no matter how much she might be involved by circumstance, he knew that she was innocent of wrong.

Again and again the puzzling queries recurred to his mind. Who was she? How was her part in the puzzling affair to be accounted for? Why was she interested in his affairs, as her challenge to him had so plainly indicated? Perhaps Mr. Jessup could tell him.

He turned sharply to the old agent.

“Who is that girl, anyhow?”

“Don’t you know?” The old man’s expression showing incredulity. “Didn’t Mrs. Cupps tell you?”

“No, she didn’t. When she first saw her she cried out something about ‘that French hussy’, and that’s all. When she found out that I didn’t believe the girl had done it she shut up like a clam,

and I haven't been able to get a word out of her since. Who is she?"

"Of course," said Mr. Jessup, "I haven't seen her with my own eyes, but from what's happened and what Mrs. Cupps said about her there isn't any doubt in my mind but that it is Anne Waddington."

"Anne Waddington!" cried Waddy, an unaccountable sense of dismay laying hold of him. "Who is she—another relative?"

"Sure—she's old Mark's granddaughter," began Mr. Jessup; then, stopping short, he corrected himself: "No, that ain't right. She's no relative of yours at all."

"But she's a Waddington, you said."

"No, she's not a Waddington at all, though folks around here have called her Waddington for so long that I almost forgot that she really wasn't. You see, it's this way. As I told you yesterday old Mark, years and years ago, married a French girl. They had one son and when he grew up, like his father, he married a French woman, a widow named Sevigne. She had a young daugh-

ter at the time, a child of two. A couple of years later Mark's son and his wife both died leaving the child on his hands, and he brought her up. Everybody round here always called her Anne Waddington."

"And does she live with him now there—in that house of hate?" asked Waddy, his thoughts imagining a girlhood spent in that bleak, unfriendly atmosphere.

"Not much she doesn't," Mr. Jessup answered. "I guess she stood it just as long as she could. When she was eighteen she came into a bit of money her mother had left her. Not much, only a few thousands, but as soon as she got it, she cleared out. Old Mark didn't make any objection, in fact, seemed glad for her going."

"Where did she go?"

"I can't say as to that. She didn't take any one here into her confidence. I did hear once a year or two after she had gone away that she was studying art in New York. Somebody from here had seen her there. I didn't even know she was back until you told me what Mrs. Cupps had said."

“Why do you suppose she came back?” asked Waddy. He was recalling the telegram he had received, and the frightened look that had come into her eyes as it had been read aloud. Was it on his account, he wondered, that she had come?

“I couldn’t say as to that, Mr. Hurd, but if I was you I’d put the constable on her track right away before she has a chance to get out of town. If she didn’t do it herself, it’s a pretty safe bet that she knows who did do it. Once she’s locked up and a few questions put to her, she’ll talk all right.”

“Under no circumstances is she to be arrested,” said Waddy, firmly. “There is no legal evidence against her. I won’t have any constable after her.”

“But something’s got to be done,” protested Mr. Jessup, his legal sense outraged. “There’s Mason lying near dead upstairs, the victim of an assault with intent to kill. It isn’t right not to try to find the one who did it.”

“Time enough to take action when he comes to and can tell us what happened. The doctor said he might recover consciousness any minute.”

“But supposing he doesn’t come to?” grumbled the elder man.

“He’ll come to. I’ve seen them come back after far worse smashes than that.”

“Something ought to be done right away, I tell you,” persisted Mr. Jessup.

“All right,” cried Waddy, springing up and seizing his cap, “I’ll do something.”

“Where are you going?”

“You stay here,” said Waddy. “If Mason comes to while I am away, Mrs. Cupps will call you. Go upstairs and take down what he has to say. Get a—what do you call it—a deposition from him.”

“Yes, but what are you going to do?”

“I,” said Waddy, his lips forming themselves into firm hard lines of determination that made him look vastly like the portrait of his great-grandfather under which he happened to be standing at the moment, “I am going to do something that should have been done forty years ago. I am going right now to see Matthew and Mark Waddington and get them together and have it out

with them. This foolishness has lasted far too long. It's all absurd, this hating each other and fighting each other that has been going on all these years. I certainly don't want their homes. They both are welcome to them and I shall tell them so."

"But the Waddington treasure—what about that?" asked Mr. Jessup.

"Time enough to divide that up when we find it."

"'Tain't likely that they'll let you in, either one of them."

"Very well, then, I'll break in," said Waddy, savagely, as he flung himself out of the door. "I'm going to bring them together if I have to drag them both to a meeting place and crack their heads together. I'm going to settle the thing once and for all and settle it to-day."

Mr. Jessup, shaking his head dubiously, followed him to the door and stood looking anxiously after him until he was hidden by a turn in the road. He felt really alarmed for the young man's safety.

None knew better than Henry T. Jessup the

depth of bitter feeling that existed between the two brothers, and none sensed half so well as he that the long brooding over their fancied wrongs in their lives of solitude had turned both the brothers' brains, making them dangerous foes. It was his growing feeling that either one of them might break forth into some maniacal crime that had caused him to send the telegram to Hurd as a last resort. He was half-minded to start in pursuit of Hurd and attempt once more to dissuade him, but shaking his head, he turned back and settled down in the hall to await developments. None knew better than he how useless it was to attempt to turn a Waddington once his mind was made up.

Yet could Jessup's vision have followed Waddy a little farther down the road, he quickly would have decided that there was no occasion for worry. For Waddy, his mind busy with planning a course of action with the two old men, phrasing the words in which he was going to tell them what fools they had been making of themselves, stopped short, and caught his breath quickly.

Some distance ahead of him, from the first of the

twin houses, from Great-uncle Mark's, there had emerged a feminine figure, heading rapidly toward the village. Even though he had caught only a glimpse of her face he recognized her at once.

It was his stranger girl.

Overboard went all Waddy's ambitious plans for seeing his two great-uncles. The quarrelsome old men were for the moment entirely forgotten. Only one thing at that particular instant seemed really worth doing, and that was to catch up at once with Anne Sevigne and have a talk with her. He felt that there was no telling when he might have another such opportunity as this.

There were so many questions he wanted to ask her. How had she happened to be present at his birthday party? Why had she been so frightened when that telegram had been read aloud there? Why was she so interested in his affairs? Why had she challenged him to come to Ortonville? Why had she herself come here? And what was she doing yesterday at his home?

He quickened his step to catch up with her, but despite his long strides he soon found that she was



walking so rapidly that he was gaining but slowly on her. He was tempted to call out to her but was fearful of startling her. But for the fact that they were entering the village he would have broken into a run to overtake her. He hesitated to do this, fearing to make them both look ridiculous.

Meanwhile, David Blaine was dutifully awaiting Anne's arrival at the post-office. Knowing well that his exacting employer would be expecting a daily report from him, he had spent most of the evening and practically all of the morning in making a detailed account of the peculiar happenings of which he had been a witness. In it he had described the three visitors he had seen entering Waddington Towers, the sounds he had heard. The only thing he had omitted was any reference to the fact that one of the visitors was a girl that he knew. He was waiting until after he had talked with Anne to complete his report. He had decided that Anne was much better posted on the affairs of James Waddington Hurd than he hitherto had had any reason to suspect, and he was determined to make her tell him everything she

knew. The more he had pondered over the mission on which he had come to Ortonville, the more mixed up and mysterious it appeared to be. He had spent half the night trying to conjecture what could have happened in Waddington Towers, as he stood there hid in the bushes watching, and so was waiting with excited interest for Anne's arrival. She ought to know something.

As he saw her approaching through the village square he hurried forward to meet her. He was within a few feet of her, oblivious to everything but her presence, when suddenly beside her there loomed—wholly without warning as far as David Blaine was concerned—the tall figure of the man he had been sent to Ortonville to watch.

“Miss Sevigne!” he heard Waddy's voice call out.

The girl turned quickly, at first startled, and then—at least so it seemed to Blaine's watching, jealous eyes—delighted and relieved.

“Mr. Hurd!” she cried.

As if it had all been by prearrangement, the two of them, James Waddington Hurd and Anne

Sevigne—or was her name Waddington?—turned abruptly around and walked away together, conversing earnestly, neither one of them giving any sign that they had noticed Blaine's presence.

Blaine stared wrathfully after them for a moment. This was Anne—Anne had certainly led him to believe that she was not even acquainted with Hurd! Angrily he turned about, and not waiting to return to his boarding house to complete his report, entered the post-office. At the public desk he hastily added a few lines to what he already had written. He had intended to keep Anne's name out of it, but now at the end of his description of the strangers' visit to Waddington Towers he added:

I saw H. for the first time this afternoon. He came to the village and met, seemingly by appointment, the young woman who visited Waddington Towers yesterday. She is known in Ortonville as Anne Waddington, but is also known in studio circles in New York as Anne Sevigne.

“All right, Anne,” he said as he affixed a special delivery stamp to his letter to Mr. Parsons.  
“You did this to yourself.”

## CHAPTER XII

### ONE PLAN UPSET

**U**PSETTING as had been the unexpected meeting of Waddy Hurd and Anne Seignie to David Blaine, it seemed to be almost as embarrassing to the two principals. Each of them on the spur of the moment had turned instinctively to the other, as if they were old acquaintances, yet with no preconceived plan on the part of either.

There were scores of questions that Anne was dying to ask, yet she hesitated to begin the conversation, having no clue to just how much or how little the heir to Waddington Towers had learned.

Waddy, too, for once, was at a loss for words. It was on his lips to reassure the girl that he at least believed her innocent, but that seemed a brutal opening. For a few steps they walked together in silence. It was Waddy who spoke first.

“That was some party, wasn’t it?” he began, his mind reverting to the first occasion on which he had seen Anne, to the point where his long list of unanswered questions began.

Anne coloured vividly. What at the time had seemed to her only a foolish lark now took on a very different aspect. If she told him the truth he would look on her as over-curious and certainly vulgar; and she was all at once conscious that she cared, cared very much for his good opinion of her. Besides, she had been timorously anticipating that his first question would be about the mysterious assault on Mason. Surely Hurd had been in Ortonville long enough to have gathered the gossip about the family. The fact that he had called her by name indicated that he already knew her history. Even if he had no suspicion of her presence in Waddington Towers the day before he must have comprehended that she was in some way concerned in the involved affairs of the Waddington family.

At any rate, she felt that she must be on her guard with him. If Mason had been fatally in-

jured, or if he had already died, someone must be punished for it. Yet an instinctive desire to shield Mark Waddington from the consequences of his folly possessed her. It was not that she loved her grandfather, as she had always called him. Her feeling was more akin to pity, her own private belief being that his long brooding in his solitary home had unbalanced his mind.

While the axe, when it had fallen, had been in Amos's hands, her grandfather's farm-hand always had been a weak-wit, a mere creature of his employer, and the crime, if crime it was, she felt was solely Mark Waddington's.

As his remark brought no response from her, Waddy, looking down at her reddening cheeks and perturbed eyes, hastened at once to reassure her.

"Of course," he said, abruptly, "I knew at once you had had nothing to do with it. It couldn't have been you."

"Nothing to do with what?" asked Anne, sparing for time to regain her composure, although the startled look in her eyes told him all too well that she knew to what he referred.

His statement had filled her with sudden panic. She had been comforting herself with the thought that her escape had been unobserved. When the hunchback had let the axe fall, striking Mason's head—Anne wasn't sure in her own mind whether he had done it purposely, or whether he had let it slip in surprise at her arrival, but she couldn't think such a casual blow would be fatal—her first thought had been to get away from the place and to remove all evidence of her grandfather's presence there. She had never dreamed that the house was at the moment untenanted except for Mason.

As she had run blindly down the road carrying the axe a growing sense of horror at what had happened and at her own panic in running away had all but stultified her senses. The idea that had possessed her was to get away from Waddington Towers before Mrs. Cupps discovered her, to get home and to hide the axe.

As she ran she had been vaguely conscious of having passed an automobile drawn up at the side of the road, but had given little heed to it. Wad-

dy's remark, implying that her flight had been observed, was susceptible of only one explanation. He must have been in that car. He must have seen her carrying the blood-stained axe.

Her face blanched at the thought that all at once had come to her. Hitherto, conscious of her own innocence, she had given little heed to the part she had played. Now it dawned on her how damning the evidence must appear.

"Will he—will Mr. Mason get well?" she faltered.

"Sure," said Waddy, cheerfully. "Don't worry about him a minute. He'll pull through. It was a nasty cut and there's a bad concussion of the brain, but he'll be all right in a day or two."

"I'm so glad," said Anne, sincerely.

She paused, waiting for his next question. Surely he would demand from her an explanation of what had happened in the bedroom. As she waited nervously she was wondering what her duty in the matter was. How far should she go in her effort to shield Mark Waddington from the consequences of his insane folly? Would it be better



for her to throw herself on Waddy Hurd's mercy and tell him the whole miserable story? Perhaps she might be able to convince him that the old man was mentally irresponsible. Yet to her amazement her escort's next question had no bearing whatever on the tragedy.

"I wish you'd tell me," he said almost plaintively, "how you happened to come to my party. I tried my best the next day to find out who you were. I must have called up a dozen people trying to find out with whom you had come."

"Nobody brought me," confessed Anne, blushing again. "I just came."

"I don't quite understand."

"I came uninvited," she said, rapidly, glad to get it over. "It was this way: I happened to be passing that supper-club place at the corner of your street and a group of a dozen or so people came out together. I heard one of them say they were going to your place and I couldn't resist the temptation. I followed along and when we got to your apartments there were so many others there no one took any notice of me."

"I noticed you," said Waddy, pointedly. "I noticed you a lot."

"Not enough to try to talk to me, anyhow." Anne's courage was coming back.

"But why," demanded Waddy, explosively, "were you so eager to come to my place? I can't understand that."

"We're really quite old friends, Mr. Hurd," the girl said, mischievously, her natural spirits reviving.

"That can't be. If I ever had met you before I know I would have remembered you."

"But we are old friends," the girl persisted. "Even if you never had met me before, I've known you, known all about you ever since I was a child. I grew up here in Ortonville, and you are the village's local hero. They read everything that's printed about you and talk about you constantly and keep wondering if you will ever come back. All my life I have been hearing about you. I always have known that some day you would be the owner of Waddington Towers. Often and often, when I was a lonely little girl here, I used to wish that you'd come back."

“And now,” said Waddy, softly, “your wish has come true. I have come home—home to stay.”

“Then,” Anne went on, “when you went into the army, I saw your picture in the newspapers, and again when your father died, and when you were decorated, and when you were wounded, so you see I know you quite well. And once——” she hesitated.

“Once what?” insisted Waddy, interestedly.

“Once when you were in hospital in England, I was over there with our Red Cross, and I happened to know one of the nurses at your hospital. I came into the room with her, just to get a peep at you.”

“I remember,” cried Waddy, enthusiastically. “I knew there was something familiar in your appearance. You wore a uniform of some sort. I couldn’t see much of your face. But I remember your eyes. I tried to talk to you and you ran out of the room.”

Anne, blushing guiltily, nodded.

“Why didn’t you introduce yourself?”

“How could I?” she asked, bitterly. “I didn’t

dare. Remember I had grown up in a Waddington home, in its atmosphere of absurd hate. I'd only been a few months away from this dreadful place then. Its taint was still on me. I dared not tell you who I was."

"You poor little kid," said Waddy, compassionately. "I've only been here two days but I have heard enough already to imagine what a hell your life here must have been."

"It was—pretty bad," said Anne, shivering. "Let's don't talk about it."

"Well, then, let's talk about the party. What did you think when that telegram came? It frightened you, didn't it?"

"Indeed it did. I hadn't been up here for nearly five years, but I knew Mr. Jessup. If he was stirred up enough to send a message like that I knew something terrible must be happening."

"Seems to be," said Waddy, "and now I am here, what do you think I'd better do? It was because of you I came, you know."

As they talked they had unconsciously been retracing their steps and now had arrived within a

stone's throw of the twin houses. Anne, happening to look up, all at once became aware of their whereabouts.

"Stop!" she cried. "You mustn't come a step farther with me. We mustn't be seen together by either of them."

"Why not?"

"My grandfather—no, I won't ever call him that again—Mark Waddington is bitter against you. He was raving all last night that he was going to kill you on sight."

"I'm not afraid of him, nor of both of them together."

"I know, but there's Amos. He is Mr. Waddington's man of all work. He's a crazy hunchback, but he's terribly strong—and dangerous, too. It was——"

She stopped abruptly.

"Don't worry," said Waddy. "You can tell me the whole thing. Nobody is going to be arrested. Mr. Jessup was for calling in the constable at once but I would not let him. I don't see any use of dragging the Waddington family

fighters into the courts. It was Amos, of course, who smashed Mason."

"Yes," said Anne. "When I got here they were sitting around the house making plans to search the big house for the hidden jewels just exactly as they were doing five years ago when I went away. I didn't take them seriously, for they're at it all the time. I went upstairs to change my dress, and from the window I saw Mrs. Cupps going toward the village. Then I saw Mark Waddington and Amos hurrying toward the Towers and they had an axe. I got dressed as soon as I could and followed them. I knew they were taking advantage of Mrs. Cupps' absence.

"Did you find them?" asked Waddy, excitedly.

"The front door was standing wide open so I went right in. I could hear voices upstairs somewhere—angry voices. I found the furniture all smashed up, and a man lying tied and gagged and blindfolded on the bed. Mr. Waddington and Amos were arguing over him and when they saw me, they were both so startled that they dropped everything and ran. Amos dropped the axe—I'm

trying to think he didn't do it on purpose—and it hit Mr. Mason's head. It was Mr. Mason, wasn't it? I remember him at your house that night."

"Yes, it was. Now, look here," said Waddy, decisively, "you go on into the house and I'll join you there in a minute. I'm going to settle this thing right now. It has lasted too long as it is. I'm going in next door and get Great-uncle Matthew. I am going to bring him into your place if I have to drag him in. We are all going to get together for once and have a pleasant little family chat."

"Don't!" cried Anne. "It isn't safe. They'll kill you."

"I can take care of myself. See," said Waddy, exhibiting the automatic he had brought with him. "I guess I can handle even Amos with that."

Fearfully Anne watched him as, abruptly leaving her, he turned and passed through the gate to the house adjoining the one that for years had been her home. Then, with heart beating fast, she entered the other gate.

It was five minutes later that she heard the

scuffling of feet approaching the house and hurriedly threw open the door. There, at the door of his brother's home for the first time in his life, stood Matthew Waddington, his bearded wrinkled old face grayer than ever from fright, while behind him, propelling him along by a forceful grip on his collar, was his great-nephew, in whose other hand was a businesslike looking automatic.

"Here we are," called Waddy, triumphantly, "all ready for that little family party."

"They're not here," cried Anne. "They've gone—both grandfather and Amos."

"You don't think," cried Waddy in alarm, "that they've gone back to the Towers?"

"No," said Anne, "they wouldn't do that. They wouldn't dare with all those people about. I think they have run away for fear they will be arrested."

As Waddy stood there gazing blankly at Anne, Great-uncle Matthew, the grip on his collar relaxing, turned with a malignant leer.

"And now, Mr. Smarty, what are you going to do about it?" he asked, derisively.



## CHAPTER XIII

### A DEAL IS PROPOSED

**W**ADDY in perplexity released his hold on the old man's collar and stared blankly at Anne. The question old Matthew Waddington had so maliciously put forth was a facer. Anne, returning his gaze, burst into sudden laughter. Keyed up as she had been by the strain of it all, her nerves taut from the tragedy of the day before, burdened with the morbid atmosphere of hate and suspicion, all at once the absurdity of the situation had struck her.

Waddy, watching her at first with amazement, began presently to laugh, too. Even Great-uncle Matthew's set old face relaxed a little as he looked from one to the other, not knowing what to make of it. At first he had rather felt that perhaps they were laughing at him, but finding his presence there practically unheeded by either of the young people,

he resisted his first impulse to escape, deciding to remain and try to discover what it was all about. Although no news had reached him yet of the attack on Mason he had gathered from Anne's remark that his long-hated brother had been detected in some sort of mischief and he was eager to know just what it was. Anne, of course, he knew by sight, and although no one had informed him of Waddy's identity he had shrewdly guessed who he might be in the glimpse he had caught of him as he passed the day before. The young man had the Waddington nose and mouth and strongly resembled the portrait of his great-grandfather made in his youth. Matthew knew, without being told, that his captor was the long-absent heir to Waddington Towers.

"Where on earth," said Waddy at last, "do you suppose old Mark can have gone? He was here when you left the house a few minutes ago, wasn't he?"

"Yes," said the girl, "he and Amos both. What they did yesterday seemed to have frightened them into silence. They had been sitting around the

house ever since just glowering at each other and hardly saying a word. I know they were both scared.”

“But where would they go? They can’t have had much of a start. Maybe we can find them.”

“I haven’t the slightest idea where to look,” said Anne.

A chuckle from old Matthew drew the attention of both of them to him. He was beginning to enjoy himself, now that he found no attempts were being made to do him any further physical violence. In forty years—forty monotonous years of plotting and scheming—nothing so exciting had ever happened to him before. It was a satisfaction, too, to find himself at last inside his brother’s house, the house to which his entrance had been forbidden four decades ago.

“I know where they’ll be,” he chuckled. “They’re in the hide-hole—the place we used to play in when we were little shavers.”

“The hide-hole!” exclaimed Waddy. “Where is it?”

“I’m not telling,” said Great-uncle Matthew, firmly.

“Where is it?” the young man demanded, his voice this time more insistent.

“Why should I tell you?” His old relative turned to him, plaintively rather than vindictively. “You—coming up here to turn me out of my home, to take my roof away from over my head.”

“Who said I came up here for that?” said Waddy, explosively. “You’re welcome to your roof for ever as far as I am concerned.”

“But the will——” quavered old Matthew.

“The will be damned!” said Waddy.

Compassion filled him as he looked at the old man’s face, lined as it was with the long years of hatred and fear, years that had left him a decrepit, wretched, suspicious old man.

“Do you mean”—a gleam of hope seemed to soften the old man’s face—“do you mean that I can keep my home?”

“Of course he means it,” said Anne, reassuringly. “Mr. Hurd doesn’t want your property. Both

you and your brother are welcome to your homes for the rest of your lives.”

“Yes,” said Waddy, “help me find your brother, and I’ll make out quit-claim deeds at once for both of you.”

The old man straightened back his shoulders and a new look came into his tired old eyes.

“And you won’t be asking—you won’t be insisting that—what the will said?”

“Make public confession and all that rot? Of course not. I would like to see you and your brother shake hands, though, and agree to quit fighting. You’re surely old enough now to know better.”

Old Matthew stood pondering the young man’s suggestion, a far-away look in his eyes.

“I’m willing,” he said at last. “I’ve had enough of it. I’ll do it if he will——” Suddenly he checked himself and the old crafty look returned to his eyes, and he shook his head. “No,” he said, firmly, “there’s the jewels—the Waddington jewels.”

“I’m going to find them,” said Waddy. “That’s

what I came up here for. Time enough to divide them when——”

“You’ve solved the cipher?” cried the old man, incredulously.

“Not yet,” said Waddy. “I only heard about it yesterday, but I’m going to. The sensible thing is for us all to get together, you and your brother and Miss Sevigne and me, and talk the whole thing over. Maybe if we all put our heads together, we can get at the secret, and when we find them we can divide them up, share and share alike. Come, Uncle Matthew, what do you say?”

At the friendly form of address the young man had used old Mr. Waddington gave a start. In the solitary life he had led kindly words for him had been few and far apart. Besides, there was about Waddy Hurd’s voice a sort of almost irresistible magnetism. People found themselves exerting themselves to please him and doing whatever he asked them to do. The old man’s first impulse was to yield. He found himself really enjoying the companionship of his young relative. He wanted very much to do what Waddy had

asked of him, but habits of a lifetime are not to be shaken off at will, and besides—it was not the Waddington way.

“I’ll think it over,” he said in his quavering voice.

If he had been expecting that there would be further urging he was disappointed.

“Fine,” said Waddy. “That’s settled. We’ll meet here in this house at ten o’clock to-morrow morning when you have made up your mind. If Mark Waddington is not home by that time you can tell us where to find him—where this hide-hole is—and I’ll go and fetch him. Then we will all have a friendly chat together and settle things once and for all. Now, you go home, Uncle Matthew, and think it over. I’ll meet you here at ten to-morrow.”

For a moment the old man’s face contorted itself wrathfully as if he was about to sputter out an indignant protest at his curt dismissal, but, apparently thinking better of it, he turned toward the door.

“Now,” said Waddy, turning to Anne, “get your bag and come along.”

“Come along where?” she asked in astonishment.

“Why, to Waddington Towers, of course. You can’t stay alone in this dismal place. Where else is there for you to go?”

“Look here, Mr. Hurd,” said the girl, an angry red coming into her cheeks, “because you can successfully bully an old man about you need not think the same tactics will work with me.”

“But it’s perfectly all right. Mrs. Cupps is there, and there’s a houseful of servants, and there’s Mr. Jessup, too. It’s perfectly all right.”

“Except,” said Anne, “that I have no desire whatever to accept your invitation.”

“Oh, come now. Maybe I was rather abrupt the way I put it, but really you can’t stay here alone.”

“Why not?”

“It isn’t safe. There’s that villain Amos and old Mark roaming about. They may come back here at any minute.”

“You have far more reason to fear them than I. They wouldn’t hurt me.”



“Wouldn’t they? Remember you are the only witness of what they did. Men who will go as far as they did yesterday will stop at nothing.”

“I’m not afraid. I’ve known them both all my life. I know how to handle them. Besides, I have another reason for not going with you—a most excellent reason.”

A roguish whim had seized her to have a little fun with Waddy. He was so cock-sure of himself, and she resented the masterful manner he had assumed in trying to direct her future movements.

“What’s your reason?” asked Waddy.

“I have an important engagement—an engagement to meet a gentleman.”

“Who is he?” he asked, incredulous but interested.

“A man sent up here to Ortonville,” said Anne, mischievously, “for the express purpose of shadowing James Waddington Hurd.”

“What! To shadow me?”

“That’s what I said.”

“Good Lord! What’s the big idea?”

“All I know is that there is a certain young man

here in Ortonville, sent up from New York, whose instructions are to watch you closely and make a daily report on everything you do. I was on my way to see him when I met you."

"Who is he, a detective? Who sent him?" demanded Waddy.

This statement of Anne's had left him utterly dumbfounded.

"The man's not a detective exactly," said Anne.

"You've already met him? You know him?"

"Oh, yes," said Anne, enjoying Waddy's consternation. "In fact, it was on his account that I came up here. You see"—she added this as an afterthought—"the young man—it's really rather complicated—the young man sent up here to watch you is in love with me, or at least thinks he is."

"Damn!" said Waddy.

"Why, Mr. Hurd," she said in mock seriousness, "you mustn't use such language."

"Look here," said Waddy, disregarding her protest, "tell me about him. Tell me everything."

"Why should I?" she countered.

“Why—why—” fumbled Waddy, floundering for a logical reason, “why, because I love you, Anne Sevigne.”

“Damn,” said Anne. “That does complicate matters, doesn’t it?”

“I’ve been mad about you ever since the first minute I saw you,” Waddy went on, desperately, following up a declaration that was as much of a surprise to him as it had been to Anne. “You haven’t been out of my thoughts for a minute. It was on your account that I came up here.”

“Why, Mr. Hurd,” exclaimed Anne in a bantering tone, “you know that isn’t so. You told your uncle Matthew your real reason. It was to find the Waddington jewels.”

For answer Waddy strode quickly across the room and seized her by the shoulders, vexed enough with her raillery to shake her soundly, yet tempted strongly to crush her in his arms and kiss her. But he did neither.

Looking down into those eyes upturned to his he saw that they were dark with anger, and he could feel the slim little figure in his grasp stiffen

resentfully, although when Anne spoke there was no trace of fear in her tones.

“Apparently you are right, Mr. Hurd,” she said. “It does not seem quite safe for me to stay here alone, at least not with you.”

With an effort he released her, and stood looking down at her.

“Won’t you take me into your confidence and tell me everything?” he asked, gently.

“Perhaps—to-morrow,” she answered, pointing toward the door.

Against his will, under the spell of her unspoken command, he turned abruptly and left her.

Yet, as he went away, even though he had been dismissed, his heart was light. He was to see her—to-morrow.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A JOURNEY IS PLANNED

**T**HE home of Elwood Parsons was a Park Avenue apartment. There were sixteen rooms for the two of them, himself and Frieda, not counting the servants' quarters. Occasionally the daughter would have a few guests, and two or three times during the season they might give a small dinner party, but most of the time even during the winter months neither Parsons nor his daughter used the big apartment except as a place to sleep and breakfast. Frieda, busy with her social affairs, seldom was home for either luncheon or for dinner unless they had guests, and the lawyer, ever busy building fences, was an inveterate attendant at public dinners. When no function of any sort was scheduled he made a point of dining at one of the several good clubs he had contrived to get into.

But always, ever since Frieda had finished her school-days, they had breakfasted together, and this breakfast with his daughter was the brightest spot in the day. Clever schemer though he was, and utterly unscrupulous in advancing his own interests, Parsons really loved his daughter, and always his most ambitious plans concerning the future revolved about her.

On this particular morning as they appeared at the breakfast table both of them looked haggard and worried. And each of them, although they anxiously observed the other's expression, for some reason seemed loath to talk.

Frieda had undergone a wearing night of self-examination. Utterly at a loss to account for Waddy Hurd's attitude toward her, and being desperately in love with him, she had been much more hurt by his rude departure than even her father had suspected.

Hitherto, whenever she had encountered him, he always had seemed delighted and had been eager for her society. She had understood, too, from her father's manner rather than from anything he

had ever said, that he would look upon Waddy as an acceptable son-in-law, and always she had felt hitherto that sooner or later Waddy would ask her to be his wife.

But now she sensed something had intervened, something that she could not comprehend.

In the seclusion of her room she had taken from a locked drawer the souvenirs of her two years' acquaintance with him. Her treasures were after all not so many—a picture of Waddy in his uniform as a British officer, a snapshot or two of them together taken in the mountains, some dance cards on which his name appeared very frequently, and a few letters, friendly, informal notes that had accompanied little gifts or were about dates they had had, notes that began, "Dear Frieda," and ended "Cordially, Waddy," notes that were surely none of them love-letters, yet in which, perhaps reflecting her own feelings, she had sensed a tender regard.

All night long she had lain awake trying to discover what was the matter. Reviewing her own conduct, she was conscious of nothing that she had

done that might have served to alienate him. It must be some external cause, and the only cause that seemed to her sufficient was the thought that comes to every girl in similar plight—

Another woman!

Her father, too, had had but little sleep the night before. He had had sent up from his office the evening before all the cases containing documents bearing on the Hurd estate and had been up until nearly four in the morning, going thoroughly over them one by one, trying to discover something among them that might account for the young man's sudden and inexplicable interest in Ortonville.

He did find one thing among them that hitherto had escaped his notice—a time-yellowed newspaper clipping that told of the hidden Waddington jewels. Parsons read through the clipping twice and then thoughtfully put it in his bill case. It was barely possible, he felt, that some gossip about the hidden treasure might have reached Waddy's ears. An impetuous desire for adventure might have sent the young man posting to Ortonville to



take up the quest, but to Parsons's analytical mind the motive did not seem quite sufficient.

As in his daughter's mind, there arose in his the fear that there might be a woman involved. He was appalled to think that his plans to have Hurd marry his daughter had miscarried, yet the more he pondered over the matter, the more determined he became to let nothing intervene to thwart his ambitions. He must not—he dare not—slip up in his plans now.

Over his coffee cup he shot a keen glance at his daughter.

“What's up between you and Waddy?” he asked.

“Dad,” the girl's eyes, in spite of her efforts, filled with tears, “I don't know.”

“What's the matter? Have you quarrelled?”

“Nothing's happened,” she answered, desperately. “I can't understand it. Oh, Dad, you're so clever. Help me get him back, won't you?”

It was a revelation to Parsons to see how deeply his daughter cared. He was silent for a moment and then asked quietly, “Has he ever said anything?”

“Proposed, you mean? No, but he would have. I’m sure he would have, if——”

“If what?”

“If something hadn’t happened. I don’t know what it is. I’m afraid it’s another girl.”

“But why,” asked her father, “would he go off to Ortonville?”

“I can’t imagine. What do you think, Dad?”

For answer Parsons drew from his pocket the newspaper clipping he had discovered the night before and passed it to his daughter to read. As she scanned it her face lightened.

“I wonder?” she cried. “It is just the sort of thing that would appeal to him—a search for buried treasure. It sounds awfully exciting. Oh, Dad, do you think that is why he was so anxious to get away?”

As they were discussing the clipping and its possible relations to Hurd’s recent actions, the butler entered with the morning mail. Mr. Parsons, catching the Ortonville postmark on one of the letters, tore it hastily open, trusting that the report from Blaine that he had been so anx-

iously awaiting might explain everything satisfactorily. A puzzled frown gathered in his face as he read Blaine's graphic description of the mysterious and exciting events he had witnessed at Waddington Towers. The frown deepened as he came to the last few lines.

"What's the matter, Dad?" Frieda asked as he sat silent, his face growing blacker and blacker.

"You know a lot of the art crowd, don't you?" he asked, suddenly, looking up from the letter.

"Not a lot of them. I know some of the artists—mostly the younger ones."

"Know any women artists?"

"Yes," she answered, wonderingly, "quite a few of them. Why?"

"Ever know or hear of a girl named—" he paused to refer to the letter before him—"Sevigne. Anne Sevigne?"

"No," said the puzzled girl. "Not that I know of."

"Or Anne Waddington? Sometimes she uses that name."

“No, I never heard of any one by that name, either. Why,” she hesitated and a startled look came into her eyes, “is she any relation to Waddy? You know his name is James Waddington Hurd. Who is she?”

“All I know about her is her name.”

“But why are you asking about her? What has she done?”

“Waddy Hurd is up in Ortonville with her—that’s why.”

“In Ortonville—with *her!*”

“That’s where his people came from. He owns an old house up there, the house where the jewels are supposed to be hidden—Waddington Towers. He didn’t know anything about it, that he owned the house, or even where the place was, until I told him yesterday. What he is doing in Ortonville or who this girl is, I can’t imagine, but I am going to find out.”

“How—what are you going to do?”

“I have a young man up there keeping tabs on him, but I don’t think he’s big enough for the job. I’m going up there myself.”

“When are you going?” asked his daughter quickly.

Parsons pondered a minute, mentally reviewing his engagements.

“To-morrow morning, the first thing. I’ll motor up.”

“But what will Waddy think of your going up there uninvited?”

“He won’t know it,” chuckled Parsons. “He will think I came up there accidentally. I’ll tell him I happened to be motoring to Albany on some legal business and saw the name Ortonville and just dropped by to see what he thought of the place. Or, better still, I’ll take up some papers that require his signature and make that my excuse for stopping.”

“Dad,” said Frieda, animatedly, the colour returning to her cheeks, “I’m going with you,” she announced decisively.

Parsons studied her thoughtfully a moment before he answered her. He was not at all sure that Waddy would be glad to see him in Ortonville. The fact that the young man had not invited his

confidence indicated a desire to be let alone. If he and this girl were up there together Hurd undoubtedly would resent his coming up. But if he had Frieda with him and they should arrive about lunch-time, common hospitality would require that Waddy bid them stay to luncheon. He might even suggest their passing the night in Waddington Towers. That would be even better still. Frieda could hold her own against any girl. Surely sight of her would bring James Waddington Hurd back to his senses again, then—for just an instant a tremor of fear shook him—then everything would turn out all right.

“By all means, my dear,” he said to his daughter, cordially, “come along with me. I think we’ll have an interesting trip.”

## CHAPTER XV

### AN EXCITING EVENING

SO YOU see," said Waddy, almost combatively, "I was right. That phrase that Mason keeps mumbling bears out everything that Miss Sevigne said. I knew from the first that she could have had nothing to do with it."

Even though he knew that in old Mr. Jessup he had an entirely unsympathetic listener, he just had to keep on talking about Anne. Ever since the spirited passage he had had with her in the afternoon, she had filled his thoughts to the exclusion of practically everything else. Waddy was in love, in love for the first time in his life, and everything took on a new aspect. Even the gloomy old house, the mysterious happenings about it, the feud of his great-uncles, the assault on his friend Mason, and the puzzle of the missing jewels were as nothing to him now. He felt that

he was just marking time until he should see Anne again. Meanwhile, he was talking about her to old Jessup.

“Don’t forget,” the old agent protested, stubbornly, “that there’s strong evidence against her. It was she that was seen running away from the house with the axe.”

“But I tell you that it was the hunchback—Amos they call him—that used it. She tried to stop him.”

“Humph,” sniffed the old man. “When you get as old as I am you’ll learn that it’s a darned sight safer to hear both sides of a story first. What does he say?”

“I told you,” Waddy retorted almost angrily, “that he has run away, he and old Mark.”

It was in the evening after supper. They were sitting together in the semi-darkness of the broad front porch of Waddington Towers, the younger man with his cigarette and Jessup with his pipe. One of the maids had been installed as nurse at Mason’s bedside and Mrs. Cupps and the other servants were somewhere in the house busy with



their duties. It was the very first opportunity that Waddy had had for discussing the day's developments with his agent, for when he had returned after leaving Anne he had found the whole house in excitement over Mason's returning consciousness.

Mason, after having lain in a stupor for many hours, apparently was trying to tell them something. When he had first begun to toss restlessly and mutter incoherently Mrs. Cupps had hastened to summon Mr. Jessup from the porch below. As Waddy came in he had found them both at the patient's bedside bending anxiously over him endeavouring to make out what he was trying to say. It was Waddy, guided by what he had already learned of the tragic occurrences of the afternoon, who finally managed to discover what it was that Mason was trying to communicate.

*“One of them is a hunchback.”*

Over and over Mason kept mumbling the same words, his brain, as it recovered from the shock, picking up thought that had been in his mind before the heavy axe struck him, jarring him into un-

consciousness. For an hour they had stood over him, hoping to hear something else, occasionally trying to lead him on with questions but invariably getting the same monotonous mumble.

After a while the mutterings had ceased, and Mason apparently fell back into what seemed a more natural slumber. Leaving him in the maid's care, Waddy and Jessup had descended to the dining room for their evening meal, but with both the butler and Mrs. Cupps hovering about to see that their wants were supplied there had been no chance for intimate conversation until they had adjourned to the porch, where Waddy had given a somewhat deleted account of his adventures.

"I still think," persisted Jessup, "that the constable ought to be notified."

"Nothing doing," Waddy repeated more firmly than ever. "If Mason, when he recovers, wants to start something I suppose it can't be helped, but I doubt if he will. I certainly shan't. There's been too much of the Waddington linen exposed to the public as it is."

“Well, what are you going to do then?” asked Mr. Jessup, curiously.

“Just exactly what I started out to do this afternoon—get those two silly old chaps together and have it out with them. Uncle Matthew has come around already.”

“Humph, if he’s done it, the other one won’t. It’s easy enough to get one of the Waddingtons to do anything. Getting the other one’s different. He’s sure to head the other way. That’s what the pair of them have been doing for forty years and longer.”

“You’ll see,” said Waddy, confidently. “I’ll get them together, but there’s another thing that’s bothering me, something that Miss Sevigne told me.”

“What’s that?”

Mr. Jessup listened in interested silence as Waddy repeated the girl’s statement about a man having been sent up from New York just to shadow him.

“What do you make of it?” he questioned, anxiously. “What motive could any one possibly

have for wanting to have me shadowed? I can't understand it at all."

"Maybe she was just stringing you."

"No," insisted Waddy, perplexedly, "from her manner I am convinced that it was true and that she knew what she was talking about."

Jessup puffed thoughtfully at his pipe, considering this new development, and then asked sharply: "How did she come to mention it? What had you been talking about?"

As Waddy's cheeks crimsoned at the question, he was glad that the darkness hid his face from his questioner. That was the part of his conversation with Anne that he had omitted. How could he explain that at the moment he had all but had the girl in his arms, that he had been telling her that he loved her?

"We were just talking things over," he answered, lamely.

"Didn't tell you who was shadowing you—the man's name or anything?"

"No, she didn't."

“There is a strange young man in the village,” said Jessup, meditatively, “stopping at Mrs. Tucker’s, name of Blaine. Got in yesterday. Might be he. Does the name mean anything to you?”

“Not a thing.”

As Waddy answered, he shivered involuntarily. The thought that he was being closely watched, his every movement spied on, in behalf of some mysterious person or persons of whose identity he had no inkling, gave him a creepy feeling. Brave though he ordinarily was, here in the darkness of the porch, its blackness softened only by the feeble beams of lamplight that came through the curtained windows, with the mysterious old homestead as a background, a house from which there seemed to be issuing all sorts of queer creakings and moanings and whisperings—noises he told himself that were doubtless caused by the servants moving about within—Waddy found himself conscious of a sensation of uncanniness and realized that his nerves were becoming decidedly jumpy. Once or twice he even thought he heard a slight rustling

in the bushes near by, but as it passed unnoticed by Jessup, he hesitated to speak of it, feeling that perhaps after all it was only his imagination, or else was caused by some prowling night animal.

“It’s the motive that bothers me. Why should any one have me shadowed? What would they expect to find out?”

“You haven’t been mixed up with a woman?” ventured Jessup.

“Good Lord, no,” said Waddy with a surprised laugh.

“It’s nothing to laugh at,” said the old man. “There’s no telling to what lengths a jealous woman will go.”

“Nothing like that in my life.”

“Then,” announced Mr. Jessup, decisively, “it’s the jewels. There’s been a lot of talk hereabouts from time to time about that hidden treasure. It must be somebody that knew about its existence. They have been keeping watch on you, figuring that sooner or later you’d come up here to get those jewels your grandfather left. It wouldn’t

surprise me if one or the other of those two old varmints hadn't been having you watched right along."

"You mean my two great-uncles?"

"Certainly. Who else? I wouldn't put anything past either of them."

"It sounds pretty far-fetched."

"I don't know that it is. Old Mark's granddaughter has been in New York, hasn't she? She bobs up here the minute you get here. How do you know she wasn't watching you in New York? Did you ever see her down there?"

"Only once," said Waddy, absently.

He was busy thinking. Of course the old man's theory was absurd, and yet Anne Sevigne had come to his party without an invitation, had sought his acquaintance in a way. Could it be that?—but no! He dismissed the thought as utterly unworthy of his consideration. She was honest and straightforward, and—he loved her.

"What other——?" began Mr. Jessup, but he stopped short with a nervous jump and stared out into the bushes. "What was that?"

For a moment they both sat with straining ears, listening.

“I thought I heard somebody out there in the bushes,” whispered Jessup.

“I did, too,” whispered Waddy, suddenly calling out: “Who’s there?”

As he spoke he sprang up from his chair and jumped down off the porch. As he did so there came the unmistakable sound of someone running away, although in the darkness it was hardly possible to tell from which direction the sound came, or to glimpse the intruder—who apparently had been listening to their conversation.

As Waddy stood there listening, debating whether or not it was worth while to start in pursuit, there came from the house behind him a prolonged shriek of terror, a woman’s shriek.

“My God!” cried Waddy. “What’s happened now?” Without hesitation he faced about and ran for the door, closely followed by Jessup. As they entered, the silence that had followed that one shriek was broken again, this time by a succession of screams, less loud, less tense, sounds such



as might come from a woman frightened into hysteria.

Guided by the sound they dashed up the stairs to the upper hall. Lying on the floor there, shrieking and moaning, they found the maid they had left stationed by Mason's bed. Bending over her stood the butler and cook, their faces almost as white as hers, as she kept shrieking and pointing wildly at a door at the end of the hall.

"I saw it. I saw it as plain as day," she kept repeating.

"Saw what?" demanded Waddy.

"A ghost," she whimpered, her breath coming in quick, painful jerks, "a ghost walking toward me."

She watched with terrified eyes as Mr. Jessup, walking to the door she had indicated, flung it open and looked all about inside.

"There's nothing there," he said.

"I tell you I saw it," the girl screamed. "A ghost, walking right toward me."

"Be quiet," commanded Waddy. "Nothing's going to hurt you now. Tell us what the ghost looked like. What did you see?"

“I saw it,” the girl moaned, “the figure of a woman, all in gray, coming right toward me, and she was carrying in one of her hands—and the hand had no flesh on it, just bones like a skeleton—she was carrying a big pearl necklace and all the while the ghost kept gibbering at me.”

“And then what happened?”

“I was carrying a candle and I could see the ghost as plain as day and the pearls all glistening in the candlelight, and I was so scared I dropped the candle, and the ghost vanished.”

“You say you saw her plain as day,” said Mr. Jessup. “What was her face like?”

“I didn’t see any face,” the girl moaned, “just a tall gray figure and the pearls. I don’t think she had any face.”

“What were you doing in the hall?” asked Waddy.

“I was on my way downstairs to call Mrs. Cupps. Mr. Mason was getting restless again and had started muttering.”

“Where is Mrs. Cupps?” asked Mr. Jessup.

“Here I am,” the old housekeeper answered,

appearing at the head of the stairs, candle in hand. "What's happened? Who was that I heard scream?"

She caught sight of the maid still lying on the floor. "I saw a ghost," the maid began again.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" The old woman's scorn was withering. "Having hysterics, is it? Get up this instant and go to your room. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, making all this commotion. Get up at once."

Cowering before the old woman's wrath the girl scrambled to her feet and, supported by the butler and cook, vanished in the direction of the servants' quarters.

"She thought she saw a ghost," said Waddy, turning to the old housekeeper. "Mrs. Cupps, is there a ghost in Waddington Towers?"

"A ghost!" the old woman sniffed indignantly. "If there was a ghost here, I guess it would be me seeing it and not her, me living here all these years alone."

She burst into a shrill cackle as if highly amused at the very idea of it, but right in the middle of her

laughter she paused to look furtively about and to listen as if expecting to hear something.

“A ghost,” she repeated, indignantly. “There aren’t any ghosts. It’s just a silly young girl’s nerves, that’s all. It’s too bad that you should be bothered by them.”

As she departed Waddy and Mr. Jessup looked at each other.

“Of course she’s right,” said Waddy, “it was just nerves.”

“Maybe,” said Mr. Jessup, “but it’s darned funny that the ghost should be carrying a string of pearls—the missing Waddington pearls.”

Waddy looked blankly at him, but before he could make reply a feeble call from the bedroom cut off all discussion. Hurrying in to where they had left Mason, they found him, the light of reason once more in his eyes, struggling to sit up in bed.

“Waddy,” he called out, excitedly, all unconscious of the lapse of time since his injury, “there are two of them, an old man and a hunchback. Hurry, Waddy, get them before they get away.”

## CHAPTER XVI

### BUT WHERE WAS ANNE?

**W**ITH the air of a conqueror Waddy Hurd strode forth from the gate of Waddington Towers to keep his appointment with Anne. A sound night's sleep had restored him to his customary buoyant spirits and had given him a much more optimistic view of the strange happenings about the old homestead. In the light of day the maid's story of having seen a ghost, a ghost carrying the missing Waddington pearls, took on a far different aspect. Waddy, as he hurried along, blithely assured himself that there were no such things as ghosts, being inclined to account for the girl's hysteria by a hallucination inspired by living in the mysterious old house and by the gossip about Mason's mishap. He dismissed the whole thing as too silly even to think about.

Nor was there anything about Mason's condi-

tion now to cause him worry. His injured friend seemed much improved and well on the way to recovery. He had been able that morning to give Waddy and Mr. Jessup a connected story of what had happened so far as he had been able to determine. To Waddy's delight he had shown no rancour toward his assailants and had let pass unnoticed a hint by Mr. Jessup that the men should be vigorously prosecuted. What was more, his story had in every way tallied with the account that Anne Sevigne had given, convincing even Mr. Jessup that she was in no way involved, but had in reality attempted to prevent any further evil being done.

All that remained now, Waddy was reassuring himself, was to bring about a reconciliation between his two silly old great-uncles and, despite Mr. Jessup's pessimism, he did not regard this as much of a task.

“When two people have been fighting each other for forty years,” he said to himself, “it stands to reason that they both are good and sick of it. If anybody can bring them together I can.”

As his steps carried him on toward old Mark's home his imagination was busy painting what would happen afterward. The quarrelling for ever stopped, he and Anne and all of them would have a conference together. Very likely when each had told what each knew about the missing jewels, among them they would be able quickly to discover the hiding-place. He would have Jessup draw up quit-claim deeds for the homes of Matthew and Mark and they would divide up the Waddington jewellery, and then—Anne!

His heart fairly sang when he thought of her! She was so wonderful, so little and slim, so dark and beautiful, so sweet and lovely, and yet so clear-headed and self-reliant, despite her femininity. Seeking for standards with which to compare her, his mind naturally reverted to Frieda Parsons, the only other American girl of his own class with whom he had been thrown in intimate contact. Frieda was lovely, too, he admitted, but so different. Hers was a cold and shallow nature, while in the heart of Anne [Sevigne, he instinctively felt, were warm wells of love, wells still un-

fathomed. How fortunate he was, he told himself, that Anne had come into his life before his friendship with Frieda had ripened into a more lasting relation—as he realized now it might soon have.

Anne!

His heart quaked a little as he recalled the precipitancy with which he had declared his affection and the fire of anger that had flashed from her eyes when he had sought to take her in his arms. He was fearful that he might have inspired in her a feeling of revulsion by his cave-man tactics. He must set a ward on his words and actions, he cautioned himself, lest she become frightened of him. But whatever happened, he was determined that nothing should come between them. He was going to have Anne Sevigne for his wife. He refused to place any credence in Anne's statement that the man sent up to spy on him—the shadow, whoever he might be—had any place in Anne's affections. After all, Anne had said the man was in love with her. She had not said that she was in love. That would be vastly different. How could any man



help loving Anne Sevigne! Probably there were many men who would like to woo her. Valiantly Waddy pictured himself battling with them all and carrying her away in triumph.

As he reached his great-uncle Mark's gloomy old house and swung in at the gate, he noticed that the front door was standing wide open. A premonition that Uncle Mark and old Amos might have returned came to him, and he approached cautiously, feeling first in his hip-pocket. A glimpse into the interior revealed nothing, so he knocked boldly. He waited a moment, but no answer came.

Once more he peered within, but could see no one about, so he knocked again, this time much more loudly. Still there was only silence. Not knowing what to make of it, and feeling sure that Anne must be somewhere about, he entered boldly and shouted her name, thinking it just possible that she might be asleep on the upper floor.

Three times he called her name without a response.

Then sudden fear swept over him. Had anything happened?

On impulse he turned and ran into his great-uncle Matthew's house next door, thinking it just possible that she might have gone there. The old man must have been peeping out the window, for as Waddy approached the door was flung suddenly open.

"Where's Anne—Anne Sevigne?" Hurd cried, excitedly. "She's not at home. There's nobody in the house."

"I haven't seen her this morning," said old Matthew. "Haven't seen her since last night—pretty late last night."

"Where did you see her then? What was she doing?"

"Right after you left her yesterday afternoon," the old man answered, apparently taking a malicious satisfaction in his narrative, "she hurried off to the village. She was gone nearly two hours, I guess, and when she came back there was a young fellow with her, a stranger in town, a man that is staying at Mrs. Tucker's."

"Did he go into the house with her?" asked Waddy, jealously.

“He sure did,” old Matthew affirmed. “I naturally was interested in what was going on, so as soon as it got dark I slipped over in the yard and watched. He stayed there a good hour and a half, talking to her, and I was right there in the yard when he came out.”

“Did she come out with him? Did they go away together?”

“No, she stood in the doorway and called out, ‘Good-night, David, see you again in the morning,’ and he went away alone—went up on the hill to the Towers.”

A flush of anger crept into Waddy’s face as he recalled the rustling he and Jessup had heard in the bushes, and the sound they had heard of someone running away. Undoubtedly this man, whoever he was, had gone directly from visiting Anne to spy on him at Waddington Towers. But what was the connection between Anne and this spy? How was it to be explained? There was only one logical course that he could think of.

“Where is Mrs. Tucker’s?” he asked. “I’m

going over there and question this chap. Maybe he knows where Anne is."

"She said she would see him in the morning," old Matthew responded, as he gave the directions asked. Waddy, hardly waiting to hear them, set out at once, his air of confidence and optimism completely gone, swept away before a burst of the fiercest rage. He was determined to find this spy, and have it out with him.

Meanwhile, David Blaine, all unconscious of Waddy's intent, sat on Mrs. Tucker's porch, busy writing another chapter of his report to Mr. Parsons. It was not a very satisfactory report, most of it being made up of an account of his efforts to get Anne Sevigne to talk about the Waddington family affairs. As a shadow fell across the paper on which he was writing he looked up, and hastily sprang to his feet, as he saw before him Waddy Hurd's irate face.

"Why, Mr. Hurd!" he exclaimed, amazement mingled with dolefulness. Hurd's presence there to him augured only one thing, that Hurd had discovered his mission in Ortonville, and he was won-

dering how he could explain things to his employer.

“Where’s Anne, where’s Miss Sevigne?” demanded his caller, threateningly. “Tell me where she is. Tell me this instant, you damned spy, or I’ll break your neck.”

“She’s at home at her grandfather’s, isn’t she?”

His surprise at Waddy’s question was so unfeigned that Waddy realized, even in his wrath, that Blaine was ignorant of Anne’s whereabouts.

“No,” he said, “she’s not there. There’s nobody in the house.”

“My God!” cried Blaine. “What can have happened to her!”

The alarm expressed in his voice was genuine, and for a moment the two of them stood there glowering at each other like two angry schoolboys, then, Blaine, remembering the report on which he had been at work, made the error of trying to seize and conceal it. The same instant, Waddy, all at once, sensing the purport of the paper, shot out his powerful right hand and wrenched the paper from Blaine’s grasp. Amazed, he scanned what Blaine had set down.

“What in blazes are you shadowing me for?” he demanded.

“I haven’t the slightest idea,” said Blaine, quite candidly.

“Who hired you?”

“My employer sent me here. That’s all I know about it.”

“Who is your employer?”

“I can’t tell that.”

Waddy studied Blaine appraisingly, correctly estimating him for what he was, an underling without initiative or any great amount of brains. He was hardly worth quarrelling with, he decided. After all, he was merely carrying out orders, someone else’s orders. There would be plenty of time later to discover who was at the back of this mysterious shadowing. The important thing now was to discover what had become of Anne Sevigne.

“I’ll settle with you and your employer later,” he said. “If you want to find out just what I do every day come to me and I’ll tell you. I have nothing to conceal. The thing I have got to do now is to find Miss Sevigne.”

“You don’t think that anything can have happened to her?” asked Blaine, anxiously.

“God only knows,” said Waddy. He was thinking now of her half-crazed grandfather and his hunchback accomplice, remembering that Anne had been the only witness of their villainy. It was not beyond reason that they might have spirited her away for fear that she might testify against them. They might even, in their terrified condition, go so far as to kill her. Her peril, so long as her whereabouts were unknown, seemed very real to him. “Unquestionably she is in grave danger,” he added, “possibly in danger of her life. I must find her.”

“I’m going with you,” said Blaine, tensely. “I want to help you find her.”

Together they hurried back to Mark Waddington’s house, the last place that either of them had seen her. As they approached they saw old Matthew Waddington standing out in the road eagerly awaiting their arrival.

“They’ve carried her off,” he cried.

“Who?” asked Blaine in amazement.

“Tell me at once. How do you know? What have you found out?” the questions came from Waddy in a regular volley.

“While I was waiting for you,” said the old man, “I went in and went all through the house—his house.” He indicated his brother’s home with a pointing finger. “The bed’s up there that she slept in, and the sheet’s all torn in strips as if they had used it to tie her up. There’s a chair upset as if there might have been a struggle. They’ve been in the pantry, too, and took off a lot of food. There’s things all spilled about as if they packed up in a hurry. They’ve carried her off to the hide-hole. That’s where she is—with them.”

“Where is this hide-hole?” asked Waddy, his voice tense and hard. “Take me there at once.”

“Come on,” said old Matthew. “I’ll show you. Is he,” he indicated Blaine, whom he had been regarding with unconcealed curiosity, “coming, too?”

“Of course I’m coming,” said Blaine, without waiting for Waddy to answer.

With surprising agility for a man of his years old Matthew led them through the yard of his



brother's house, over a stone wall, down a ravine, up a hill, through a clump of trees, up a still steeper hill by a path so little used that it was all but effaced. They climbed steadily for two miles or more, the ravine they had crossed becoming almost a chasm, with a sheer drop from the hillside of a hundred feet or more. At the top of the cliff he came to a stop.

"It's right down there," he said, "a cave in the side of the cliff. See that path there that breaks off right at the rock?"

"Yes, yes," said Waddy, excitedly, leaning over the edge of the cliff to see.

"Well, if you catch hold of that tree there and swing yourself out, just around the rock there's a path again, wider and safer, and it leads right up to the cave. You can't see it till you're right up to it, for it's hid by the trees. It can't be reached from below at all. This is the only way to get to it. It's a wonderful hide-hole. We discovered it when we were little shavers and we used to play in it."

Waddy, without waiting for any more explana-

tions, was already on his way down the precipitous path with David Blaine close behind him. At the tree that old Matthew had indicated, where the path broke abruptly off, seizing hold of a stout branch he swung himself off into space, twisting about the sharp corner of the rock, where he found his feet resting on a gradually widening shelf of rock that extended along the cliff, a pathway concealed from below by the tops of the trees that grew at the bottom of the cliff. Pausing only for a second to make sure that Blaine had succeeded in negotiating the path, he ran along the cliff side looking for the entrance to the cave. Once, glancing upward, he caught a glimpse of old Matthew's bearded face peering excitedly down from above.

For perhaps one hundred and fifty feet he and Blaine hurried on, the path gradually widening. As yet they had seen no opening in the rock. Suddenly, as they pushed aside some branches that impeded their path, they found themselves confronted by the huge squat figure of the hunchback. He was armed with a heavy bludgeon that

he brandished menacingly as they took a step nearer. Waddy, his muscles tense, was set for a spring at him even though he realized the peril of trying to battle with him on such a narrow footing. With the slightest misstep either or both of them would be plunged to the rocks below.

“Get out of here, both of you, or I’ll smash your heads,” commanded Amos, roughly.

“Is Anne here, Anne Sevigne?” asked Waddy, sparring for time as he planned an attack that would disarm the hunchback.

From the cave behind there came a frightened cry, “Keep them off, Amos. Don’t let them in. Don’t let them get me.”

It was Mark Waddington’s voice. At the sound of it the hunchback swung his great club with a vicious blow that would have swept Waddy from the path, but Waddy, his eye alert for the movement, in a flash had drawn his automatic and aiming at the man’s uplifted arm had fired before the blow could fall.

A surprised look came into the hunchback’s face as the club fell harmless from his broken wrist and

went crashing down over the rocks. With a whimper like that of a wounded animal, he stood for a minute staring dumbly after it, and then, terror creeping into his face as he realized that he was unarmed and helpless, he sprang over the cliff-side.

Without giving his fate a moment's thought Waddy and Blaine together made a rush for the entrance to the cave.

## CHAPTER XVII

### AT THE JOURNEY'S END

**F**RIEDA PARSONS had been looking forward to the motor trip with her father with pleasurable anticipation. On similar journeys occasionally made with him he had always proved to be a delightful companion, devoting himself whole-heartedly to her entertainment. She was confident, too, that she could count to the fullest of her father's ability as a strategist to help bring Waddy Hurd back to her.

Yet, once started on the journey, she found herself bothered about her father. He did not seem himself. His face was gray and drawn as if he might have been suffering from loss of sleep, and he seemed nervous and distraught. At first Frieda had been inclined to attribute his condition to worry over her affairs, but as she watched him

closely, she decided that there must be something else weighing heavily on his mind.

As he sat silent and morose by her side, she ventured a question or two.

“Have you heard anything more?” she asked.

“About what?” he asked, starting nervously as she addressed him.

“About Waddy and that artist person?”

“Not a word.”

“Didn’t you get any more reports from the man you sent up?”

“No.”

Presently, as he relapsed into a moody silence, she tried again.

“What shall we do if Waddy is not there when we arrive?”

“He’ll be there,” said her father, and after that for hours they rode along without further conversation. Whatever it was that was troubling the lawyer he seemed in no mood to take his daughter into his confidence.

Yet when, after several inquiries, they found their way to Waddington Towers, it was not

Waddy, but Mr. Jessup who greeted them. As the car swung through the open gate and came to a stop before the porch, Jessup scrambled up surprisedly from his chair and eyed them curiously.

"Is Mr. Hurd here?" Parsons asked. "Mr. James Waddington Hurd?"

"He's here but he isn't at home," the old man answered, plainly curious as to the new arrivals.

"I'm Mr. Parsons, his lawyer," snapped the visitor. "Where can I find him? It is important that I see him at once."

"So you're Mr. Parsons," said the old agent, extending his hand. "Well, I am Henry T. Jessup. We've been writing back and forth a great many years. Won't you get out and come in?"

"This is my daughter, Mr. Jessup," said the lawyer, taking the proffered hand as he got out of the motor. Ever alert to seize an opportunity, he welcomed the chance of talking things over with Jessup before Waddy's return. It probably would be less difficult to learn from Jessup than it would

be from Waddy himself just what mysterious mission had brought him to Ortonville.

“Probably you and your daughter would like to wash up a bit after your ride,” said Jessup, hospitably. “I’ll call Mrs. Cupps, the housekeeper.”

As he vanished within the house on his mission, Parsons turned quickly to his daughter.

“Give me a few minutes alone with him before you come down and I’ll get at the bottom of things.”

And presently, reappearing alone on the porch, he found Jessup there awaiting him. He proceeded at once to a cross-examination.

“Where did you say Mr. Hurd was?”

“I didn’t say,” answered Jessup, guardedly. He was wondering what had brought Parsons up, and, recalling the man who had been sent up to shadow Waddy, the thought had come to him that Parsons might be the person who was having Waddy watched, though for what purpose was beyond him. Though he had long been in a sense an employee of Mr. Parsons, he felt that his duty was to the young man himself rather than to his



lawyer, and he resolved to say nothing that would throw any light on Waddy's actions.

"He hasn't gone away?" Parsons asked.

"No, he's about somewhere."

"What is he doing?"

"I couldn't say."

"But you know where he went," the lawyer insisted, fast losing patience. The strain under which he had been ever since Waddy's visit to the office made it difficult for him to control his nerves.

"Yes and no," replied Parsons. "I heard him say he was going to call on some of his relatives."

"Relatives! I didn't know he had any."

"He's got too many," said Jessup, "if you ask me."

"Has he gone to see this woman, Anne Waddington, Anne Sevigne, or whatever she calls herself?"

It was Jessup's turn to look surprised. He was wondering how, if Parsons knew nothing about Waddy having any relatives, he could have known about Anne Sevigne. It must be Parsons, he decided, who had been responsible for the man who had been shadowing Hurd. If that were the case,

he felt quite certain that Waddy would approve of his throwing Parsons off the track.

“He went to see a couple of old men—his great-uncles they are.”

“Look here, Jessup,” Mr. Parsons leaned forward in a confidential manner, laying his hand on Jessup’s arm, “you have been our agent here for many years and should have confidence in me. I want you to tell me the whole thing. What is Hurd doing here? Is he after the Waddington treasure?”

“The Waddington treasure!” the old man echoed, blankly. “What’s that?”

“Do you mean to say,” said Parsons, entirely deceived by his air of innocence, “that you have never heard that old Mr. Waddington hid a lot of jewels about here somewhere?”

“Oh, that! There was some talk to that effect years ago but though a search was made for them, nothing ever came of it.”

“Was it a search for them that brought Hurd up here, do you think?”

“No,” said Jessup, decisively, “that had nothing to do with his coming.”

“Was it the woman, then—this Anne Waddington, or whatever her name is?”

Jessup shook his head.

“I don't think he ever laid eyes on her until he got here. He didn't know who she was until I told him. She isn't any real kin of his, you know.”

If it wasn't the jewels, and it wasn't the girl, Parsons found himself at an utter loss for a motive to account for Waddy's actions, yet he sensed from Jessup's manner rather than from his words that the old man was deliberately withholding something, and his anger burst beyond his control.

“Look here, Jessup,” he said, wrathfully, seizing the old man's shoulder roughly, “look here, I want——”

But his sentence went unfinished. From the doorway behind him his daughter rushed out, her face pale with fright.

“Father,” she gasped.

“What is it?” he asked, springing up in alarm.

“What's happened?”

“There's a man,” she faltered, her breath coming in gasps, “in bed—in one of the rooms upstairs—”

a man with his head all in bandages. It isn't—Waddy, is it?"

In amazement, Parsons turned inquiringly to Jessup.

"Good lord, no!" said Jessup. "That's not Mr. Hurd. That's a friend of his, Mr. Mason, Conway Mason."

"Conway Mason!" exclaimed Frieda. "What is he doing up here?"

"What's happened to him? Has he been hurt?" asked Parsons. The complications of the whole affair seemed beyond even his acute mind.

"I should say he had been hurt," replied Jessup, keenly enjoying their bewilderment. "Had his whole head pretty near smashed in with an axe, he did."

"Who struck him—not Waddy?" asked Frieda.

"No, it wasn't Mr. Hurd. It was somebody trying to kill Mr. Hurd and they smashed Mr. Mason by mistake."

"Trying to kill Mr. Hurd?" echoed Frieda in horror.

"Tell us, who did it? Has any one been ar-

rested?" asked Parsons, fearfully. He was wondering if the agent he had sent up had become involved in a quarrel with Waddy and had sought vengeance on him.

"Nobody has been arrested yet," said Jessup.

"Why not? Don't you know who did it?"

"Mr. Hurd won't have anybody arrested for it. I wanted to call in the constable, but he wouldn't let me."

"Humph," said Parsons, mystified, then as a new thought came to him, he asked:

"Was it the woman—this Anne Waddington—who did it?"

"She was there when it happened," said Jessup, mischievously, "but as far as I can gather, she had nothing to do with it."

"But I can't understand," said Frieda, piteously, "I'm all mixed up. Who would want to kill Waddy Hurd?"

"I guess this is he coming now," said Jessup, as he heard steps approaching from the direction of the gate. Yes——" he began, then broke off in blank astonishment.

Mr. Parsons and Frieda, turning their eyes toward the gate at Jessup's exclamation of surprise, saw a strange-looking procession approaching the house.

In advance came Waddy Hurd, coatless, carrying tenderly the limp, inert figure of a slender girl. Behind them came shambling two frightened faced old men, and behind them, apparently acting as a sort of rearguard, a younger man whom Parsons recognized at once, even though he marvelled at his presence in the group.

"Waddy!" gasped Frieda Parsons with sinking heart. There was something about the way in which Waddy Hurd strode along that told her jealous eyes that this girl, her rival, had won.

"Old Matthew and Mark, walking along together peaceably!" exclaimed the astounded Jessup.

"Damn Blaine," muttered Parsons between his teeth. "That's a devil of a way to carry out my orders."

Waddy alone of all the group assembled at the porch seemed wholly unembarrassed at the strange situation of which he was the central figure.

“Hello, everybody,” he called out, cheerfully, seemingly not a bit surprised nor discomfited at the presence of Frieda Parsons and her father. “Everything’s going fine. Just wait a minute until I turn this young lady over to Mrs. Cupps and I’ll tell you all about it. Parsons, you are the very man I was wishing to see. There are a couple of deeds I want drawn up right away.”

He strode into the house, his arms still tenderly clasping the slender figure of Anne, but as he started with her up the stairs to the second floor he found the way barred.

Before him, her old eyes flashing wrath and resentment, her withered arms outstretched to block his passage, stood the little figure of the old caretaker.

“Mr. Hurd,” she exclaimed, “what is this you are doing?—bringing one of them into the house they were forbidden to enter.”

“It’s all right,” he answered, impatiently. “The trouble’s all over.”

“It isn’t right. It can’t be right,” the old woman wailed. “Your grandmother’d turn over in her grave if she could see this day.”

As Waddy, brushing her aside, marched boldly on to one of the bedrooms, old Mrs. Cupps followed, protesting, threatening.

“No good’ll come of this, Mr. Hurd. It’s against your dead grandmother’s last wish. No good’ll come of it. She’ll come back and haunt the place if that girl stays here. Please, Mr. Hurd, please take her away.”

“Shut up,” commanded Waddy, roughly. “Don’t you see that Miss Sevigne is all in?” He spied one of the maids down the hall, peeping out to see what was going on. “Here,” he called, “come here and take charge of Miss Sevigne and get her into bed. And you,” he turned sharply to old Mrs. Cupps, “you keep away from her. Do you understand? She is a guest here and must be treated as such.”

As he turned to lay the girl gently down on the bed, Anne, rousing herself, smiled weakly up at him.

“I warned him,” Mrs. Cupps muttered under her breath. “No good can come of it. He’ll see.”



## CHAPTER XVIII

### A SECRET IS TOLD

**B**UT why on earth was she kidnapped? Who did it?" asked Mr. Parsons, looking from Uncle Matthew to Uncle Mark and then to David Blaine.

"I don't know," said Blaine, helplessly.

"It was the will," said old Matthew.

"No, it was the cipher," objected old Mark.

All hope that Parsons had had that affairs might yet turn out as he hoped had all but vanished when he had seen Anne in Waddy's arms, when he had observed his attitude toward her, but he was not going to give up without a battle.

While Waddy was upstairs he was eager to learn just what had happened, but the two old men, who had seated themselves side by side on the edge of the porch, seemed strangely loath to talk, and Blaine's answers were all but incoherent.

As a matter of fact, so much had happened, and had happened so swiftly in the last half-hour, that Blaine's head was in a whirl, and coming so unexpectedly into his employer's presence as he followed Waddy Hurd home, he was in a state of mental panic.

"You, Blaine," commanded Parsons, "you explain it. Just what happened?"

"I can't," said Blaine, miserably. "I don't know."

"I'll explain it all," said Waddy, appearing in the doorway. He had dispatched the cook to get some clothing for Anne, and now for the first time had remembered the hunchback. "But first, you," he pointed to Blaine, "go along with the butler and show him where to find Amos—the hunchback, you know. I expect you'll find him pretty well battered up. I shot him in the wrist just before he jumped off the rocks."

Blaine, eager to be out of Mr. Parsons's embarrassing scrutiny, hastened to obey, and as he departed, Frieda turned to Hurd.

"How is the young woman? Is she hurt?"

Although she knew that the person she had seen Waddy holding in his arms must be Anne Sevigne she could not bring herself to say the name.

“Oh, Miss Sevigne’s all right,” said Waddy, his eyes lighting up. “She was handled pretty roughly and is a bit bruised and one of her ankles is sprained, but as soon as she gets a little rest she will be fine.”

“What happened to her?” asked Parsons, eyeing him narrowly.

“It all goes back to a fool will my great-grandfather made years and years ago. These two old chaps here,” he indicated his great-uncles with a nod, “had quarrelled. The will directed that if they hadn’t made up in forty years they were to be turned out of their homes and I was to inherit them. Then there were a lot of jewels hid somewhere, too. Naturally Uncle Matthew and Uncle Mark, living side by side, and hating each other all the time, got all twisted up thinking and worrying. When I came up, they thought I’d come to dispossess them, and either one of them would have

been glad to have something happen to me. Eh, uncles?"

The two old men, sitting there listening attentively to his narrative, grinned sheepishly and nodded. The overwhelming sense of relief that had come to them when they found that the dreadful thing they had feared all their lives—that they might be robbed of their homes—was not to take place, had left them strangely apathetic and dazed. Forcibly brought together by their masterful nephew after forty years of hate, they had found themselves after all not hating each other nearly as much as they had imagined. Something—perhaps it was the visit to the hide-hole where they had played together as boys—seemed to have wiped out the long years of bitterness between them. At any rate, after their years of failure, of unsuccessful search for the treasure, they seemed content for the time being to leave everything to their great-nephew.

"Well," Waddy went on, "Uncle Mark got to it first. He and old Amos, his servant, invaded the house, searching for the treasure. Somehow

they mistook Mason for me and he got smashed up. The prospect of being arrested frightened them so they ran away and hid, but the fact that Miss Sevigne had been here in the house and had been a witness of their mischief——”

“But,” interrupted Miss Parsons—there was just a suggestion of a slur in her tone—“what was Miss Sevigne doing here in your house? Who is she?”

Before Hurd could answer the Waddington pride unsealed old Mark’s lips.

“She’s my granddaughter,” he cackled, “that’s who she is. She’s my dead son’s step-child. I brought her up. Anne Waddington she’s always been called though her real name is Sevigne—Anne Sevigne.”

“She followed them to the house,” explained Hurd. “She was afraid they were up to some mischief.”

“But what puzzles me,” said Parsons, “is how you yourself happened to be here when all these things were happening. What brought you up here?”

“I sent for him,” said old Mr. Jessup, tersely.

“Anyhow,” Waddy went on, as Parsons shot an angry glance at Jessup, “old Amos, coming back to the house at night for food supplies, found Miss Sevigne alone there, and decided to carry her off and hide her. Uncle Mark knew nothing about it—that’s right, isn’t it?”

“It sure is,” Uncle Mark responded. “It was a foolish piece of business and I told him so. Amos ain’t much better than a half-wit.”

“I was to meet Uncle Matthew and her this morning,” said Waddy, “and when she wasn’t anywhere in the house, I didn’t know what to think. You see, there’s a fellow up here sent up specially to shadow me, and she had met him the evening before.”

“A man sent up to shadow you!” exclaimed Frieda in surprise. “What for?”

“I haven’t been able to figure it out. I can’t understand why on earth any one could be interested in my movements.”

“If I were you,” interjected Mr. Jessup, “I’d ask Mr. Parsons about that shadowing business. He and that fellow that was here just now, that

stranger in town, seemed to know each other. They called each other by name.”

As Waddy turned an interrogative glance at his lawyer, Parsons was mentally cursing his own stupidity in having spoken to Blaine, and was also mentally cursing Blaine for having fumbled on his job. But he managed to reply, “I’ll explain about that later. I do know the man and I can guess why he was sent.”

Satisfied with his statement, Waddy continued:

“Neither Uncle Matthew nor this chap knew where Miss Sevigne was and Uncle Matthew found everything in the house upset, things that looked as if she might have been carried off after a struggle, and Uncle Matthew was sure he knew where they were all hid—in a cave they call the hide-hole—so we started out for there. Amos was on guard and tried to brain me with a club, so I pinked him in the wrist and he jumped off the cliff. In the cave I found Uncle Mark and Miss Sevigne, and that’s all there is to it.”

“But I can’t see yet,” said Mr. Jessup, “how you got those two old fools together.”

“It was easy,” Waddy grinned. “I did just what I said I was going to do. When Uncle Mark got up to the top of the cliff, I grabbed them both, and told them I’d knock their heads together if they didn’t shake hands. I told them I would make out deeds for their land to-day, so they decided to quit and make up.”

“But don’t forget,” piped up Uncle Matthew, apprehensively, “you promised us each a third of the jewels.”

“Yes,” said Uncle Mark, “a full third.”

“Sure, that goes,” said Waddy. “The minute we find them we’ll divide them up. Now you two old chaps go and talk things over, and come back here, say at eight o’clock to-night. By that time, Mr. Parsons and Mr. Jessup will have the deeds drawn up and Miss Sevigne will be rested up enough to talk and we’ll have a grand family conclave. If we all put our heads together I have an idea we can soon locate the hiding-place of the Waddington jewels. Jessup, you had better go down to your office and bring up all the necessary papers. I’m going to get cleaned up a bit.”



As they all departed, Frieda and her father, for the first time since Waddy's return, had an opportunity for a word together alone.

"Father," said the girl, desperately, "get me away from here at once."

"We can't go," said Parsons, doggedly. "Hurd wants me to stay to draw up those papers."

"But, Father," the girl cried, "we must go. I just can't stay."

"You must stay," he said, turning a haggard face toward her. "You've got to win Waddy Hurd away from that girl. You can do it, I know. You must do it, I tell you. You must, for my sake!"

Concerned though Frieda was with the collapse of her own ambitions, she found herself even more perturbed by the sudden change in her father.

"Why, Father," she exclaimed. "What do you mean? I don't understand."

A queer, furtive look came into the lawyer's face. To his daughter, studying him apprehensively, it seemed that he had all at once turned into an old, old man.

“Come,” he whispered, “let’s take a walk. Let’s get away from the house. We can’t tell who may be listening to us. There is something I want to tell you.”

Vastly puzzled by his manner, she assented, and as soon as they were well out of hearing of the house he began at once with a fervent plea to her to try to win back Hurd’s affections.

“Don’t you see, Father,” she said, listlessly, “that it is hopeless—utterly hopeless. He is mad about that girl. It is too late.”

“Listen, girl,” said her father, his hand clenching her arm desperately as he drew her down to a seat beside him on a fallen log.

For a long time he talked to her in broken whispers, and at what her father told her there came into her eyes a look of utter amazement, of incredulity, and then of horror. On and on her father talked, and still the look in her eyes remained.

“Please, Frieda,” he begged, “think what it means. There are only the two of us. We must stand together.”

“Yes,” she said and her voice was hard, unforgiving, “there are only two of us, and you should have thought about me.”

“But you must,” he urged. “It is the only way out.”

She listened in stony silence as a flood of words poured forth from her father, as he commanded, begged, urged, pleaded. There was in her much of her mother, much of the stern, uncompromising Scandinavian attitude of mind, much of the rugged native honesty. The specious pleas that her father was making repelled her, and yet her affections made her accede to his wishes. After all, except for him, she was utterly alone in the world. Of a naturally reserved temperament, she had few real friends. There had been only her father—and Waddy, and Waddy was lost to her for ever.

“Leave me alone,” she said at last, “I want to think; I must think.”

“You will try?” he begged. “At least you will stay here a day or two longer, promise me that? I’ll find a way out.”

“Yes,” she assented after a moment’s thought,

“I will promise that much. I will stay if you wish me to.”

So he left her there, sitting alone on the fallen log, alone with the wreck of her brightest hopes, alone with the bitterest thoughts she ever had known, alone with a shame such as she never had thought possible, and with dulled eyes she watched him as he stumbled weakly away from her, all at once a broken, despairing old man, and as she watched the resentment in her heart gradually gave way to pity.

When she started back to the house, the dusk of evening already was descending, and her mind was not yet made up.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A FAMILY CONCLAVE

**I**N THE great wide hall of Waddington Towers, its eventime shadows made if anything more sinister and depressing by the flickering light of many tall candles, a strange assemblage was gathered—the family conclave that James Waddington Hurd had set his heart upon. Looking down dourly on the guests was the faded portrait of the mansion's builder, whose whimsical will, so carefully drawn full forty years before, had started all the trouble. Gleaming dully in the plaster above their heads, in the plaster above the hall's great fireplace, were the three gilded links that years before had formed the sign of which the silversmith was justly proud.

At a long table, an array of legal papers, surveyors' maps, and musty deeds spread before them, sat Elwood Parsons and Henry T. Jessup, checking

over the twin quit-claim deeds they just had finished drawing up. On the other side of the table, like two hungry waiting ravens, sat the two aged sons of James Waddington, Matthew and Mark, at last outwardly in accord, both of them in honour of the occasion arrayed in their long-unused, dingy-looking frock coats of a long-forgotten pattern, and about their necks the quaint black silken stocks of an older generation.

Yet, though the deeds were agreed to and were being signed, over these four men there hung a depressing pall of suspicion and distrust.

Toward the fireplace, where some great logs had been set ablaze to dispel the evening chill, the atmosphere seemed more cheerful. There, in a great easy chair, heaped with quaint embroidered cushions, sat Anne Sevigne, to all appearances none the worse for her adventure of the night before. Hovering near her, as the business of transferring the two homes to the old brothers went on, was Waddy, eager to have the papers completed and get on to the next part of his programme.

Conway Mason was not present. Although he

was rapidly recovering, he was still confined to bed. Nor was David Blaine in evidence. Mr. Parsons, late that afternoon, after profanely berating him for having ignominiously failed in carrying out his mission, had directed his immediate return to New York. Parsons had in fact been so anxious to get him out of the way that he had hired a village automobile to carry him eighteen miles across country that he might catch a New York train. Frieda Parsons also was missing from the group, although Waddy a few minutes before had given her a cordial invitation to be present.

“It’ll be quite exciting,” he had said. “As soon as the deeds are out of the way, I am going to organize a jewel-hunt.”

“You must excuse me,” she had said, wearily. “After all, it does not in any way concern me. It is purely a family matter.”

“But we’d all be delighted to have you,” Waddy had urged, although he coloured a little, sensing in her remark a subtle reference to their changed relations. Although she had said nothing to him

about Anne, and although he had striven to appear on as friendly and as cordial terms with Frieda as ever, he guiltily sensed that her woman's intuition had read what was in his heart. Though between them there never had been any formal declaration, he knew that Frieda was in love with him, and he realized that she had been expecting him some day to propose to her. Down in his heart he realized that the responsibility for her feelings toward him was his. He was sorry that it was so. He hated to hurt Frieda, but ever since the night of his birthday party, his own heart had told him, had kept telling him insistently, that there was but one woman in the world for him. Whenever he thought about Anne, there were a finality and inevitability about his thoughts of her that completely possessed him.

Frieda, sensing the depth of his infatuation for Anne, found it torture to be in his society. As soon as she could she had got away to her room, where she had flung herself wearily on the bed. The blow to her pride and to her affections was disturbing enough in itself, and right on its heels



had come that astounding, shameful revelation that her father—the father that she always had trusted with an unwavering trust—had made to her. She could realize, too, as she thought it all over, the viewpoint that he had presented to her, that it was imperative for him—and for her own future as well—that she should employ all her woman's wiles to win back Waddy's affections. That, too, was the course her own pride bade her take. Only that very evening, a few minutes before she had talked with Waddy, she had half-promised her father that she would accede to his wishes, and yet——

Her nerves all on edge, she lay there alone until the very darkness drove her to rise quickly and open the door into the hall. Looking about on the dimly lit upper floor she could see nor hear nothing to alarm her, so leaving the door slightly ajar, she crept back to bed again.

Meanwhile, downstairs, the papers at last all signed, Waddy had taken affairs in charge.

“Our next step,” he said, “is to discover the hiding-place of the jewels my great-grandfather

kept in this house. I am sure that if we each tell what we know about them, and explain our theories as to what he might have done with them, before we get through we'll find the hiding-place. But first I'm going to call in Mrs. Cupps."

As the old housekeeper entered the room and sat gingerly on the edge of one of the chairs, if malignant looks could have killed, there would have been three corpses in the room. Her eyes fairly blazed resentment and wrath as she saw Uncle Matthew, Uncle Mark, and Anne all present in the premises she had for so many years sacredly guarded against them.

"Mrs. Cupps," began Waddy, "you've heard about those jewels. Did old Mr. Waddington ever by any chance say anything to you about them? Did he tell you where he had hid them?"

Her lips closed tightly. She cocked her head to one side in that strange way she had of seeming to listen apprehensively for some inaudible sound. She shot a defiant glance at the two old brothers.

"Come, Mrs. Cupps," urged Waddy, "speak up."

“Mr. Waddington,” she said, speaking slowly, “never told anybody anything.”

“Then you know nothing that would help us find those jewels?”

“Help *them!*”

There was venom in the glance she shot at her two old enemies.

“Help me,” corrected Waddy, adding sternly, “remember this is my house now.”

Quickly the old woman recovered herself.

“There’s nothing, Mr. Hurd. Nothing that I can tell,” she said.

“That’s all, then,” said Waddy. “You may go.” Despite her denial, he had the impression that she was keeping something back, but he realized that it would be better to question her when the visitors had gone. He turned to his two great-uncles.

“Can either of you give us any clue to the hiding-place? Have you any suggestions to offer?”

“If I ever had found out where they were, I’d have had them long ago,” confessed Uncle Matthew quite honestly.

“The same here,” echoed Uncle Mark.

“The minute I read James Waddington’s will,” said Waddy, taking up a copy of the document from the table, “I conceived the notion that the concluding paragraph and the verse that follows were a sort of cipher—that they contain some clue to where the jewels are concealed.”

“Sure,” said Uncle Matthew, and Mark and Jessup nodded in agreement.

Slowly and distinctly Waddy read the passage aloud:

“And finally I do give and bequeath to each of my beloved children, a golden token, which will be found in a drawer in my secretary, these being replicas of the three golden links that for many years formed the sign at my place of business, the originals having by me been set in the mantelpiece of Waddington Towers.

“When these be joined in unity  
To make a perfect chain,  
The pathway to prosperity  
Will be exceeding plain.”

“Sure, it’s a cipher,” said Uncle Mark, “and everybody knows a perfect chain is a hundred feet

long, but where are you going to start measuring from?"

"A perfect chain is only sixty-six feet long," began Uncle Matthew, hotly, ready to take up the old controversy again.

"Wait," cried Anne, excitedly, "wait! I have an idea. The will says that he left each of you a golden token. Have you yours, grandfather?"

"Sure, I have," said Mark Waddington, drawing from his pocket an oval gold object about two inches in its greatest dimension. "I've always carried it as a luck-piece, though small luck it has brought me."

As the girl took it from his extended hand she turned to the elder brother.

"And yours? Where is yours?"

From his pocket Matthew Waddington produced a similar trinket. Carefully Anne inspected them both, giving a delighted exclamation as she studied the reverse side.

"There's something engraved here," she cried, "but it is so worn away I can hardly make it out."

"It's just father's motto," explained Mark.

“‘Push and Pull’ it reads. He was always saying that push and pull would get you anything.”

“It’s the same on both,” said Anne, her face now ablaze with excitement as she turned to Waddy Hurd.

“There were three of these tokens. Where is yours? Have you it?”

Into Hurd’s face came a look of blank astonishment as his hand went into his pocket.

“Why, of course I have,” he cried, “but I never realized before, not until this very minute, what it was. My father always used to carry it as a pocket piece and before that I can remember my grandmother wearing it as a breast-pin. See, you can see the place where the pin and clasp used to be. It’s just the same as the others except that a thin plate of gold has been added to the reverse side for backing.”

“Let me have it,” said Anne, eagerly.

Taking the trinket from his hand she began a minute inspection of it, turning it this way and that, pressing it here and there if as in search of a hidden spring. All at once there was a little click

and the gold plate fell away from the back, leaving it a link identical with the others, except for the fact, as Anne announced, that the legend on it read

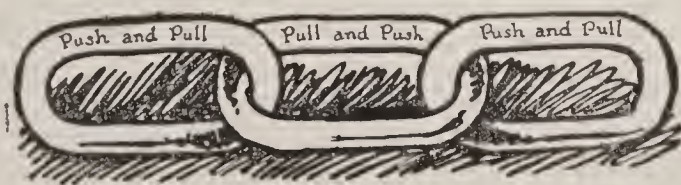
*“Pull and Push.”*

“Hurrah,” she cried, “at last we’ve got it. We have the cipher.”

“I don’t understand,” said Waddy, as his two old great-uncles crowded eagerly forward to stare blankly at the three links that Anne had laid in a row, face down, on the arm of her chair. Parsons and Jessup, too, infected by the general excitement, came closer.

“Remember,” she cried, exultantly, “how that first line reads, right after the paragraph that tells of the three tokens—‘when these be joined in unity’—Well, here they are at last.”

She pointed significantly to the three links in a row:



“I must be stupid,” said Waddy, “I can’t get what you are driving at.”

“Don’t you see,” she answered, “to find the jewels all you have to do is to follow the directions given here—push and pull, pull and push, push and pull.”

“But where?” asked the puzzled Waddy.  
“Where?”

“There, of course, stupid,” said Anne, triumphantly, pointing above her head to the three larger links set in the plaster of the mantel.  
“That’s where the jewels are hid, of course.”



## CHAPTER XX

### THE CIPHER SOLVED

**I**T DID not occur to any of them to doubt the correctness of Anne's deductions. The three smaller links, arranged in a row like those in the mantel above them, identical as they were in aspect, lent plausibility to her theory. Put side by side for the first time in forty years it seemed obvious to everyone that the legend on the reverse side spelled a message.

As Waddy sprang forward and began energetically pressing on the central link, his two great-uncles, with marvellous nimbleness for their age, hastened to join him and began similar efforts to push in the end links.

“And to think,” groaned Uncle Matthew, “that they've been here all this time right under our very eyes.”

For several minutes the three of them worked

frantically, trying by main strength to push the links farther into the plaster, but their efforts seemed futile.

“Nothing seems to give,” said Waddy, disappointedly. “They seem to be set in solidly.”

“Wait,” said Anne, “let’s read the directions again. Maybe you have been pushing them in the wrong direction. Maybe they slide. Try pushing them sideways.”

As Waddy bent over the smaller links, re-reading the words engraved on them, Uncle Matthew, still pushing desperately at his end of the mantel, followed Anne’s advice and with all the force he could muster in his old fingers began pressing the curved surface of the gilded link in the direction away from the others. He did not succeed in moving it.

“Try pushing it toward the others,” suggested Anne as she watched him. “Mr. Waddington wanted the three links closer together, didn’t he?”

Obediently the old man did as she had suggested, pushing on the link in the direction of the central

one. As he did so a shrill cry of delight escaped him.

“It’s giving a little,” he cried, joyously. “It’s sliding.”

Abruptly the other two stopped to watch. The great gilded link propelled by his eager fingers did really appear to be sliding sideways. Suddenly one end of it swung out for an inch or two as if it might have been pivoted on some sort of a hinge in the centre. Getting his fingers under the edge of it the old man pulled and tugged at it desperately but it would not be budged any farther.

“Wait,” cried Waddy. “Maybe it is balanced with the link on the other side, and the two of them serve as a sort of a lock to keep the central link in place. Try yours, Uncle Mark.”

As avidly as his brother had done, old Mark began pressing inward on the link on his side of the mantel. It, too, began sliding, and as it gave a little he seized it and jerked it sharply outward, but, like the other fastened by a pivot, it came only so far and no farther. But the central link, the one before which Waddy was standing,

as its mates were moved, swung forward a little, as if it might be pivoted horizontally. Catching his fingers under the link's edge Waddy strove to pull it out farther, but it seemed immovable.

"You're doing it wrong," warned Anne. "On the middle link the direction reads, 'Push and pull.'"

Reversing his tactics Waddy gave the upper edge of the link a sharp inward push. There was a click, as if some hidden catch had been released, and the whole link moved outward a little distance.

"Now," said Anne, who had been excitedly watching his movements, "pull."

Waddy gave the central link a quick jerk. Out it came, so quickly, so easily, for a distance of nearly two feet, that it all but caused him to lose his balance, revealing behind it a shallow drawer of polished wood, in which there rested, its key beside it, a metal casket.

"It's the jewels," cried Mr. Jessup. "It's the very identical box he kept them in when he showed them to Dad and me over forty years ago. There's

diamonds and rubies and pearls inside, heaps of them. I saw them with my own eyes.”

For just a second Waddy and his two old relatives stood staring dazedly at the box, then into the faces of the two older men crept a cunning look of greed. With an angry snarl, such as a beast might make, they dove forward together into the drawer in an effort to seize the precious casket, but Waddy was too quick for them. Thrusting them roughly aside with his powerful arms he picked up the box, and holding them back despite their wrathful protests, he laid it in Anne Sevigne's lap.

“It was Miss Sevigne,” said Waddy, proudly, “whose brains solved the cipher. Certainly she is entitled to be the first to open the treasure chest.”

Smiling up at him, Anne took the key and inserted it in the brass padlock that fastened the lid. With their bodies trembling in anticipation, their clutching fingers hardly able to restrain themselves, their greedy faces bent far down to catch the first glimpse of the treasure, the two old

Waddingtons waited in uneasy suspense. Peering over their shoulders were Parsons and Jessup, almost equally excited although they anticipated having no share in the jewels.

Hours seemed to elapse as Anne struggled with the key, but at last it turned in the lock, and she flung back the lid.

A howl of agonized disappointment came in unison from the two old brothers, and a puzzled expression crossed the faces of the other onlookers. The top tray, velvet lined, bearing many marks where something hard had rested—was empty.

Uncertainly Anne lifted out the tray, as the anxious waiting eyes peered down into her lap, and looked beneath. The second tray, too, was empty.

“My God,” groaned Waddy, watching fascinatedly, “they’re gone!”

As the third and last tray was lifted out, and the bottom of the box inspected, a depressing silence fell on them all. There was nothing there. The Waddington jewels had vanished.

“It’s mighty queer,” said Mr. Jessup. “There isn’t any question about it. That must have been

the place where the old man hid the jewels. Who could have taken them?"

At the suggestion that someone had taken them, the two old Waddingtons, their faces flushed with anger, shot suspicious glances at each other, at everyone present. In their bitter disappointment all the poison of their years of hating swept back afresh into their veins.

"I'm through—through with all of you," cried old Matthew, passionately. "It's a dirty trick to play on an old man. Someone has got them. Some one of you has them. When I find out which one it is, I'll get them away from him if I have to kill him. I'm the oldest living son. Those jewels are mine, mine by right, I say."

With one last vengeful suspicious look about, he seized his hat and made for the door, flinging himself out of the house, muttering curses as he went. Uncle Mark, pausing to pick up the empty trays and study them regretfully, with a black look that took in all present, a moment later followed his brother's example.

"What a nice, pleasant, family party," laughed

Waddy, the ridiculous side of it all striking him.

“Who could possibly——?” began Mr. Parsons, but his sentence was cut short.

From the upper floor came a shrill scream followed by an agonized cry—a girl’s cry of terror.

“Father, Father, where are you?”

Mr. Parsons, dashing up the stairs with the others close behind him, ran to the bedroom occupied by his daughter. They found Frieda huddled in hysteria just inside the open door.

“What is it? What’s the matter?” asked Parsons as he bent anxiously over her.

“There was something”—she paused, shivering violently—“something that looked like a ghost. It came right along the hall, a figure all in gray, carrying a candle. It was mumbling to itself and was holding up a string of pearls.”

“My dear,” said the lawyer, soothingly, “you’ve been dreaming. It was only a nightmare.”

“I wasn’t asleep. I saw it, I tell you,” the girl persisted.

“Where did you see it?” asked Waddy.

“It passed right by my door,” said Frieda, re-



covering a little as she found herself surrounded by friends, and the upper hall's mysterious atmosphere removed by the lights they were carrying. "It was so dark and creepy up here that I left my door open. I was lying on the bed in the dark wide awake, and I saw it passing. I tell you I really did."

"Let's look around," said Mr. Jessup, seemingly impressed by her narrative.

And as Frieda's father and Anne got her back to bed and tried to soothe her, Jessup and Waddy made a thorough search of the upper floor. In the front room Conway Mason had slept peacefully through it all, and the butler, who had been impressed as Mason's night nurse, and had been sitting by his bedside, insisted that he had heard or seen nothing until he had heard Frieda screaming. In the room opposite and in the other rooms in the main part of the building there was nothing suspicious to be found. The commotion apparently had not reached the rooms in the wing occupied by Mrs. Cupps and the servants, for they found the old housekeeper asleep in bed and the other

servants all in their rooms. Nowhere could they discover any evidence of any nocturnal prowler.

“Probably her father was right,” said Waddy as they reluctantly abandoned the search. “She must have dreamed it.”

“I don’t know,” said Jessup, shaking his head dubiously. “It’s funny that two of them should have the same dream—a figure in gray, carrying a pearl necklace—the missing Waddington pearls.”

## CHAPTER XXI

### DISCOVERED—THE GHOST

**I**T WAS the next day's end, a most dissatisfying day for all concerned. It had even put a damper on Waddy Hurd's usually exuberant spirits, for everything that he had attempted apparently had turned out wrong. His two old great-uncles seemingly had renewed their ancient feud right where they had left it off. Mrs. Cupps, still wrathful at him for having admitted her enemies into the house, all day long had gone about muttering to herself. Waddy himself had spent practically the whole day looking about Waddington Towers, trying to find some clue to what had become of his great-grandfather's treasure. When, wearied of his futile search, he had tried to make love to Anne Sevigne, she had sternly repelled him.

"You mustn't," she had insisted. "I won't listen. I can't. All my life I have lived under

the black shadow of this family fight. I can have no peace of mind until this silly feud is ended, till the jewels are found and divided and everything's settled."

"And then?" said Waddy, hopefully.

"Don't bother me," said Anne. "I'm busy. If you must make love to someone, there's Miss Parsons. She is mad about you."

"Frieda! In love with me!" cried Waddy. "Absurd. We're just old friends, that's all. I have loved *you* ever since that night at my party."

"And I—" began Anne, but she checked herself, and ended the sentence far differently from what she almost had let slip—"can think of nothing else but what could have happened to those jewels."

It had been on her lips to tell Waddy that long before he had ever even heard of her existence he had been the hero of her dreams, but she couldn't. She never must let him know that in the days when she was a lonely little girl, living a drab existence with her bitter old step-grandfather in one of the twin houses of hate, she used to comfort herself by pretending that James Waddington Hurd was her

faithful knight, and to play that some day he would return to Waddington Towers and carry her off and then they would live happily ever afterward. He must never know that the real reason she had returned to Ortonville was not to help David Blaine, but in the hope of meeting him.

“I’ve given up hope of ever finding those jewels now,” said Waddy. “I haven’t the slightest idea where they might be or who took them.”

“They’ll turn up somewhere,” said Anne, confidently. “They must be found. The feud will never be settled until they are.”

Mr. Parsons and Frieda all day long had been keeping to themselves, and after supper when the lawyer had set out for the village to do some telephoning to the city, Frieda had accompanied him. All day they had been arguing without reaching any agreement, and she started off with her father, determined to have it out with him, to tell him once and for all that she could not do as he wished, that he must find his own way out of his predicament. Every hour that she had remained in

Waddington Towers—hours of torture for her they were, as she jealously watched Waddy and Anne Sevigne—had convinced her of the utter futility of any effort on her part to win the young man back. In a most despondent mood, as they walked toward the village, she had announced her decision. Annoyed by his vehement protests, she had left him, and turning about had come back to the Towers.

Unaware that she had returned and that the open window before which she happened to be sitting on the dark porch carried every word of their conversation to her ears, Anne and Waddy, in the living room, began once more discussing with Mr. Jessup the disappearance of the jewels.

“I’ve been thinking it over all day,” said Mr. Jessup, “and I know who it is that has them.”

“Who?” cried Anne and Waddy in astonishment, while Frieda, outside, not wishing to eavesdrop, rose from her seat and started to move softly away. She stopped abruptly, however, as she overheard Mr. Jessup’s answer, given with strong conviction.

“Elwood Parsons.”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed Waddy.

“Why do you suspect him?” asked Anne.

Frieda sank back in her chair and sat there tensed, listening, anxious to hear every word.

“When you put two and two together,” insisted Jessup, “it’s as plain as the nose on your face. There’s nothing to show when the jewels were taken out of that metal box. They might have been taken away yesterday, and then again somebody might have taken them forty years ago just after the old man passed out. I got to thinking who there was that had had a chance to get at them, and it narrowed down to two people: Mrs. Cupps—and of course it wouldn’t be her—and Elwood Parsons.”

“But when would Parsons have had a chance to get them?” asked Waddy. “He had never been in the house till yesterday.”

“Oh, yes, he has,” said Jessup, quickly. “I couldn’t place him at first. I had had a lot of correspondence with him, but I was sure we’d never met. Yet his face seemed familiar to me. All at

once it came back to me. Elwood Parsons came up here forty years ago escorting your grandmother when she came to the funeral. He was here in the house two nights then. He was just a poor young law clerk then. He's a rich man now. Where did he get his start? It was from those jewels, I tell you."

"That's all bosh," said Waddy, hotly. "I'm not going to let you say things like that about Parsons. He was my father's lawyer for years. I have implicit confidence in him."

"That's more than he has in you. It was he that sent that young man up here to shadow you, if you want to know it. Your coming up here worried him. He was afraid you'd find out about his having taken the jewels, so he sent a man up here to watch what you were doing here."

"That part is true," said Anne. "I happen to know that it was Mr. Parsons who arranged to have you shadowed. I know the man he sent. David Blaine. He is a clerk in Mr. Parsons's office."

"I can't understand that," said Waddy. "But,



anyhow, I trust Parsons. Whatever he may have done, Parsons is no thief."

"You're wrong, Mr. Hurd," said Frieda, suddenly appearing in the room. "My father *is* a thief."

Her innate honesty had at last triumphed in the long battle she had been having with herself. That there was only one way out, was her final decision. Waddy must be told everything, regardless of consequences.

As the trio stared at her in astonishment she went on steadily, speaking in a lifeless voice, her pale cheeks flushed.

"My father, Mr. Hurd, has plundered your estate of nearly two hundred thousand dollars. It is all gone, hopelessly gone, lost in speculation, spent in living beyond our means. He could not understand your coming up here so unexpectedly, and fearful that you had discovered his defalcation and were beginning an investigation, he sent a man up to watch you. He had it all planned out that I was to marry you, so that his thefts never would become public, although, of course," she

lifted her head with something of her old pride, "that would have been impossible. When I knew what he had done, I would not have consented, even if——"

She nodded significantly toward Anne, and then, her strength deserting her, she sank sobbing into a chair, crying out, "But my father didn't take the jewels. I know he didn't."

"There, there, Frieda, don't cry," said Waddy, his own voice breaking as he spoke to her. "It's all right. It doesn't matter. I shan't do anything about it. It is really my own fault. I should have looked after my affairs more closely."

The girl's revelation had been a shock to him. The fact that he had been robbed seemed nothing. The tragedy of it, in Waddy's eyes, was losing confidence in a man he had implicitly trusted. More money meant nothing to Waddy Hurd. He always had had all that he needed of it. What were a few figures more or less in a ledger? At any rate, only one thing mattered to him now—Anne. He must have Anne.

"Don't cry, Frieda," he said, patting her head

gently. "I'm not going to have your father arrested."

"Do you think I care about that?" she cried, fiercely, raising her face and looking about wildly. "What difference would that make? What difference would anything make? The thing I can't ever escape—not ever in all my life—is the terrible knowledge that my father, my father whom I loved and trusted, has been a thief. But he didn't take the jewels, I tell you. He didn't."

As she spoke the last words she looked defiantly, challengingly at Anne and Jessup.

"Miss Parsons is right," said Anne, calmly. "Mr. Parsons had nothing to do with taking them. I know where they are. Only a few minutes ago I discovered the ghost."

"Who?"

"Where?"

"Who is it?"

Question after question was volleyed at her by Waddy and Jessup, and even Frieda, for the moment, forgetting her own troubles, dried her tears and sat up to listen.

“Come with me,” said Anne, and as Waddy and Jessup followed her, she led the way out the back door and around to the side of the house, where a ladder she had placed against an apple tree reached up almost to a window on the second floor, a lighted window in the wing that was partly open.

“Climb up there and look,” whispered Anne, and Waddy, moving up the ladder noiselessly, gasped in astonishment at what he saw.

There, preening before a mirror, her nightgown turned back from her withered neck, and a great pearl necklace adorning it, her wrinkled fingers alive with sparkling gems, and others heaped on the dresser before her, sat old Mrs. Cupps, mumbling to herself, pausing every once in a while with head cocked as if she were listening.

Straining his ears, Waddy could catch something of what she was saying, “My pretties. They thought they’d take you away from me after all these years, me the only one that knew where they were hid, me that watched and saw the old gentleman putting them away. Me that’s been watching and guarding them all these years, and

wearing them all and nobody the wiser. They're mine, mine, mine, my pretties, my treasures."

It was too pitiable a tragedy to watch for long. Waddy, depressed at the sight, yet delighted that at last the mystery was solved, swung down the ladder to let Jessup have his turn.

"She's mad, of course," whispered Anne. "Living alone in this gloomy old house with her guilty secret has turned her brain. The shock of our finding the drawer in the mantel-piece was too much for her and has upset her completely."

"But how did you come to suspect her?"

"I just had to find those jewels to be happy, and—well, there was no one else to suspect."

"You've found the jewels," cried Waddy. "You're happy, so then——"

He turned impulsively toward her. It was a warm June evening. They were alone there in the orchard in the darkness, save for Jessup still up the ladder, peering into the window.

"Then?" he repeated, softly.

"Yes," said the girl, bravely.

And old Mr. Jessup, climbing stiffly down the

ladder, eager to talk about what he had seen, found them so absorbed with each other that they seemed oblivious to his presence. With a warning shake of his head, he turned away, remarking aloud—"Well, I'll be dumbed."

THE END







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