





**THE TRAGEDY AT THE
BEACH CLUB**

By William Johnston

THE MYSTERY IN THE RITSMORE

THE APARTMENT NEXT DOOR

THE HOUSE OF WHISPERS

LIMPY

THE BOY WHO FELT NEGLECTED

THE YELLOW LETTER

THE TRAGEDY AT THE BEACH CLUB



HE FOUND HIMSELF GAZING INTO THE BLACK, LIMPID, FRIGHTENED
EYES OF A PRETTY ITALIAN GIRL.

FRONTISPIECE. See page 142.

THE TRAGEDY AT THE BEACH CLUB

By
WILLIAM JOHNSTON

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY
MARSHALL FRANTZ ✓



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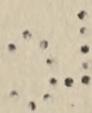
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**THE TRAGEDY AT THE
BEACH CLUB**

THE TRAGEDY AT THE BEACH CLUB

CHAPTER I

WATCHING EYES

ON, on, through the night, there sped relentlessly a little roadster, its solitary occupant dust-begrimed and bearing marks of weariness as if from a long journey, yet apparently grimly determined to reach some fixed goal within a given time.

On several occasions as the car stopped while its occupant inquired the way, invariably the person addressed turned to stare wonderingly after the departing traveler. In the motorist's face was a strange, inscrutable expression, a look indicative of some fixed, definite purpose, almost a maniacal glare that seemed to portray an intense purpose to carry out some great resolve, cost what it might.

Presently the car, after its occupant had once more inquired the directions, turned off the main

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thoroughfare and began proceeding more slowly, as if there were need for caution over a less-traveled road.

At the same hour, hardly half a mile distant, there crept through a narrow strip of woods that lined the Sound a sinister figure, intent on avoiding observation, a figure whose eyes were blazing with resentment, hate, despair, a figure moving swiftly yet silently, slipping noiselessly from cover behind one tree to another, but all the while persistently advancing toward a goal on the shore that was marked by a blaze of lights and the sound of merry voices.

In the same locality, too, had one an all-seeing vision that could read the innermost hearts of men, there would have been noted two men, ostensibly friends, mingling in a reveling throng, their thoughts masked behind smiling faces; two men, — one possessed by a great fear, and the other by consuming wrath.

Yet surely no one, however prophetic his vision or however psychic his gifts, looking, on that peaceful June night, at the pretty scene in our little club — the Beach Club, we call it — could possibly have

suspected the presence there of the grisly shadow of Tragedy as, entirely unobserved, it crept closer — and closer — and closer.

The pleasant picture the clubhouse presented might have been duplicated at any one of the hundred summer colonies about New York, — a cluster of matrons, cool in sport clothes, ranged along the wall of the ballroom floor, placidly chatting of new crochet stitches, servants' wages, recent plays, engaged couples, thoroughly enjoying in their own mature fashion the tittle-tattle of a friendly community, as they occasionally turned observant maternal glances to the dancing floor to see how their daughters were behaving and which of the men they were getting as dancing partners. In the card room adjoining, the club's four inveterates, Pressly Hart, Doctor Rhodes, John Dixon and Ed Manners, as usual, were wrangling over half-cent auction, their rank swelled on this, the weekly dance night, by a sufficient number of husbands and fathers to make three other tables. A few more of the older men sat placidly smoking in the piazza rockers.

And elsewhere — everywhere — was Youth —

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youth in couples, with some few of the newly married folk, foxtrotting jerkily to "Vamp a Little Lady," gliding gracefully, even if perspiringly, to the subtler strains of "The Blue Danube," and between dances cooling off in merry groups on the wide piazzas where they could watch the moonbeams cut sparkling capers on the wide waters of the Sound.

Of all places in the world assuredly this little friendly, happy club at Rockmont seemed the most unlikely setting for a great tragedy. The families represented — there were hardly fifty of them — had been coming to the place, all of them, for years. They were, without exception, of the more prosperous, untemperamental, wholesome middle class, most of them owning their own cottages and all of them their own cars. Their boys and girls had grown up together. Every one in the place knew everything there was to know about everybody else, or — until this night of tragedy — had thought they did.

An air of good fellowship, of neighborly feeling, seemed to pervade the whole club, and among the dancers as they chatted there was that frank

camaraderie and pleasant chaffing only possible among tried acquaintances.

“Poor old Bill,” a laughing girl taunted her partner — he was under thirty — “you men, as you get old, get dreadfully soft.”

“This to me,” he retorted, “when I’ve already danced three times with you this sweltering night.”

“I didn’t mean that. That’s harder on me than on you, for you never will learn to dance, but ——”

“But what?”

She hesitated a trifle before answering.

“None of you men seem to have any pep these days.”

“Meaning which?”

“I can’t find a single man to get up at six to-morrow to play tennis with me.”

“Try a married one. They’re easier.”

“Don’t get fresh, Bill Tilt. You’re not half as game as you used to be when we were kids together.”

“I’m a business man now. I haven’t time for childish follies.”

“To-morrow’s Saturday,” she challenged him.

“You don’t go to business Saturdays.”

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“Think how hard I work the other five days while you girls out here do nothing but play around all day and have a good time.”

“A good time,” she echoed scornfully. “I wish you had a week of it — nothing to do all day long and not a man to talk to until the six-eighteen gets in. Please, Bill, won’t you?”

“Why pick on me?” he replied almost peevishly. “Rout Carew out to play with you.”

“Paul Carew’s an engaged man,” she replied, coloring prettily at this mention of her fiancé’s name. “He has to work Saturdays. It becomes him to take life seriously, when he’ll soon have a wife to support.”

Mollie Manners’ engagement to Carew, announced three weeks before, had been the summer’s sensation in the colony. Carew was a comparative stranger. At the close of the war he had been brought to Rockmont as a guest by a fellow officer who had known him in France. Each summer since he had returned, living at the Inn in the village, enthusiastically joining in the sports, mingling freely with all the young people, in the course of the season being entertained at least once for dinner in

most of the houses, meanwhile carrying on his courtship of Mollie with such craft that no one had suspected his intention until the announcement of their betrothal.

To most of them it had come as a complete surprise, and to Bill Tilt as a shock. He felt that he had been or was about to be deprived of a good playmate. Sometimes, when he was alone and began to think about it, he wished he had proposed to Mollie himself. Life without her, he felt, would be strangely lonesome, almost unbearable.

“If I were engaged to you,” he snapped, “even if I did have to go to business, I’d get up at six for you.”

“Paul wanted to,” she answered proudly, “but I wouldn’t let him.”

“What’s the big idea, anyhow?” growled Tilt. “Why this early stuff?”

“It’s the tournament. I’m just crazy to get in a lot of practise and surprise everybody. I’m out for the cup in the ladies’ singles. Besides, it’s lovely and cool early in the morning, and we’ll have the courts all to ourselves. Please, Bill, won’t you — pretty please?”

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Into her great dark eyes came a pleading look, a soft, alluring look that Tilt had never been able to withstand, and her concluding phrase, the "pretty please" brought back to his mind with a rush vividly pleasant memories of their merry times together — long before Carew had come — when they were just boy and girl together.

"All right, all right!" he cried, as the music stopped, holding up his hands in mock token of surrender, as the couples about them applauded vigorously for an encore.

"Remember, six sharp," she warned him, as they stood waiting a moment.

The music started up again. Tilt, lowering his hands, was about to encircle her waist again, when Carew cut in and swept her away.

"I'll be waiting on the courts for you," she called back smilingly over her shoulder, as Tilt, resentful and disgruntled, abandoned the dancing and sought solace in a cigarette in solitude on the verandah.

On went the dancing, the gossip, the bridge, and closer and yet closer crept the sinister shadow of tragedy, still with no warning of its coming unless

some one might have observed, peering furtively in from a back window — a window that looked out on a sort of court where the cars were parked — two frightened eyes that roved the ballroom as if in search of something or some one. Presently, if any one had been watching closely, they might have seen the eyes stop and tighten and have noticed creeping into them a strange set expression of — what was it — hate or hopelessness. But only for a fleeting instant were the watching eyes visible. As quickly as they had appeared, they vanished again, the outer darkness swallowing up their owner before any one of the dancers had noticed the occurrence.

Otherwise there was no hint of the unusual, no foreshadowing of the terrible, no warning of the dreadful, mysterious tragedy that before the morning would cast its gloom on all the merry dancers, would wreck the happiness of some, would shatter lifelong friendships and would spread its poison through the whole community.

Unconscious of the sword above their heads, the merry assemblage danced on. Peace, contentment and the joy of living was theirs. Even from the

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faces of the men at the card tables the evening's pastime seemed to have wiped away the worry lines of business cares. So far as any one could see, it was a perfect picture of a happy, carefree community.

All too soon came twelve o'clock and the good-night dance. The matrons, for the most part trustfully leaving their daughters to be escorted home by boy friends, gathering up their wraps, invaded the card room in a body to stand firmly united against husbandly please for "just one more rubber." In a very few minutes the club entrance was thronged with the departing and noisy with merry "good nights."

Paul Carew, as usual, was waiting for Mollie as she emerged from the cloakroom, and many a glance was bestowed on them as they stood there together. Physically they seemed an ideal couple for mating. Dark-eyed, slender, her masses of auburn hair always were kept trim and shining. Slim-ankled and dainty, her bared arms, softly rounded though they were, had the brown of the athlete, and her pretty face glowed with health and good nature, though her square chin indicated that on occasion she could

display a mind and will of her own. Generally she gave the impression of being a tall girl, but the man beside her towered a good six inches above her. If ever there had been a tendency on his part to slouch over, it had been remedied by his army service. He stood there straight and erect, blond as she was dark. His well-fitting dinner coat gave to his shoulders perhaps undeserved breadth, and a captious critic might have considered his lips a trifle loose, without being able to dispute the fact that he was a handsome man. Though he was undoubtedly American-born, there was something about his face — perhaps his rather large, aquiline nose, perhaps the expression of his gray-green eyes — that gave most persons on first meeting him a feeling that somewhere in his pedigree was a considerable strain of alien blood. At any rate he appeared well-bred and cultured, and it was generally understood in the colony that he was an electrical engineer, who after Amherst had taken a course at Cornell which he had completed just before entering the army. Apparently, too, he had some means besides his profession, for he lived comfortably and kept a car. Mollie Manners, too, the colony knew, had a

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small income of her own, so altogether the match was considered a suitable one.

“Mollie, dear,” Carew whispered, drawing her a little apart from the others, “would you mind it very much if I didn’t go home with you to-night — if you went on with the family?”

“What is it?” she cried, scanning his face solicitously. “Are you ill?”

“Not at all,” he laughed reassuringly.

“You’re sure?”

“Quite. It’s just some business.”

“Business at this hour of the night!” her eyes sought the clock. “It’s long after twelve.”

“It’s some papers,” he explained nervously, “something I have to get fixed up before morning. Something ——” he hesitated for just a second, “something I promised to attend to.”

“Oh,” she said, “of course that is different. I don’t mind in the least. Only, Paul dear, don’t stay up too late.”

“Don’t worry,” he replied, “I shan’t.”

Perplexedly her eyes sought his. Despite his reassuring words, there was something in his manner, a nervousness, something — she could hardly

describe it — that seemed strange and different about him. She feared that he might be feeling ill and was keeping it from her. Or perhaps it was some business worry? What could it be? It was unlike him to be upset about business, yet she noticed that his hand as he clasped her was trembling and clammy. Once again she raised her eyes questioningly to his.

Unmindful of the crowd about them, with an accepted lover's daring, he bent and kissed her lightly on the lips, then springing lightly into his car, dashed away in the direction of the Inn, both he and Mollie utterly unconscious that the eyes of at least three persons who had witnessed their parting kiss, two of them in the clubhouse, and a third person hidden in the black shadows outside, had sent after Carew, departing, frowning, unfriendly, bitter glances.

And closer, and still closer, crept Tragedy.

CHAPTER II

MORNING'S REVELATIONS

ALL too early for Tilt came Saturday morning. Returning from the club dance shortly after midnight, he had retired immediately, but not to sleep. The thought that he must be up again by six was far from being a soporific, and besides all through the hours he had been haunted and harassed by visions of Mollie. There kept recurring to his mind, distastefully and annoyingly, the picture she had made in their last dance together, a picture rudely shattered by the masterful, proprietary way in which Paul Carew had swept her away from him.

"Damn Carew," he muttered to himself, "I wish he never had turned up here."

Hitherto Tilt, with no thought of matrimony, with no conscious feeling of love toward his old playmate, had been content to drift along in the pleasant sunshine of her companionship. Now, as the prospect loomed closer and closer of her becoming another man's wife, he realized, with poign-

ant regret, that he loved Mollie Manners, that he always had loved her.

He was in a savage mood as he left his home and hurried along the beach toward the courts, swinging his racquet viciously at the nodding daisies along his path. Yet it was hard to be ill-tempered on such a morning as this with the prospects of having two hours alone with Mollie. As the cool sea air, with its pleasant, elusive tang, struck his face and filled his lungs, his mood quickly softened.

Mollie was right, he decided. It was wonderful in the early morning. The sun, coming up behind Little Island, was cutting a golden path across the Sound's incoming tide. The sea birds, busy with breakfast, were fluttering about everywhere, a horde of hungry gulls, like scout planes, watching each wave crest for floating dainties, croaking their dissatisfaction as they sailed along, while in the shallows of the cove the silent cranes hopped about with grotesque dignity, seeking unwary fish. From the leafy shelters of the woods near by came the raucous notes of the crows, the trill of robins and the mischievous cries of catbirds.

Tilt was hardly five minutes in reaching the

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courts, and as he arrived he looked about with a feeling of triumph. Early as it was, apparently he had been the first to arrive. He hurried on a little farther to a place commanding a view of Lloyd's Point, confidently expecting to see Mollie racing toward him, but she was nowhere in sight. For a moment he felt puzzled. It was not at all like her to be late. Some girls he knew would have considered it a great joke to date a man for six o'clock and then keep him waiting for half an hour, but Mollie was not that sort. Brought up among boys, it was her custom always to be prompt in keeping engagements.

It occurred to him then that she might already have arrived and be in the clubhouse getting her racquet or putting on her tennis shoes. Sometimes in the years gone by, when they used to have these early engagements more frequently, he recalled that she had been in the habit of stopping at the caretaker's cottage for the key and opening up the clubhouse. Probably that was where she was now.

As he turned back and approached the building, he saw what he had not noticed before, — that the door was standing ajar. His conclusions thus veri-

fied, he started for the steps, his lips shaping themselves into a cheery call to announce his arrival, but he stopped short in his tracks.

From somewhere — it seemed to him from within the clubhouse — there came a shrill, unforgettable, prolonged scream, like the cry of some person or animal in mortal agony, a terrifying, unearthly sound, such as it seemed hardly possible for any human being to make.

What was it? What did it mean? What could have happened?

Bewildered by the amazing scream, he stopped for a second and stood there listening, half expecting to hear the cry repeated. Strangely enough, at first no thought of Mollie came into his head. The cry he had heard had not sounded in the least like her voice, and at any rate he knew that she was not the sort of girl given to shrieking or screaming. He was not even sure that the sound had come from the clubhouse. There was a muffled quality about it as if it might have come from some distance away, perhaps from one of the yachts at anchor a quarter of a mile away.

But Mollie — where was she?

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She must be somewhere about, probably in the clubhouse. He must find her at once. If she had heard that scream, it undoubtedly would have alarmed her. Suppose something had happened to her, something dreadful? With his heart in his throat, he took the steps two at a time and made for the open door, all sorts of wild imaginings filling his brain.

If Mollie were in there, who could be with her? He knew the building now was untenanted at night. Two weeks ago the steward had been discharged for stealing, and his place had not yet been filled. Old Hodder, who looked after the boats, kept the key at his shack down on the beach. The last to leave at night snapped the spring lock on the door, and the first to arrive stopped at old Hodder's and got the key. Striving vainly to conjecture what might have happened, with his alarm for Mollie's safety increasing, he made for the door, but before he reached it he heard steps — some one coming toward him — some one running — running fast. Instinctively his muscles stiffened, and his fists clinched. If any one was in there, if any one had harmed or had frightened Mollie —

It was Mollie herself.

She dashed out of the place as if all the devils in hell were after her. She was neither shrieking nor crying, but her breath was coming in short, quick gasps that seemed almost to choke her, and in her eyes was the most fear stricken look that Tilt had ever seen.

“Mollie,” he cried, putting out his arms, “what’s happened? What’s the matter?”

She seemed not even to have seen him. With her eyes staring, with that look of dreadful horror still in them, she ran right on, straight past him as he attempted to seize her.

“Mollie!” he cried again, but she paid no attention and kept on running, running as fast as she could in the direction of her own home.

Puzzled beyond measure, utterly at a loss to understand what could have terrified her so, Tilt dashed after her. Although in his college days he had been on the track team and even now prided himself on his speed, run as fast as he could he was unable to catch up with her. She ran madly on and on, making no sound except that queer, choking gasp. He was just behind her as she reached home

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and dashed up the front steps and through the door into the living room. Seeming even in her hysteria to realize that she was at home and safe, she gave a little cry — something that sounded to Tilt like “Mother” — and fell in a senseless heap to the floor.

It had not seemed to Tilt that they had made much noise as they entered the house, but there must have been more than he imagined for as he bent over Mollie, Kit — the Terrible Kit — Mollie's younger sister, came flying down the stairs in her pyjamas, her bobbed black hair all tousled from the pillow. She stopped short on the landing as she saw Tilt and her sister lying on the floor, let out a shriek and dashed back upstairs. In half a second the whole house was in commotion. Mrs. Manners and Mollie's brother Ed and the servants, in various stages of deshabille, ran into the living room. Mrs. Manners was the only one who seemed to have kept her head. Without saying a word, she got a pillow under her daughter and began trying with brandy and smelling salts to revive her. The others, crowding around the bewildered Tilt, all began asking at once what had happened.

The Terrible Kit, reappearing in a kimono, pushed past the others and shaking her fist in Tilt's face, tragically screamed out:

“What have you done to my sister?”

Tilt, as soon as he could get them somewhat calmed down, told them all he knew about it, which of course was practically nothing.

“Mollie has been badly frightened,” said Mrs. Manners, looking up from her task. “She must have seen somebody or something in the clubhouse. Bill, why don't you and Ed go down there and investigate? Some tramps may have got into the clubhouse. But, Ed, before you go, I wish you'd telephone Doctor Rhodes to come over.”

Ed, still in his bathrobe, went at once to the 'phone, which was in an alcove just off the living room, where every one could hear what he said. He had some trouble in getting the number, as invariably is the case when you try to get a suburban number in the early morning, and when he did, they gathered from what he was saying that Doctor Rhodes was not at home. At that both Mrs. Manners and Tilt exchanged surprised glances, for Rhodes had been at the club the night before.

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Walter Rhodes was a specialist in the city and had no local practise, never answering calls except in emergency cases to oblige old friends like the Manners family, so it seemed unaccountable that he should not be at home at this early hour.

“Rhodes is out,” said Ed, turning away from the 'phone, “and his old housekeeper is all worked up about it. She doesn't know where he is. She says some one called him on the 'phone about one in the morning, and he went out and hasn't showed up since. She's afraid something has happened to him.”

“That's funny,” said Tilt, “I never heard of his answering night calls.”

“He never did,” Ed replied, “but wherever he went, he didn't take his car. The housekeeper says it is in the garage.”

“Try to get Doctor Burroughs from the village, then,” suggested Mrs. Manners.

Doctor Burroughs was at home and promised to come at once. Mollie by this time had revived a little, although she was by no means herself yet. She kept moving her head hysterically from side to side, and once in a while she gave a little moan.

“If you boys will carry her upstairs,” said her mother, “she’ll be better off in bed.”

“Wait a second till I slip on some clothes,” said Ed, as they complied with Mrs. Manners’ request, “and we’ll run down and see what’s wrong at the club.”

A moment later, just as he and Tilt was starting off, the Terrible Kit, still in her kimono, came rushing downstairs after them.

“You go back,” her brother commanded sternly. “There’s no telling what we may find. It’s no place for a kid.”

“She’s as much my sister as she is yours,” said Kit stubbornly, “and I have a right to know what happened to her.”

There seemed to be no way of stopping the determined young flapper without appealing to her mother, and they did not wish to add to Mrs. Manners’ troubles just then; but Tilt put in a word of advice.

“Better stay home, Kit. We may find a bunch of tough tramps down there.”

“Who’s afraid of tramps,” scoffed Kit, “when she has two big men along to protect her.”

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“Do you think it was tramps?” asked Ed of Tilt.

“Some vagrant might have taken a notion to camp in the clubhouse.”

“It could happen easily enough, but I doubt if we find anything at all. Girls get like that sometimes, sort of timid and scary, all upset about nothing at all. Mollie, alone in the clubhouse at that hour of the morning, probably thought she saw something or thought she heard something and went off into hysterics.”

“No,” Tilt defended her warmly, “Mollie isn’t that sort at all. She’s as cool headed as a man and has a lot of nerve. Remember that time I was in the motor smash-up with her, she never turned a hair — didn’t even cry out when they crashed into us.”

“’Sright,” said Kit, “Mollie’s just like me. We’re neither of us afraid of anything.”

Nevertheless, as they approached the clubhouse, the Terrible Kit sidled shyly up to Tilt and slipped her hand into his as if to give herself courage. Even the two men, while certainly not frightened, approached the little building with a

nervous air of expectation, perhaps of premonition.

They found the door standing wide open, just as it had been when Mollie ran out, and together the three of them went in. Right at the entrance was the reception room, such a room as is common to all small clubs of this sort, — mission furniture, some sporting prints and standing about on shelves some “maybe they are silver” cups and trophies. Nothing was out of place in this room that any of them could observe. At the left the dancing floor was visible in its entirety through an uncurtained archway. On their right a passageway led to the lockers, and on one side of this was a big room used as a card room. Across the corridor from the card room were two smaller rooms, one — now locked — used as the steward’s sleeping quarters when they had a steward and the other as a meeting room for the club’s governors.

“Let’s go down toward the women’s lockers,” suggested Tilt. “That’s probably the direction Mollie took as she came in.”

“Right,” said Ed, leading the way with Tilt and Kit close at his heels.

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They glanced into the card room but there was no one there, and they were hurrying on down toward the lockers, when Tilt felt Kit's hand tighten convulsively on his.

"Oh, look!" she breathed in a horrified whisper.

Both men stopped short and turned at once to peer in the direction of her frightened glance.

"My God," cried Ed Manners, "what's this?"

He turned to his sister and seizing her almost roughly by the shoulders thrust her back.

"Get out of here," he commanded. "This is no place for you."

"I won't," said Kit stubbornly, even though her face was white, and the hand with which she was clutching Tilt's was trembling violently. "It's Doctor Rhodes."

At a table in the second of the smaller rooms off the corridor was Walter Rhodes, sitting, or rather sprawling grotesquely. His head rested on the table, and his arms dangled loosely, lifelessly at his sides, while on the floor, almost at his feet, lay a revolver.

"It doesn't seem possible," cried Ed, "but it certainly looks as if Rhodes had killed himself."

“No wonder Mollie had hysterics,” said Tilt, picturing to himself the shock it must have been to her when she discovered the body, for Rhodes had been one of her dearest friends.

For a moment the three of them stood, spell-bound with horror, looking into the room. There was nothing to indicate that there had been a fight or a struggle, nothing to hint of the presence of an intruder, except for the fact that a window on the Sound side stood open. Whoever was last to leave the club generally closed all the windows, but this one could easily have been overlooked, or for that matter Rhodes himself might have opened it before he took his seat at the table.

“I can't believe that it's suicide,” said Tilt firmly. “There's some mystery about this. Rhodes isn't the sort to have killed himself. He could not have had any motive. He was in splendid health, doing big work and making plenty of money. What reason could he have had?”

“Who knows,” said Manners. “Perhaps it was some woman ——”

“Hardly at his age. He was well over fifty.”

Manners stepped into the room and, picking up

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the revolver, broke it, and exhibited it to his companions.

“I guess that settles it,” he said. “See, there’s one bullet discharged.”

“I can’t believe it,” Tilt repeated. “Rhodes wasn’t the sort. There was nothing of the quitter about him.”

“If he didn’t kill himself, how else do you account for it?”

“I don’t know.”

“At any rate, we’ve got to do something — notify the police, or the coroner or somebody.”

“What’s the matter with letting Pressly Hart attend to that? He’s president of the club.”

“That’s a good idea. We’ll ’phone him.”

As he spoke, Manners lifted the doctor’s head and straightened his body back in the chair.

“Don’t,” Tilt warned him. “We ought to leave everything just as it is until the authorities arrive.”

“Of course, but what I did will not hurt anything or destroy any clues, if there are any. It seemed a shame to leave him in that uncomfortable position.”

“What’s that?” the excited, shrill voice of the Terrible Kit interrupted.

In their excitement over the tragedy, both of the men had forgotten about her. She was still standing in the doorway. Her bright eyes blazing with excitement, she was pointing to the spot on the table where the doctor's head had been lying. There was a piece of paper lying there with something written on it. Eagerly Tilt picked it up and together he and Manners examined it. It was a sheet torn from one of Rhodes's own prescription pads, and on it in the doctor's handwriting were these words:

WALTER RHODES, M. D.

R_x

*I have waited here
for you for ha*

The writing ended abruptly, the line of the last

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letter jerking sharply up as if a bullet might have stopped his hand as he wrote. What could it mean? Would a man stop in the middle of a sentence to kill himself? There was bewilderment in the puzzled glances the two men exchanged. The finding of the unfinished note had put an entirely different complexion on the tragedy. Into the mind of both came what his housekeeper had said, about some one having telephoned him after midnight and his having gone out. Manifestly he must have come here to the club to meet some one, — some one for whom he had waited.

Whom had he expected to meet? Was it a man or a woman? Could it have been possible that Rhodes, all unsuspected, was involved in an affair, and that he had been lured here and shot down by some jealous husband? Or had there been some one who had plotted to take his life from some other motive, — robbery, revenge, perhaps from sheer madness through brooding over some fancied wrong.

Carefully Manners laid the little scrap of paper back in the exact spot from which Tilt had picked it up.

"It's too deep for me," he said. "I guess we had better telephone Hart."

Together the three of them left the room, returning down the corridor to the telephone in the reception hall. As Tilt was calling up, Manners turned to his sister.

"Look here, Kit," he said, "you get out of here quick. The first thing you know, you'll be dragged into court in a murder case. Anyhow, in a very few minutes there'll be a lot of people here, and you don't want them to catch you looking like that."

It is hard to say which of his arguments it was that appealed to the youngster, but at any rate she reluctantly withdrew. After talking over the 'phone with Hart, Manners and Tilt, left alone, returned once more along the corridor to where the body lay.

"What do you make of it?" asked Tilt.

"It certainly is mysterious. Looks like murder."

"But who would want to murder Walter Rhodes?"

"I give it up."

"It seems to me," said Tilt thoughtfully, "if we can find out who it was that telephoned him late

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last night, if we can discover to whom the message he was writing was addressed, if we can find out for whom he was waiting there, we'll come pretty near locating the man that killed him."

"Or the woman," suggested Manners.

"What makes you ——" began Tilt, but his question died in his throat.

As they talked, they had come once more to the door of the room where the body was. At their first glance within they had halted abruptly, gaping at the table in stupefied astonishment.

The paper — the unfinished message that Manners had laid so carefully back in its place — the paper that both had considered so important a clue to the murderer of Walter Rhodes — had vanished.

CHAPTER III

POINTING FINGERS

THE inquest was on. Apart from the morbid, curious excited throng of summer residents, of villagers, of officials, already gathered on the dancing floor of the club, paying little heed to any of them, as he leaned against a pillar of the porch outside, was old Hodder, a far away look in his eyes.

A score of things about him marked him for a follower of the sea, — his wind-beaten face, his shirt wide open, revealing his tanned hairy neck, his up-rolled sleeves, the sea symbols tattooed boldly on both forearms, the hitch of his trousers, the roll of his walk, the tilt of his cap. Indeed, with his long, gray, tobacco-stained mustache and his beady black eyes, given another setting, it would not have been in the least difficult to imagine him as a pirate, an adventurer, but to thoughtless Rockmont, now as always he was just “Old Hodder who looks after the boats.”

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He was muttering to himself as he stood there.

“It must have been her that got him. She vowed she would. It must have been her.”

Within the clubhouse the inquest proceeded, the County physician, Doctor Dooner, presiding with bustling dignity. One of those incompetent medical men, too lazy or too careless to build up a paying practise, he had turned to politics as a way out of his rut, and now keenly alive to the possibilities of publicity for himself in such a mysterious affair as this, was enjoying to the utmost the part he had to play in it.

The two most important witnesses, Manners and Tilt, had been informed by him that they would be the first ones called, and already they were sitting uneasily in chairs in the front row facing the jury. Although it was now nearly twelve, more than five hours since they had 'phoned the news to Pressly Hart, they had hardly had a minute to themselves. The celerity with which the news had spread had amazed them both. Close on Hart's heels had come the curious throng, with the village police chief — he was Smithers, the grocer — everybody, crowding around them, demanding over and over

again to be told about the discovery of Walter Rhodes's body. By tacit understanding, neither of them had mentioned Mollie's part in the affair, both devoutly hoping that her name could be kept entirely out of it.

It wasn't until Doctor Dooner began impaneling the jury that they had had the opportunity for a quiet word together.

"Bill," whispered Manners, "what did you do with that paper — that message that Rhodes was writing?"

"Me!" cried Tilt, in an astonished whisper. "I didn't touch it again. I thought sure you had it."

Appraisingly, almost suspiciously, they studied each other's faces. Hitherto the best of friends, enjoying the mutual confidence in each other that long years of pleasant acquaintance invariably brings, the grisly figure of murder had risen between them, spreading on either side suspicion, distrust. Simultaneously into the minds of each had flashed the thought that the other had secreted the paper, fearing it might involve or incriminate some one he knew.

"I didn't take it," said Manners. "I put it back

in exactly the spot where it was when you picked it up."

"Where is it then?"

"Perhaps it blew out the window."

"There wasn't the suspicion of a breeze."

"Then," said Manners decisively, "some one went into that room and picked up that paper and destroyed it or hid it. There was no one there but us two."

"Didn't you take it?"

"Didn't you?"

"Mr. Edward Manners to the stand," they heard Doctor Dooner's voice call out.

"Look here," whispered Tilt hurriedly, "if we tell about that paper and can't produce it, it'll look mighty queer."

Manners nodded understandingly and moved forward to testify. Simply and directly he told the story that he already had told many times that morning. He and Tilt had gone into the clubhouse about six that morning. On their way to the lockers they had happened to glance into the directors' room. Sitting at the table, stone dead, with a revolver at his feet, was Walter Rhodes. The body

was cold, showing that the shooting must have taken place some hours before.

Tilt, following, corroborated Manners' story in every detail, Tilt, too, being careful to make no mention of the fact that either of the Manners girls had been in the clubhouse that morning. As he was completing his testimony, he was amazed to see coming into the room Mollie Manners herself. Her mother was with her, looking anxious and distressed, but Mollie, hatless and garbed in a becoming sport suit, with the quick recuperative power of youth, showed hardly a sign of her recent attack of hysteria and seemed as cool and composed as ever.

"That's all you can tell us then," said Doctor Dooner.

Tilt nodded uncomfortably.

"As I understand you," said the examiner, "you say that you and Mr. Manners were the first to discover the body. How did you happen to visit this building at that early hour?"

Tilt was mentally floundering, trying to think of some answer, when Mollie's voice cut in:

"Doctor Dooner, I can explain that. It was I who first found the body."

The eyes of every one in the room turned in amazement in the girl's direction, while both Tilt and her brother shot angry glances at her, trying to warn her to keep quiet. Her mother, too, laid her hand restrainingly on the girl's arm, but she went calmly on:

"Doctor Rhodes was a very good friend of mine. I have known him as long as I can remember. If anything I can tell will help find his murderer, I am going to tell it."

"His murderer!" exclaimed Doctor Dooner. "Don't you know that he is supposed to have killed himself?"

"He was murdered," said Mollie calmly. "He would never have committed suicide."

"Miss Manners," said Doctor Dooner, "will you please take the stand and tell us everything you know about the affair. Tell us just what happened."

"I had a date," Mollie began, "at six o'clock to play tennis with Bill, that is, with Mr. Tilt. The evening before, so that I could get into the clubhouse to get my racquet and shoes, I had gotten the keys from old Hodder ——"

“Who is Hodder?”

“The caretaker. I got here shortly before six and unlocked the door; I was going down the corridor toward the lockers when I saw Doctor Rhodes. I didn’t realize at first what had happened. It was hardly light enough in the room to see distinctly, and my first thought was that he had fallen asleep there and had slept all night in a chair. I called to him, and he didn’t answer me. Then I thought that perhaps he was ill, but still suspecting nothing serious, I ran over to him and touched him on the cheek.”

She stopped abruptly, and a curious shiver shook her at the recollection of the shock she had received.

“What happened then?”

“I’d never seen a dead person before,” she said, her voice sinking almost to a whisper. “When I touched his cheek and found it cold, it was terrible. I got frightened, terribly frightened, and I guess I must have shrieked and run home.”

“Did you see any one in the clubhouse?”

“No.”

“Nor hear any one?”

“No. I don’t remember anything that happened after I touched him. I must have become hyster-

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ical, I guess. But I am certain that before that I neither saw nor heard any one in the clubhouse.”

“That will do,” said the examiner, as he excused her, turning sternly toward Manners and Tilt. “Young gentlemen, you will please remember that justice is not to be trifled with. While your motive in suppressing the fact that Miss Manners found the body is perhaps understandable, such actions cannot be tolerated. Is Mr. Hodder here?”

The chief of police found the old boatman still standing on the porch outside and brought him in.

“What is your name?” the examiner asked.

“Hodder ——” he hesitated as if making an effort to recall the name by which he had been christened, adding after a second — “Malachi Hodder.”

“Where do you live?”

“Over yonder.”

He pointed out the window to his home, a tumble-down shack just off the anchorage.

“Miss Manners says that she got a key to the clubhouse from you last night. Is that statement true?”

He nodded.

“ You let her have the key? ”

“ Sure I did.”

“ Did any one else have keys? ”

“ Two of 'em — him ” — he pointed toward Pressly Hart, “ and the Commander.”

“ The Commander,” said Doctor Dooner, puzzled.

“ Whom do you mean by ‘ the Commander ’? ”

“ Doctor Rhodes.”

“ Why do you call him ‘ the Commander ’? ”

“ Him and me was in the navy together; that’s why, sir. He was Commander Rhodes then.”

That this statement was news to most of the summer colonists was evident from the glances of surprise that were exchanged. Well as most of them knew, or thought they knew Doctor Rhodes, few of them were aware that he had been in the navy, and old Hodder had been a club fixture so long that the circumstance of his coming there had been forgotten.

“ Did any one else have keys? ”

“ Just them two.”

“ Your cottage is within hearing distance of the club. Did you hear anything unusual going on last night — say after midnight? ”

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Hodder was silent for a moment, as if making an effort to think. Into his eyes came that far away look that was in them as he had stood on the porch. What was going on in his mind? Was his memory turning back to the days of long ago when "the Commander" and he were shipmates?

"Did you hear anything?" Dooner repeated.

"Only them two shots."

"Two!" cried Tilt excitedly. "Were there two?"

Hodder nodded emphatically, and Doctor Dooner's face showed satisfaction, as he turned to the jurors to say:

"Gentlemen, this testimony bears out the facts that I gleaned from an examination of the body. Rhodes was not killed by a shot from the revolver that was found lying at his feet. Although one bullet had been fired from it, death came to him from a rifle bullet that passed clear through his body. We found the bullet buried in the wall behind where he was sitting, it having passed clear through the chair. From the direction of the wound, the bullet apparently was fired by some one standing on the porch outside who aimed at him

through the open window. Nor from the position of the body is it likely that Rhodes fired off the revolver. It looks as if the murderer, after killing him, placed the revolver at his feet, to give a semblance of suicide. Go on, Mr. Hodder; what did you do after you heard the shots?"

"I didn't do nothing, sir."

"Why not?"

"I wasn't sure it was shots. I thought maybe it was automobiles or a boat backfiring."

"And that's all you know?"

Any one observing old Hodder closely might have seen a crafty look come into his eyes, but nobody was noticing him as he mumbled:

"That's all, sir."

"Mr. Hart," said Dooner, excusing Hodder and calling another witness, "how do you account for the window being open?"

"I don't know," said Hart confusedly. "We're pretty careless about windows out here. It might have been left standing open for a couple of days without any one noticing it. Since we discharged the steward a couple of weeks ago, the club has sort of run itself."

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“Why was the steward discharged?”

“Rhodes caught him grafting in buying supplies. Rhodes was our treasurer.”

“Who was this steward?”

“Gus Pincus, his name was. I don't know much about him.”

“Has he been seen about here recently?”

“He was in my store only yesterday,” volunteered Police Chief Smithers; “cussing about Doc Rhodes, he was, too.”

“Did he make any threats?”

“I wouldn't go so far as to say that. He was just kicking about Rhodes not wanting to give him a chance to make a living.”

“Do you know where he is now?”

“He said he had a job at the Meadowmount Club.”

The members of the club grouped about the room looked at each other blankly. Gus for three years had been their steward, Gus, a good-natured, weak sort of chap. It was easy enough to believe of him that he had done some petty pilfering, but Gus a murderer! They could not imagine it.

“While of course,” said Dooner judicially, “there is no evidence to involve this man, it might be well to locate him and investigate his whereabouts last night after midnight. Are there any other witnesses?”

“Here’s Mrs. Grady, the doctor’s housekeeper,” said Smithers.

It was with difficulty that any sort of a statement could be dragged out of the old woman, so upset was she over the tragedy. Finally Dooner and Smithers between them managed to get her calmed down sufficiently to tell about the doctor having been called from his home by telephone sometime after midnight.

“Who answered the ‘phone?”

“Meself, bad luck the day.”

“Who was it?”

“’Twas a queer, husky voice.”

“What did he say?”

“I disremember; something about wanting to speak to Doctor Rhodes.”

“Did he give any name?”

“He did not, bad cess to him.”

“What did you do?”

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“ I called the doctor. He was in his study, reading, belike.”

“ Did you recognize the voice? Was it any one you know? ”

“ It had a quare, lusty sound, though I couldn't be saying whose voice it was.”

“ Was it Gus Pincus's? ”

“ Him — the dirty thief — it was not.”

“ But you don't know whose it was? ”

“ Woe's me, I do not. If I heard it again, I'd know it, but wirra, wirra, what's to become of me with him lying there kilt? Oh, wirra, wirra, God save his soul, a fine gentleman he was.”

Weeping, the old woman was led from the stand. Doctor Dooner asked if there were any other witnesses. For a moment there was silence. Tilt, slouched down in his seat, with a puzzled expression on his face, was trying to measure the value of the evidence that old Hodder had given and to fit it to the facts brought out by the medical examination. If Rhodes had been killed with a rifle fired from the end of the porch, it looked to Tilt as if his murder was the outcome of a deliberate plot, as if the assassin, undoubtedly the man who had telephoned

him, had lured him to the club for the express purpose of killing him. But what could have been the motive, a motive impelling enough to bring about this cold-blooded murder?

Suddenly out of the stillness that had fallen on the assemblage a shrill voice rang out. It was the Terrible Kit's.

"Bill, aren't you going to tell them about the paper — the message Doctor Rhodes was writing?"

If a bomb had exploded in the clubhouse, it could hardly have made a greater sensation than Kit's question. Doctor Dooner, deciding at once that both Manners and Tilt were deliberately withholding important evidence, after one wrathful glance in their direction, demanded:

"Who is this young lady? What does she know about this case?"

"She is my sister," said Manners, looking at Kit as if he would like to have spanked her then and there; but returning his glance with a scornful look, Kit took the witness stand and glibly told of the finding of the message written on a prescription blank.

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“And what became of that piece of paper?” asked Doctor Dooner accusingly.

“The last I saw of it, my brother put it back on the table; then he sent me home, and I didn’t see any more.”

“Mr. Manners,” said Dooner severely, “will you please explain why you said nothing about this all-important clue?”

“Because,” faltered Manners, “when Tilt and I came back there, after ’phoning Hart, the scrap of paper had vanished.”

“How do you account for its vanishing?”

“I don’t.”

“Why did you not tell about this paper when you were first examined?”

Ed Manners shot an appealing glance in Tilt’s direction as if he expected his friend to help him out, but Bill, his tall ungainly figure slouched down in his seat, refused to meet his eye.

“I don’t know,” said Manners lamely. “I felt that it would sound fishy to tell about this paper when we were unable to produce it.”

“Could your sister — your sister Kit — have taken it?”

“Oh, no,” he said quickly. “That would have been impossible. She wasn’t in the room at all — just at the door. She was not out of my sight until I sent her home.”

“Could Mr. Tilt have secreted it?”

“I do not see how or when he could have.”

Much puzzled, Dooner recalled Tilt to the stand, and he of course told the same amazing story. When they went together to the telephone it was there. When they returned, two minutes later, it was gone. He could offer no theory to account for its disappearance. It was evident, from the faces of the spectators, from Doctor Dooner’s expression, that every one present was convinced that both young men were lying. Even Manners and Tilt realized that their statements had resulted only in creating suspicion that they both knew or suspected more about the murder than they were telling, and both shared righteous indignation toward Kit, whose indiscreet question had precipitated the crisis.

“Mr. Tilt,” said Dooner — and his voice was very stern — “I trust you realize that you have been guilty of a grave indiscretion in suppressing this evidence. Remembering that you are under oath,

answer me this question: Have you any opinion or suspicion, or knowledge as to whom this message Doctor Rhodes was writing was addressed?"

"No, sir. Absolutely none."

"Miss Manners — Miss Mollie Manners — who first found the body, has testified that Rhodes was a friend, a very good friend of hers. Did the thought not come into your mind when you found that paper that the message might have been addressed to her — to Miss Mollie Manners?"

"Oh, my God, no," Tilt shouted. "Such a thought never entered my head. That was utterly impossible."

"Tell me the truth," persisted Dooner relentlessly. "Wasn't that the real reason you and her brother entered into a conspiracy to suppress this evidence?"

"Certainly not."

"What was your motive then?"

"We hadn't any," cried Tilt. "The paper had disappeared. We could not account for it. We decided to say nothing about it for the present. That's all there was to it."

"Humph," snapped Dooner disbelievingly.

“That’s all. I’ll ask Mr. Manners to take the stand again.”

Both Tilt and Manners now realized the gravity of their situation and the terrible mess they had made of it. The insinuation that it was Mollie — their Mollie — who had had a rendezvous with Rhodes was absurd, incredible, yet they both felt that once the suspicion was whispered, there was no telling where it might end or what its effect might be on the girl’s reputation. If only they had told about the miserable paper in the first place. Ed Manners’ face as he took the stand was black as a thundercloud.

“Mr. Manners,” said Dooner, “I will put the same question to you that I asked Mr. Tilt. Have you any suspicion, opinion or knowledge as to whom the message was addressed?”

“None whatever.”

“Did you think it was meant for your sister?”

“Certainly not,” Manners answered, restraining himself with effort.

“Why did you not mention finding that message? Tell me the truth.”

For a moment Manners was silent, moving un-

easily in the chair, then turning to give a defiant glance at Tilt, he said slowly:

“ I thought that Mr. Tilt for some reason of his own had hidden or destroyed that paper.”

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST SECRET

THERE were just two passengers for the Inn on the two-sixteen train that afternoon, — Paul Carew and a slender, boyish-looking stranger with intense eyes. On the way up from the station the taxi-driver, with garrulous delight, told them of the strange affair at the club.

“Of course,” he said, “after what was brung out at the inquest, there ain’t a doubt in any one’s mind but that the girl is mixed up in it.”

Carew’s face went white. With a look of incredulous horror in his eyes, he asked:

“What girl do you mean?”

“The Manners girl — Mollie Manners,” the man blundered on.

“My God!” cried Carew. “That’s impossible. It isn’t true.”

The stranger beside him turned a searching glance at him, as if puzzled to account for his vehemence.

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“Of course,” said the taxi-driver hesitantly, feeling perhaps from the manner in which Carew received his statement that he had gone a little too far, “of course, I ain’t saying that she done it herself. I’m only repeating what everybody else is saying about her. And as for that, there’s always a woman at the bottom of everything.”

“But it couldn’t have been Miss Manners,” Carew protested, his face still white and set. “I know it couldn’t.”

Taking it that his veracity had been attacked, the taxi-driver indignantly sought to bolster up his position.

“What for then,” he demanded, “did her brother and Tilt try so hard to keep her name out of it? Why did they keep so quiet at first about the message the doctor was writing when he was shot? And who was he writing it to? She admitted on the stand he was a very good friend of hers. What was she doing at the club all by herself at that hour of the morning? I tell you there’s something fishy about the stories her and her brother told. They’re keeping something back. Maybe Miss Manners is mixed up in it and maybe she ain’t. I’m not say-

ing. All I'm saying is that the girl knows more than she's telling."

"She had nothing to do with it. She couldn't have," insisted Carew warmly.

As the taxi drew up at the Inn, he sprang out hurriedly, and without waiting to wash or change, ran to the garage for his roadster and started at once for his fiancée's home. His companion, standing for a moment on the porch of the Inn, watched his actions with unconcealed interest, and when he turned to go to the desk, his brows were drawn in a pucker as if he was trying to puzzle out why Carew had been so certain about Miss Manners. His manner was abstracted as he wrote his name on the register:

"Richard Devan, New York City."

"Staying for some time, Mr. Devan?" the clerk asked, as he reached for a key.

"Yes," he said, "for several days, probably — perhaps for several weeks."

Meanwhile Carew's arrival at the Manners home had been anticipated a few minutes by Bill Tilt. When the inquest had been adjourned with the customary verdict, "by a person or persons un-

known," Tilt, like the rest of the colony, had gone home for luncheon, but now, seated on the Manners porch with the family, he was having it out with Ed for having practically accused him of secreting Rhodes's unfinished message.

"I didn't intend to let you in for it," Ed was trying to explain. "The disappearance of the pesky thing got me all balled up. I knew Kit couldn't have taken it, for I'd had my eye on her all the time. I knew I hadn't taken it myself. There wasn't any one else there. It must have been you."

"But," cried the aggrieved Tilt, "what on earth would I do it for?"

"I admit that puzzled me," said Ed, "but if you didn't take it, who did?"

"Maybe," interjected the Terrible Kit, who, being a movie fan, was up on mysterious crimes, "maybe there was some one else in the clubhouse, some one we didn't see. Perhaps the murderer still was lurking near the scene of his dastardly crime."

She delivered the last phrase as though she was fairly gloating over the affair, and her mother gave her a reproving glance as Tilt said thoughtfully:

"I wonder if Kit is right. Somebody might have

been hiding in there. After we found the body, we didn't look about for anything else."

"There are a lot of nooks and alcoves," Ed admitted, "where some one could have hidden."

Just at this junction Carew drove up. His face was black with rage as he ran up the steps.

"How dared you bring Mollie into this?" he fairly shrieked at her brother.

"It could not be helped," Ed started to explain, but the wrathful young man would not listen, and turning to Tilt, began hauling him, too, over the coals, for his part in the affair.

"And you, Tilt," he raved. "You have always professed to be a friend of hers."

"It was that fool Doctor Dooner that did it," the Terrible Kit burst out valiantly. "Both the boys did the best they could to keep both Mollie and me out of it."

"Really, Paul," said Mollie calmly, "there's nothing to get excited about. Everybody who knows us knows that none of us could have had anything to do with it."

"Is that so?" exclaimed her lover sarcastically. "You ought to have heard the taxi-driver. He told

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me everybody was saying that the Manners girl was mixed up in it some way."

"Just silly village gossip. They love to talk about us in the village."

"But," groaned Carew, "think of the notoriety of it. Your name will be in all the papers, and the reporters'll hound you to death, prying into everything you ever have done."

"Nonsense!" cried Mollie spiritedly. "What difference does a little unpleasant notoriety make, if only we can discover who killed Doctor Rhodes? After all, that's all that matters. He was my friend, our friend. Nothing that can happen to me means anything if it will help to discover the brutal coward who shot him down."

"You should think about me," cried Carew passionately. "Do you think I like it, having my fiancée's name in all the papers in connection with a murder?"

"I'm sorry you feel that way about it, Paul," said Mollie, still unmoved.

"Promise me that you'll have nothing more to do with it — that you'll keep out of the limelight."

"I can't promise that," she said gravely. "I am

determined to do all I can to help find Walter Rhodes's murderer."

"I forbid your having anything more to do with it," cried Carew.

Mollie's chin went forward with an aggressive thrust, and her eyes flashed with rising anger, but before she could make any retort, Pressly Hart pulled up in his car in front of the house and came up on the porch. In the car with him was John Dixon, a lawyer living in the colony.

"Oh, hello, Tilt," he exclaimed, "it is you I'm looking for. I thought I'd find you here. I am going over to Doctor Rhodes's cottage with Dixon to look through his papers to see if we can find any clue to the mystery. For some reason Dixon wants you along."

"Certainly I'll come," said Tilt, rising, glad of an excuse to absent himself.

"It may interest you to know," Hart explained to him, as they drove away, "that I talked with Doctor Dooner after the inquest. He agreed with me that Rhodes's murder was most mysterious. I decided that in the interests of the club we ought to help clear the thing up and telephoned to the city for

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an experienced detective I knew about. He came out on the two-sixteen and is to meet us at the cottage."

As Tilt listened, he was wondering curiously why Dixon had insisted on his coming, but Hart chattered on, giving him no chance to ask questions, and just as they reached the Rhodes cottage the detective drove up in the Inn taxi. It was the boyish-looking young man who had come up from the station with Carew.

He and Tilt gave each other casual glances and then with a howl of joy fell on each other's neck.

"Bill Tilt!" exclaimed Devan.

"Good old Dick," roared Tilt delightedly.

"What," cried Hart, "do you two chaps know each other?"

"Do we know each other," cried Tilt. "We were buddies in France. I'll tell you, Hart, you've picked some detective. Devan was one of Uncle Sam's very finest intelligence officers."

Their surprised greetings over, they approached the cottage, where they found Mrs. Grady holding mournful court on the porch. All the servants in

the colony — Swedish, Irish, colored and Japanese — seemed to be gathered there, and to each new arrival she was tearfully relating the episode of the midnight telephone message.

“Send these people away,” Hart commanded, and as they departed, he explained to the old housekeeper the mission on which they had come. She was alone in the house, for Rhodes’s body had been conveyed to the undertaker’s shop in the village. She made no objection but led them at once to the doctor’s study, pointing to a large old-fashioned safe that stood in one corner.

“You’ll find them all there,” she said. “That’s where he was after keeping everything.”

“That will be all, Mrs. Grady,” said the lawyer suggestively, as she took her place in the doorway, arms akimbo, evidently intent on seeing what went on, but at his hint she grumbly withdrew, leaving them alone.

“Gentlemen,” said Mr. Dixon, “before we examine the contents of the safe, I would like to relate a curious incident. Several times in the last few years I have happened to look after some small legal matters for Doctor Rhodes. Though I know noth-

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ing in general about his affairs. One day, a couple of weeks ago, he dropped into my office.

“ ‘Dixon,’ he said, ‘I’ve been making a will. I wish you’d look over it and tell me if you think it will stand, and get me some witnesses while I sign it.’ I read through the document, and he signed it, taking it away with him. As he was leaving the office, he turned and came back.

“ ‘Dixon,’ he said, ‘if anything ever happens to me, here is the combination to the safe in my cottage up at the beach.’

“ ‘What do you wish me to do with it?’ I asked.

“ ‘Keep it. Living alone as I do, it is just as well for some one to know where to find things.’ ”

“Do you suppose,” asked Tilt, in awed tones, “that he had any premonition, any warning of the dreadful thing that was soon to happen to him? Did he speak of any threats against his life?”

The lawyer shook his head.

“He was as calm and collected as if he were discussing the weather. There was nothing in his manner to indicate any mental perturbation. The incident made little impression on me at the time, even though I could not help marveling at the con-

tents of his will. I put the slip with the safe combination on it in an envelope and locked it up and never gave it another thought until this morning; when I heard of the murder, I went right into town then and got it."

"When did you say he gave it to you?" asked Hart thoughtfully.

"I've forgotten the exact date. It was about two weeks ago."

"That must have been just at the time he discharged the steward," cried Hart excitedly. "You don't suppose that Gus Pincus had threatened his life, do you?"

"Nonsense," cried Tilt. "Gus Pincus is a light-fingered rascal, but he wouldn't hurt a fly. It's absurd to think of Rhodes being afraid of him."

"Anyhow," suggested Devan, "let's see what is in the safe."

Dixon, combination in hand, quickly opened it, revealing books and papers within in apple-pie order, for Rhodes, like most successful surgeons, had been methodical in everything he did. There were several ledgers in which he had kept accounts of his

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professional work and of the returns from his investments, and in an envelope with them a packet of income tax receipts. As they glanced over these, an exclamation of astonishment escaped his three neighbors. Though they all had looked on him as fairly well to do, none had suspected Rhodes of being anything like a millionaire, yet the receipts showed that he had been paying taxes on an income exceeding seventy thousand.

Practically all his estate, it quickly appeared, was in bonds and stocks, for no deeds were found except for the cottage in which he lived, though his securities filled one of the drawers in the safe. They did not stop to list these but hastened to open a small drawer to which they found a key inside the safe. Within it, with a packet of Liberty Bonds, they found a sealed gray envelope with something written on the outside. Dixon carried it to the window, where the light was better, and together they examined the superscription, which read:

“The last will and testament of Walter Rhodes, M. D., of Rockmont.”

“We’d better not open it,” said Dixon.

“Why not?” said Hart. “You’re his attorney.

"That's undoubtedly just the reason he gave you the combination to his safe."

Dixon looked toward the detective, who nodded approval, whereupon he broke the seal and drew forth a document in the doctor's own handwriting, which read:

June 10, 1921.

I, Walter Rhodes, M. D., being of sound and disposing mind and memory, and considering the uncertainty of life, do make, publish and declare this to be my last will and testament as follows, hereby revoking all other and former wills by me, at any time made:

FIRST: I direct that all lawful and just claims against my estate shall be paid.

SECOND: I direct that my executor shall pay an annuity of six hundred dollars (\$600) in monthly payments to my housekeeper, Bridget Grady, for the term of her natural life, as a recognition of her faithful services to me.

THIRD: I direct that my executor shall pay to Rose Addison, nurse, who has been in my employ for many years, the sum of Ten Thousand dollars (\$10,000) in cash.

FOURTH: The residue of my estate, both real and personal, I give, devise and bequeath to Mary Evelyn Manners, of Rockmont.

FIFTH: I hereby appoint as my sole executor, without bond, and with power to sell, my friend William H. Tilt, and I hereby urge and warn said

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executor, by all lawful expedients, to oppose and resist any claim or claims against my estate, full legal settlement of my wife's interest therein having been made, as by law provided.

As Dixon raised his eyes from the document he had been reading, his glance met the startled eyes of his auditors. In that last paragraph, in that carefully worded warning to his executor, they read a revelation. They sensed that in Walter Rhodes's life there had been a secret — some hidden, ugly thing — that he dared not face, something so repellent, perhaps so scandalous that he had referred to it only in the most obscure way. But Tilt, while he grasped the sinister significance of that last clause as quickly as the others, was even more startled and perturbed by what had gone before.

“I wonder what it means?” he muttered to himself. “He's left everything to Mollie, and he made the will the day after she got engaged.”

“But,” said Dixon, “plainly he was expecting his will to be contested. That last clause refers to a wife who he must have had reason to believe might fight for a share in the money. That paragraph puzzled me when he had me read the will, but as he

volunteered no explanation, I asked for none. If you will recall, there was always a reserve about him that made one hesitate to ask him questions. As a lawyer, I had no reason for trying to question him. The will clearly and plainly stated what his wishes were, and that is all any will can do."

"That last paragraph must refer to some episode that happened years ago," said Pressly Hart. "Who would have thought that Walter Rhodes had a past."

"All men have pasts," said Richard Devan sagely. "So Rhodes was married."

"Married?" cried Hart. "And we all thought him the most confirmed old bachelor you ever saw. Women didn't seem to interest him."

"Why, then," asked Devan, "did he leave his fortune to one, to Miss Manners?"

Meanwhile Tilt's mind had been in a turmoil. The news of what the will contained was astounding, almost incredible. Mollie an heiress, Mollie a millionaire! All Rhodes's money left to her. What would people think about it? What would they say? Already her name was being bandied about. The unfortunate inquest had started the tongues of gossip wagging about her and Rhodes.

“Look here,” he cried, “can’t we keep the contents of this will secret for the present? It will only make talk if it is filed. Is there not some way that it can be withheld until the mystery of the murder is solved?”

“That matter rests in your hands,” said Dixon. “The law allows a reasonable length of time for the filing of a will.”

Devan’s keen eyes had been studying Tilt’s face as he made the proposition, as if trying to discover the executor’s real motive in making it.

“Tilt is right,” he said abruptly. “It can do no harm to keep the contents of the will secret for a few days. Its publication, in fact, might only result in starting a lot of gossip that would obscure the trail of the murderer. What do you say, gentlemen? Shall we pledge ourselves to secrecy until Tilt gives the word?”

“What about Mollie — Miss Manners?” asked Tilt. “Hasn’t she at least a right to know about it?”

“I think,” said Devan, after a moment’s consideration, “you may safely tell her about it, if you will pledge her also to secrecy.”

“Then,” said Hart, half disappointedly, it seemed to Tilt, “you don’t think that she is mixed up in it in any way — in the murder, I mean?”

“Some woman is mixed up in nearly every murder,” said Devan, “but although I have hardly begun my investigation yet, I’m convinced that in the case of Doctor Rhodes’s murder, the woman involved is not Miss Manners.”

“Who is it then?” asked Hart eagerly.

“I don’t know. I haven’t the slightest idea yet. I can only say that when we find the woman involved, we’ll find the murderer.”

“You think a woman did it!” cried Tilt amazedly.

“I didn’t say so. I merely meant that whether a man or a woman did the killing, there is a woman involved in it somewhere.”

Giving the pledge of secrecy that Tilt had suggested, they restored the papers to the safe and separated, Tilt insisting on his old friend making his headquarters at the Tilt cottage.

“It will enable you to carry on your investigations without any one suspecting you,” Tilt explained. “My people are in the mountains, and we’ll be alone

there. I'll give it out that you are an old army mate of mine here on a visit, and you can work unmolested."

"That's a bully idea," said Devan, "if Mr. Hart and Mr. Dixon will help us preserve my incognito."

The reasonableness of this appealed to both of them, and they readily assented. Tilt drove back to the Inn with Devan to get his luggage, but as they rode along together, there came into his mind four puzzling questions, — questions that he did not submit even to his friend, Richard Devan; questions to which, ponder over them though he did for many days to come, he could find no satisfactory answer.

Why had Walter Rhodes left all his money to Mollie Manners the day after her engagement was announced?

Why had Rhodes named him as executor — him, Bill Tilt — when Mollie was to marry Paul Carew?

Who was Walter Rhodes's wife?

Where was she?

CHAPTER V

A NEW MYSTERY

“It’s your theory, then,” said Tilt, as he and Richard Devan sat that evening after dinner on the porch of the Tilt cottage, “that a woman did it?”

“I try not to have theories,” said Devan.

He had had a busy afternoon after their discovery of Walter Rhodes’s will. He had visited the clubhouse and made a minute study of the scene of the crime. He had driven over to see Doctor Dooner and from him had obtained an account of what the inquest had brought forth; and besides, he had spent a long time at the telephone, for what purpose Tilt had no idea.

“It is not a theory, but an accepted fact with investigators,” he continued, “that in ninety per cent. of the cases of premeditated murder, a woman is involved in some way. Old Nature has seen to that. The sex relation is the most impelling motive there is. Where a man kills another in a quarrel,

it may be over property, a fancied insult, without premeditation, a woman may or may not be at the bottom of it; but where a murder is carefully planned, facts show that we can safely assume that there is a woman concerned. But theories otherwise only hamper an investigator. The modern method is to collect the facts and then more facts, and when you have gathered all the facts possible, to try to fit them together."

"I suppose your army work taught you that."

"It surely did. In our intelligence work, we always went about everything that way, noting and making record of even the most trivial things. It was surprising often, when the facts that had been collected by a dozen different investigators were assembled, how enlightening they were. At first most of them would seem utterly insignificant, meaningless, with no relation to each other. As you studied them carefully, you suddenly would discover that two of them matched. You put the two together and began grouping the other facts you had gathered about the two that matched. Before you knew it, you had formed a picture, and the information you sought was before you. In a murder case, I have

found the same method advisable. I collect facts, facts, facts, and when I have assembled them, in most cases I find I have the murderer's picture."

"What facts have you about this case?"

"Not as many as I hope to have in a few minutes when Miss Addison gets here."

"Miss Addison," exclaimed Tilt. The name had a familiar sound, but he could not identify it.

"The doctor's office attendant."

"Where did you find her? How did you manage to locate her?"

"That was easy. I called up several of the nurses' registries and finally got her boarding place. She had not yet heard of Doctor Rhodes's death and naturally wanted to get all the details, so I took the liberty of asking her to come out this evening."

"What do you think she knows about it?"

"A woman in a man's office, working with him day by day, gets to know a lot about him, often knows him better than any one else in the world. I do not know whether Miss Addison has any information, but we will soon find out."

"What other facts have you gathered?"

"Let's jot them down," said Devan, "and see

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whether anything she may tell us will fit into what we already have.”

Seizing a pad he jotted down:

Walter Rhodes two weeks ago makes a will. From this will it is evident that he anticipates a claimant to his fortune to appear.

He shows the will to a lawyer and gives him the combination of his safe.

Question—What put the thought of making a will into his head? Had threats been made against him? Were these threats made in person or by mail? Who would be apt to know about these threats?

“I’d say the nurse would be likely to know if any one did,” interrupted Tilt.

“It’ll do no harm to ask her,” admitted Devan, as he resumed his summary:

Last night a man calls Rhodes to the telephone.

He goes to the club, presumably to keep an appointment with this man.

He waits for some time and starts to write a note.

While writing, he is shot down through the open window.

The use of a rifle indicates that his murderer is a man.

The murderer, having killed him, approaches, takes out Rhodes's revolver, and fires it off to give the semblance of suicide.

The murderer was some one Rhodes knew — some one who knew Rhodes's habits — who knew that he had a key to the club.

Question — Was the murderer one of Rhodes's fellow club members?

“My God,” cried Tilt, “you don't think it was one of us, do you?”

“Don't the facts seem to indicate that it was some one who knew a good deal about Rhodes?”

“They certainly do,” admitted Tilt. “You don't think it could be Gus Pincus, the steward Rhodes discharged?”

“The local police think he did it,” said Devan. “They are planning to arrest him to-night. I had a chat with him this afternoon. He got hold of a bottle of whisky yesterday and doesn't remember much about what he did last night. He knows that he is suspected and is badly frightened.”

“Of course he knew a lot about Rhodes,” said Tilt, “and he was all worked up over his discharge, but I can't believe he would do it.”

“Nor I,” said Devan, “but if he is innocent, his

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arrest will only serve to make the real murderer feel safer.”

“The thing that puzzles me most,” said Tilt, “is the disappearance of that note the doctor was writing. Who do you suppose could have taken it?”

“The murderer probably has it,” answered Devan calmly.

“But there was no one in the clubhouse but Ed Manners and I. You don’t think it was one of us?”

Devan laughed at his friend’s consternation.

“You two didn’t see any one else there, but there must have been some one else. Picture the committing of the crime. The murderer has four things in mind, — to kill Rhodes, to make it look like suicide, to get away safely, and to conceal his rifle. He is so intent on these four things that he forgets about the note Rhodes is writing. Rhodes’s body, as it falls forward on the table, conceals the note. The murderer carries out his plans and reaches home without having been discovered. Naturally, though, he is unable to sleep. As he lies in bed, he reënacts the tragedy, trying to make certain that he has left no clues behind. Suddenly he recalls what Rhodes was doing as he fired at him. The thought appals

him. Rhodes was writing — what? To whom? His name may be on that scrap of paper. It may betray him. He must get possession of it before any one else finds it. He rises hastily and hurries to the clubhouse. He is too late. You and Manners are already there. He conceals himself in one of the alcoves and watches to see what you will do. When you are telephoning, he sees his opportunity. He gets possession of the paper and vanishes. He feels safe against discovery.”

“I hope you are right,” sighed Tilt, “but what do you suppose was the murderer’s motive? That’s what gets me.”

“Who, here in the colony, knows Rhodes best? Who are his oldest friends?”

“The Manners family, I suppose,” said Tilt guardedly. “They must have known him a long time.”

“Any one else?”

“Yes,” said Tilt, “there’s old Hodder, who looks after the boats. He calls Rhodes ‘the Commander.’ They must have been in the navy together, though I never knew till the inquest that Rhodes had been a navy man.”

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“Can you get old Hodder here to-night, right away?” asked Devan, his keen gray eyes showing acute interest.

“Sure! I’ll run down to his shack now and bring him over.”

Not until his return with Hodder a few minutes later did he understand that the errand on which he had been dispatched was a ruse on Devan’s part to be alone when Miss Addison arrived. She was on the porch talking earnestly to Devan, a slender woman of perhaps forty, who even without her uniform looked just what she was, — a sensible, practical, capable trained nurse.

“Would you mind asking Hodder to wait a few minutes on the lawn?” said Devan, as he presented Tilt. “Miss Addison was just about to tell me something that may have a bearing on the case.”

“It was about three weeks ago,” the nurse began, “when Doctor Rhodes made a request that struck me as peculiar. He was always most methodical, letting nothing interfere with his office hours, but one day he said: ‘Miss Addison, please make no engagements for me to-morrow between two and four, and if any one comes send them away. I am expecting

a caller with whom I have an important matter to discuss. Admit no one but him.' 'What's his name?' I asked, to be sure of admitting the right person. 'He'll call himself Mr. Smith,' he answered."

"Did you see this Mr. Smith?" asked Devan eagerly. "Could you describe him?"

Miss Addison shook her head.

"Doctor Rhodes must have been at the window, on the lookout for him. He admitted the man himself, without waiting for him to ring the bell. I was in the back offices making up bandages and did not know there was any one there until I heard excited voices in the front office."

"Excited voices! Was there a quarrel?"

"It did not sound as if they were quarreling. Doctor Rhodes's voice seemed as firm and even as always. It sounded rather as if he was insisting on his caller doing something and as if the man was protesting vigorously against it."

"How long did the caller stay?"

"It must have been over an hour. The doctor himself let the man out, and I did not see him."

"Was that the only time this visitor was there?"

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“No, he came twice afterward, the last time only day before yesterday, and as before his visits always were shrouded in mystery, the doctor himself admitting him and letting him out. I never caught even a glimpse of him.”

“Would you know his voice again if you heard it?”

“I doubt it. I heard it only through folding doors. No, I don’t think so.”

“Is there anything else you can think of that might have a bearing on the case?”

“No, I don’t think there is,” she answered, after a moment’s hesitation.

“Do you know Miss Manners — Miss Mollie Manners?” asked Devan.

“I know that the doctor had a friend of that name, but I never have seen her. Several times he has commissioned me to buy birthday and Christmas gifts for her.”

“Do you know if Doctor Rhodes had ever been married?”

“Married!” she cried. “Why, of course not. He was a typical old bachelor.”

“Call Hodder in,” said Devan, turning to Tilt.

“Miss Addison, I’d be glad to have you stay and hear what Hodder has to say, if you wish.”

“Certainly I’ll stay,” she said. “I’m just as much interested in things as you are.”

“I forgot to tell you,” said Devan, “that Rhodes has left you ten thousand dollars.”

Miss Addison’s eyes filled with tears.

“It was just like him to do that. He was good and kind to every one, but I’d willingly give it all to have him back, or to discover the man who killed him.”

“Hodder,” said Tilt, coming upon the porch just then with the old boatman, “this is Mr. Devan, who wishes to ask you some questions about Doctor Rhodes.”

“All right, sir,” the man replied.

“You called Doctor Rhodes ‘the Commander,’” said Devan. “How long had you known him?”

“A matter of twenty-five, maybe twenty-six years, and a fine man he was, too.”

“Why did you call him ‘the Commander’?”

“That’s what he was when I first knowed him — Commander Rhodes, sir.”

“In the American navy?”

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“ Sure, sir. We seen service together, him and me.”

“ Had he ever been married? ”

The old man's face took on a strange look, its hardening lines indicating a stubborn intent not to reveal too much.

“ That's not for me to be saying.”

“ But he had been married? ”

“ I'm not saying that.”

“ What are you so secretive about it for? ” demanded Tilt, explosively. “ Why don't you tell us if Rhodes was married or not? You know, don't you? ”

“ I'm not saying if I know or if I don't know. Fifteen years ago it was my enlistment ran out, and I was looking for a place when who should I meet but the Commander, and it was him that brought me up here, and just one word he says to me. ‘ Hodder,’ he says, ‘ what's past is buried and ain't to be talked about.’ ‘ Right, sir,’ says I, and it ain't going to be talked about, even with him lying dead there. It was himself put it on me to be silent, if by chance there was anything I knew, and silent I'll be, not that I'm saying there's anything I know.”

“But,” persisted Devan, “if there is anything you know that may help us find who murdered Doctor Rhodes, don’t you see that it is your duty to tell us, your duty as a friend. He was a friend of yours, wasn’t he?”

“The best friend I had in the world,” the old man said.

“Then why won’t you tell us what you know about him?”

“Nothing I could tell could bring him back again,” persisted Hodder stubbornly.

“But wouldn’t you like to see his murderer captured?” said Tilt. “Do you think it’s right to hold back information that may help the man that killed him?”

“It may be right, and it mayn’t. There’s never but the one thing he asked of me, and many’s the kind thing he’s done for me. It ain’t to be talked about, says he, and come what may, I ain’t talking.”

“Perhaps,” suggested Miss Addison in an undertone, “he might talk to Mr. Tilt by himself. The presence of two strangers may bother him.”

Devan nodded understandingly, and turning to Tilt, said:

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“Well, Bill, if Mr. Hodder doesn't wish to take us into his confidence, I suppose that is all there is to it, so as there are some things Miss Addison and I wish to talk over alone, we'll excuse you two.”

“You understand, sir,” said old Hodder apologetically, as he rose to go, “I'd tell you what you're asking if I could, but he says to me, says he, ‘Hodder, there's some things that ain't to be talked about.’”

“I understand,” said Devan, catching Bill's eye in an effort to give him the suggestion that he should try to pump the old man as they went away together.

Tilt caught his meaning, but as he and old Hodder strolled together to the old man's shack, not a word more could he get out of him. Feeling vastly disappointed, he returned home, to find Miss Addison just entering the taxi for the station.

“Get anything more?” asked Devan, as soon as they were alone.

“Not a word. He's as stubborn as a stone fence.”

“Never mind. We'll find some way of making him talk when we are ready. Who else here in the

colony knew Rhodes well — who has known him for a long time? ”

“ I suppose,” said Tilt, after pondering over the question, “ that Mrs. Manners must know him as well as any one.”

“ The girl’s mother? ”

“ Of course, Mollie’s mother.”

“ Do you know the family well enough to take me over there — to drop in quite casually? ”

“ Oh, yes, certainly. I’m over there a lot. It will seem perfectly natural for me to bring over an old pal to meet them.”

“ Come on, then,” said Devan.

When they reached the Manners home, they found its occupants following their accustomed routine, in spite of the day’s exciting events, Mollie and Paul Carew ensconced on the porch, the Terrible Kit away at one of the neighbors, and Ed off somewhere playing auction. Presenting Devan merely as an old army pal, Tilt lingered on the porch for only a moment and then remarked:

“ Dick must meet your mother.”

“ You know where to find her,” Mollie answered lazily from the hammock.

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“Of course,” Tilt answered, leading the way into the house.

There was a glass-enclosed nook off the dining room, originally designed for a conservatory, that Mrs. Manners had appropriated for her own particular den, fitting it up with a couch of many pillows and a reading lamp. Here, as Tilt well knew, it was her custom to spend her evenings, book or magazine in hand. Presenting his friend to her, they chatted a few minutes on various topics until a question from Mrs. Manners gave him the lead he was seeking.

“Have they found any clues?” she asked.

“No,” Tilt answered, “there’s nothing new as yet, but there is something I wanted to ask you. Did you by chance ever know that Doctor Rhodes was married? Did you know his wife?”

Both he and Devan were amazed at the result of his question.

Mrs. Manners sat bolt upright, raising herself with a convulsive start. Her face went ghastly white, and her whole body seemed to stiffen. For a moment she sat there, her lips tensed, her eyes frightened, her whole manner giving them the

impression that she was on guard, alert, terrified.

“What a funny question,” she said, speaking in a hard, metallic tone and evidently making the greatest effort to retain her self-control. “What made you ask me that?”

“But he had been married, hadn’t he?” Tilt persisted. “You’ve known Doctor Rhodes a long time, probably longer than any one else in Rockmont. You must know. There’s something that has come up”—he almost let it slip about the will before he remembered that they had agreed to keep it secret—“something that makes me believe that at some time Rhodes had a wife. Did he?”

“Something about his death—about his murder?” asked Mrs. Manners. She had risen now from her seat and stood facing him, frantic anxiety showing in her manner.

“Yes,” said Tilt, “something about his murder. Was he married?”

Instead of answering him, Mrs. Manners suddenly turned and sat down, burying her face in her hands, as if she would shut out from her memory something that his question had recalled.

“You mustn’t ask me that. I can’t answer it. I won’t,” she almost sobbed, as Tilt stood staring in amazement at her. Devan, although taking no part in the conversation, was watching her closely.

“But it’s important — most important,” Tilt persisted.

“It isn’t possible,” Mrs. Manners burst out. “She didn’t do it. She couldn’t have.”

“Then he was married,” Devan’s voice cut in.

“Please, please, don’t ask me any more questions,” begged Mrs. Manners. “It has been such a distressing day. So much has happened. I mustn’t talk. Give me time to think. Give me till to-morrow. Go, won’t you, Bill, both of you — please go — at once. I must be alone. I must think. I must think what to do. I’ll answer your questions. I’ll tell you anything you wish to know to-morrow. Give me till to-morrow. She couldn’t have done it. It’s impossible.”

CHAPTER VI

SEVERAL SURPRISES

WHEN Tilt got up on Sunday morning, about ten as usual, he was amazed to discover that Devan had breakfasted long before and had vanished, presumably off scouting somewhere for more facts to complete his picture.

“What time did he go out?” he asked the cook.

“It was long before eight. When I came down, before seven, he was sitting on the porch. I made him some coffee, and off he went.”

“He didn’t say where he was going?”

“He did not.”

“Nor when he would return?”

“No, sir. He just drank his coffee and went.”

Somehow Tilt felt cheated. Utterly mystified over Mrs. Manners’ extraordinary conduct the night before, he had tried in vain, as he and Devan walked home together, to extract the investigator’s theory about it, but Devan wouldn’t talk. All the

way home he was silent, and for the next two hours until they went to bed he had sat silently playing solitaire, with his brows wrinkled in thought. Only once had he looked up from the cards and that was to ask for a railroad schedule. Tilt was certain that Devan had already made some deductions from Mrs. Manners' actions, and he had been looking forward to the morning in the hope that Devan would confide in him.

After he had had his breakfast, he tried to settle down to the papers, but even the accounts of Doctor Rhodes's murder, hinting as they did that it was the work of a discharged employee of the club, failed to hold his attention. His thoughts kept reverting to the peculiar wording of the will, and all at once he remembered that he had not yet informed Mollie that she was the legatee of the fortune. It gave him an excellent excuse for going over to see her. If he waited until afternoon, in all probability Paul Carew would be there, and he would have no opportunity for seeing her alone. It had been agreed among them that only Mollie was to be told.

All the way over he was trying to frame words in which to break the news to her, but his effort was

wasted. He found the Manners porch occupied only by the Terrible Kit and one of her chums, Gertie Small. They were sitting close together, apparently in a state of great excitement, and as he approached, he observed that they hastily concealed some object behind their skirts.

“Where’s Mollie?”

“Out,” said Kit.

“Out where?”

“She and Mr. Carew went off somewhere in the car.”

“Is your mother at home?” he asked, visibly disappointed. If it were impossible for him to tell Mollie, as long as he was here he might just as well have another talk with Mrs. Manners. Probably, he reasoned, it had been the presence of Devan last night that had disconcerted her. Undoubtedly this morning, when he was alone with her, she would explain everything.

“Mother’s gone away,” said Kit.

“Gone away!” echoed Tilt, startled. “Where? What do you mean?”

Visions of all sorts of complications arose alarmingly before him. Already people were gossiping

about the Manners family and wondering why he and Ed had tried to avoid mentioning that accursed scrap of paper. He knew, too, that Mollie's appearance and statements at the inquest had started the tongues of gossip and scandal. If on top of all this Mrs. Manners herself had gone away, what would people think?

"Where has your mother gone?" he repeated.

"I don't know," said Kit. "None of us know. When we came downstairs this morning, there was a note from Mother on the table. She said in it that she had to go away for a few days on some business. She said that it was nothing for any of us to worry about, but she didn't tell what it was."

"Didn't she say where she went?" Tilt asked again, more puzzled than ever.

"No, that's all — just what I told you. It's funny, though, she went off so unexpectedly. She hadn't told any of us her plans — not even Ed."

Tilt listened, astounded, perplexed, mystified, as the Terrible Kit rattled on. There was no doubt in his mind that this unexpected departure of Mrs. Manners was in some way connected with the murder of Walter Rhodes. He felt sure that her de-

cision to make this mysterious journey had not been reached until after he had begun to question her about the marriage. There certainly had been some incident in Rhodes's past, some painful episode concerning a woman, with the details of which Mrs. Manners was acquainted. But even so, Tilt could find no theory to account for her marked perturbation the evening before. Why had she refused to answer his question? Why had she begged for time? Where had she gone this morning and for what purpose?

More eager now than ever to find Devan and report to him this amazing new development, he turned to go, but to his amazement the Terrible Kit caught him by the sleeve and looked at him appealingly.

"Bill Tilt," she said, "you are a good friend of mine, aren't you?"

"Why, of course, Kit," he said, wondering what was coming next.

"And I can trust you?"

"Sure you can."

"Bill," she whispered mysteriously, "I know something more about it. I've had a message."

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“What on earth are you talking about? What do you mean — a message from your mother?”

“No,” said Kit, “not from her. It was something vastly more important than that.”

Tilt plumped himself down on a porch chair beside the two youngsters, much puzzled by Kit’s excited manner, and looked inquiringly at Gertie.

“It’s all right,” said Kit reassuringly, “Gertie knows. We got the message together.”

“What message? What do you mean?”

Kit’s voice once again sank to a mysterious whisper as she leaned forward excitedly:

“A message about the murder!”

“A message — from whom?” demanded Tilt.

With a quick jerk, Kit drew aside her skirt, revealing a ouija board.

“Ouija told us something,” she said solemnly, “something most important.”

“Oh, tommyrot,” laughed Tilt in relief. “Surely you girls don’t take any stock in that sort of truck. It’s all nonsense.”

“It isn’t nonsense,” cried Gertie.

“Indeed it isn’t,” insisted Kit. “Lots and lots

of times ouija has given us wonderful messages, and some of them have been true."

"Oh, shucks," growled Tilt; "you're both too big to swallow that sort of thing."

"When things come true," persisted Kit, "you have to believe. And we did have a message — a message about the murder — just a few minutes ago, just before you came up on the porch. We asked the same question twice, and each time we got the same answer."

"What was the question?" said Tilt, interested in spite of his doubts.

"We asked ouija, 'Who killed Walter Rhodes?'"

"And what did ouija say?"

"Promise you won't tell any one. Mother forbade my using the ouija board, but this time I just had to. It was so important to find out."

"All right, I promise."

Still Kit hesitated, studying his face earnestly.

"I'm afraid to tell you, Bill. You think it all a big joke. But we did ask the question, and we got an answer — such a funny answer. We don't know

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what to make of it, but we feel it's dreadfully important. We know it means something, but probably you'll only laugh."

"I promise not to laugh."

"You see," said Kit solemnly, "we've got to tell some one about it. We couldn't tell Mother, even if she were here, because she doesn't like my using ouija. And you'll see when we tell the message why Mollie mustn't know about it. Ed would only laugh at us, so you're the only person we can tell, unless we tell the police."

"For heaven's sake, don't do that," said Tilt, with visions of scareheads in all the papers over the Terrible Kit's pictures.

"We want you to promise that when we tell you, you'll do something, that you'll try to find out what the message means."

"God knows I will do anything and everything to find out who killed Rhodes."

"It said the same thing twice," shrilled Gertie.

"Yes," reiterated Kit, "exactly the same both times."

"What did it say?"

"It said, 'Ask Paul Carew.'"

“Both times the same,” repeated Gertie excitedly.

“Oh, nonsense,” cried Tilt. “Kit, your mother is absolutely right. If you were my daughter, I’d spank you if you ever touched ouija. Ask Paul Carew — what rot!”

“I don’t care,” replied Kit, stiffening with hurt pride. “That’s what the message said, and you promised you wouldn’t laugh and you promised you’d try to find out what it meant. We trusted you with our secret, and you’re a mean, hateful thing. Come on, Gertie.”

Grabbing up their ouija board, the girls started into the house, but Kit paused in the door and turned for a parting fling:

“Of course ouija doesn’t always tell the truth. Several weeks ago I kept asking, ‘Will Mollie marry Paul Carew?’ and every time the answer came, ‘Bill Tilt,’ ‘Bill Tilt,’ but I’m glad ouija doesn’t always tell the truth, for I wouldn’t let Mollie marry you if you were the last man on earth — so there!”

As the door slammed behind the irate youngster, Tilt turned abruptly and started homeward, inclined to moralize on the foolish conduct of the young

among females. Mrs. Manners was right. Kit had no business monkeying with that ouija board. He wondered if he ought not to speak to Mollie and Ed about her psychic venturings and have them make her stop it. It was all nonsense, but where could these two silly youngsters have got such an answer to their question? Probably one or the other of them, consciously or unconsciously, had manipulated the board, but even so, why had they brought in Carew's name? It must have been the Terrible Kit. She had the stronger personality of the two. What could have put it into her silly head to write such a message about her sister's fiancé? Maybe she disliked him, and the dislike expressed itself subconsciously when she got herself into a semi-hysterical state.

Half-bitterly he thought of the other message that she had mentioned, getting his name when she asked whom Mollie was to marry. That certainly was odd. Down in his heart, he had waked up to the fact that he cared for Mollie, that he had wanted her for a wife, before Carew had won her. If only —

He espied Devan half a block ahead and hurried

to catch up with him, eager to tell him of Mrs. Manners' mysterious departure.

"Hello, Devan," he called out, "I've some news that will surprise you."

"What do you mean?" asked Devan and waited for him to catch up. "Have you just discovered that Mrs. Manners has gone away?"

"You know that?"

Devan nodded.

"After our visit there last night and the surprising way in which she acted when you asked about Rhodes's marriage, the more I pondered over it, the more convinced I became that she was likely to make a journey somewhere this morning. That's what I was thinking of when I asked you for a schedule."

"I don't see how you could possibly have made any such deduction," cried Tilt in perplexity.

"I don't quite see myself, but I did. From her actions, it was evident that she knew the secret in Rhodes's past and must have known something about the woman involved. You remember her exclamation, 'She couldn't have done it.' It was apparent that she was suddenly confronted with the idea that the murder was done by this woman, yet for some

reason she believed that the woman was not in a position to have done it. There was only one way in which she could satisfy herself on this point and that was by making a personal investigation. That was the mission that took her to Boston on the first train this morning. I saw her go."

"You didn't shadow her?" There was resentment in Tilt's tone. The idea of having his friends under espionage seemed repellent.

"Don't worry," Devan hastened to reassure him. "It was discreetly done. She hadn't the slightest idea that any one witnessed her departure."

"I suppose," said Tilt, still unmollified, "that you wired on to Boston to have some one pick her up there and shadow her."

"No," said Devan, "nothing like that will be necessary. Mrs. Manners is an intelligent, law-abiding sort. It is only the unintelligent who try to obstruct the workings of justice. As soon as she has returned, she will be ready to tell us everything she knows, or I miss my guess. She is just as anxious as you are to discover who murdered Rhodes, but she is determined to be fair-minded and will not let us suspect this woman, whoever she is,

until she is sure that there is ground for suspicion."

"I'm glad at any rate that you didn't shadow her."

"I would like to know, though," said Devan thoughtfully, "what she and old Hodder said to each other. She spent fifteen minutes at his cottage before she took the train this morning."

CHAPTER VII

IN THE MORNING MAIL

IT wasn't until Wednesday morning — the day after Walter Rhodes's funeral — that Bill Tilt found the opportunity he had been seeking of seeing Mollie alone. Oversleeping, he had missed his regular train, the seven-fifty-three, and arrived at the station barely in time to get aboard the eight-thirty-six. As he passed down the aisle, exchanging nods with his various acquaintances, he was delighted to observe Mollie seated alone and dropped down beside her.

“Oh, Bill,” she exclaimed, “I'm so glad. There's something I wanted to tell you — to show you — something I can't understand.”

“And I,” said Tilt, “have been trying for three days to find you alone. I've something to tell you, something wonderful — a tremendous surprise.”

Apparently giving little heed to what he was saying, the girl had been fumbling in her bag, and now she brought out an envelope and offered it guardedly for his inspection.

“Look, Bill,” she whispered, “look at what came to me in this morning’s mail. It’s the missing message, the scrap of paper that disappeared.”

Amazed, Tilt took the envelope from her hands and examined its contents. It was unquestionably the same paper that he and Ed Manners had seen lying on the table, a prescription blank and written on it the words, “I have waited here for you over ha—” in Rhodes’s well-known hand. Frowningly, he studied it, turning the envelope over and over. There seemed little that would give any clue to the sender. It had been mailed in Rockmont the evening before, and on the envelope were only the words, “Miss Mollie Manners,” written in the hand of some one little used to penmanship. It might be, Tilt decided, either the writing of some illiterate person, or an attempt to disguise some one’s penmanship, but most it looked like the writing of a badly educated child.

“What do you make of it?” whispered Mollie.

“I don’t know,” he answered. “It looks like a child’s writing. I’d say it might have been written by some girl. It looks like a girl’s writing.”

“It struck me that way, too. Whom do you suppose sent it to me?”

There flashed into his mind what Devan had said about it, — that the murderer, having killed Rhodes and made his escape and having successfully concealed his rifle, after reaching home had suddenly recalled the paper on which Rhodes had been writing and in alarm had returned to the scene of the crime, fearful lest it might betray him. But if Devan’s theory were right, why had the murderer mailed this scrap of paper to Mollie? What could have been the motive?

“Was there anything else in the envelope — any note?” he asked.

“No, that was all — just what you have there.”

“Have you shown it to any one else?”

“No, the postman handed it to me just as I was leaving the house this morning. You’re the only person that has seen it.”

“Look here,” he said quickly, “promise me that you will not show it to any one, not yet, at any rate.”

There had come into his mind the scene on the Manners’ porch Sunday afternoon, and the thought

had come to him that possibly Kit, with the aid of her friend Gertie, in some way had retrieved the paper. They both, he realized, were all worked up about the tragedy, and there was no telling to what hysterical ends their doings with ouija might lead them. He determined to get possession in some way of specimens of the handwriting of both youngsters and decide if they had had anything to do with it.

“I wish you'd keep it, Bill,” said Mollie. “I shan't say a word to any one about it. Doctor Rhodes was my very best friend, and every time I saw that paper or thought about it, it would bring back his terrible end.”

“He was indeed your best friend,” said Tilt, “a far better friend than you have any idea of.”

“What makes you say that?”

“We found his will Saturday afternoon. He left nearly a million dollars, and he left it practically all to you. Think of it, Mollie; he left you everything.”

“That would be just like him,” said Mollie softly, with a little quiver in her voice, “but I'd give it all — every cent of it, to have him back.”

“Funny thing about it, though, he made me the executor. I can’t understand why he did that.”

“I’m not surprised at that. He thought a lot of you. He often talked with me about you.”

“For certain reasons we thought it best,” Tilt went on, “to keep quiet about the will for the present. We agreed to tell no one about the will but you. There was one very peculiar clause in it.”

“Was it,” asked Mollie, her voice breaking a little, “was it about his marriage — about that woman?”

“You knew about that?” cried Tilt, astounded.

“Not everything.”

“Tell me about it. Tell me everything he told you.”

“Look here, Bill,” said Mollie, turning to him and speaking in a tense whisper. “I’m going to tell you something I never have told a soul — not even my own mother. I was closer to Walter Rhodes, I think, than any one else in the world. I think he thought more of me than he did of any one else. I know he did. I thought — I still think — he was one of the grandest and noblest of men. There was once, it was years and years ago when I was

eighteen, I thought I was in love with him. You know how silly and romantic girls of that age are. He used to take me riding with him and was always nice to me. To him, of course, I was still a child. I don't think he had realized yet that I was growing up. Once"—her cheeks turned a fiery red—"once I asked him to marry me."

"What—you asked Walter Rhodes to marry you!"

"It sounds terribly foolish now, but that's what I did. It was then that he told me about it."

"Told you what?"

"About his marriage. It seems that years and years ago, when he was a young surgeon in the navy, he met a beautiful girl and became wildly infatuated with her. He courted her arduously for two weeks, and then they were married. Right after that he was ordered to the Philippines and was gone for two years. The first year he was away, there was a child. He was reported killed, and for months nothing was heard of him. He had been wandering in the bush for months, insane from a blow on the head, cared for by the natives, I guess. When they found him, it was a long time before he

was well. They took out the bone that was pressing on his brain. He came home, still crazy in love with his wife, and found her married to another man."

"How terrible for him."

"I don't know just what happened after that. Of course, there was a terrible scene and they separated. My father wanted him to get a divorce, but he wouldn't do it. I think he still loved her. I believe he loved her to the day of his death."

"What became of the woman?"

"I don't know. He didn't tell me that."

"And the child — what became of it?"

"I don't know. I think my father knew, and perhaps my mother knows something about it. Of course, I never talked with them about it."

"I'm sure your mother knows. That's why she has gone away — at least that's what Devan thinks."

"Mr. Devan — I don't understand. What has he to do with it?"

"Oh, I've been intending to tell you about him. Pressly Hart thought the murder was so mysterious that the club ought to make its own investigations, so he hired Devan to conduct it."

“I thought he was a friend of yours.”

“He is. I didn’t know he was on the case till we met at Rhodes’s house. I saw a lot of him in France. He’s a regular wizard at finding things out.”

“I do hope,” said Mollie with a sigh, “he finds out soon who murdered Doctor Rhodes. It’s a terrible strain, this waiting and wondering.”

“He has found out a lot already. He had old Hodder up at the house and questioned him. He wouldn’t talk much, yet from what he said we are convinced that he knew Rhodes’s secret. It’s practically certain, too, that your mother knows that Hodder knew.”

“Mother — Hodder ——” exclaimed Mollie perplexedly. “Why, I didn’t suppose she knew there was any such person as Hodder; she hardly ever goes near the club.”

“She knew Hodder, just the same. The fact is, she spent fifteen minutes or so at his shack yesterday morning before she went away.”

“What can it all mean — Mother talking with old Hodder — I don’t understand.”

“No more do I. Both your brother and I, right

from the start, have been positive that it was a man who murdered Doctor Rhodes. A woman would not have used a rifle. Nor is it likely that Rhodes would have been meeting a woman at that hour in the morning. He was not that sort."

"I wonder — could it have been" — there was horror at the thought in Mollie's tone — "could it have been that woman's child?"

"That's just a possibility," ventured Tilt. "Perhaps your mother can tell us something when she returns. I am positive her sudden trip was connected with the secret in Doctor Rhodes's life."

The train was now nearing the terminal. In a few minutes Tilt and Mollie would be separating, he to his business and she to her shopping, yet it did not seem to Tilt that he had had half long enough with her to talk things over.

"Tell me," said Mollie, as people began gathering up their parcels, "what have the police done?"

"They have Gus Pincus locked up. The only charge against him so far is drunkenness and disorderly conduct. They probably will try to make out a case against him."

“We must not let them do that,” said the girl determinedly. “He had nothing to do with it.”

“No,” agreed Tilt. “I think you are right about that. It is just as well, though, to let them use him for a stalking horse for a few days. It will serve to draw attention away from ——”

“From the Manners family, I suppose you mean,” she finished, as he hesitated.

“No, from what Devan is doing.”

“Paul says every one in the village is gossiping about us already. He still is furious at me because I talked at the inquest. He has been trying to get me to promise him that I will take no part in the investigation. He even urged me to go away for a while. He dreads all the publicity.”

“But you’re not going?”

There was sharp dismay in Bill Tilt’s voice. The very thought of Rockmont without Mollie appalled him. More and more each day he was realizing how much her companionship meant to him. The prospect of life at Rockmont after Paul Carew had married her and taken her away loomed up very drab and dreary.

“Of course I’m not going away, Billy. Do you

think I care what people say, or how much I get mixed up in the case, if only the doctor's murderer is discovered and punished. Oh, I wish I knew who was guilty — who committed such a brutal, cowardly crime."

"Devan suggests that it might have been a member of the club ——"

"Not one of us," cried the girl incredulously.

"Yes, he pointed out that the murderer must have been some one familiar with Doctor Rhodes's habits and with the club. He must have known that Rhodes carried a key to the clubhouse. It must have been some one Rhodes knew and knew well, or he hardly would have gone out at that hour for a meeting. Really, circumstances do point to some club member."

"Or to a club servant."

"There are only two — Pincus, whom Rhodes discharged and old Hodder."

"I'm certain it wasn't poor harmless old Gus. He might steal, but he never would kill anybody."

"I know it wasn't old Hodder. He would have laid down his life for Rhodes."

"I can't conceive," said Mollie thoughtfully, "of

his making a date with either of them at one o'clock in the morning. It was neither of them."

As they made their way out of the train, there was little opportunity for further conversation, and at the street their ways parted.

"Look here," said Tilt, "when am I going to get another chance to see you alone and talk about things? I want to read that will to you."

"Come over this evening."

"But won't Carew be there?"

"No, Paul has gone away. He said last night he was leaving on the midnight train for Boston and might have to be away for several days."

"Fine," cried Tilt, delighted at the news. "I'll be over to-night right after dinner."

Light-hearted at the prospect of so soon having another opportunity of seeing her alone again, he left her at the Avenue, and hurrying on across Forty-second Street at Sixth Avenue, was held up by the traffic. As he waited on the curb, his mind still absorbed with the puzzling tragedy that had shocked their little community, a taxicab passed, going north. In it were a man and a woman engaged in earnest conversation. In that trance-like

condition that often accompanies mental concentration, Tilt saw them with his eyes, in fact looked directly at them, but unrecognizingly, until his subconscious mind began hammering a warning at him.

He looked again at them, this time consciously, and gasped in amazement. In the taxicab that went whirling on by was Paul Carew, who only a few hours before had told Mollie that he was taking the midnight train to Boston.

Tilt stood staring after the cab perplexedly. What could it mean? Why had Carew lied to Mollie? Why had he spoken of going away and then not gone? What could have been his motive for deceiving her? While inclined to be a little jealous of Carew, and conscious now that from the first he had neither wholly liked nor wholly trusted the man, Tilt still was loath to believe him a deliberate liar. Yet what else was there for him to think about it? It certainly had been Paul Carew in that cab.

And the woman with him, the woman with whom Carew had been conversing so earnestly. Who was she? What could that mean? Tilt, as he recalled

the scene, was certain that her face was familiar, that she was some one he knew and had talked with, but whom?

All at once it came to him — the amazing knowledge of who she was — the woman he and Devan had talked to for an hour hardly two days ago,— Rose Addison.

Though he had caught just a passing glimpse of her face, Tilt was positive as to her identity. But what could this new development mean? What angle of the mystery could thus have brought together Rhodes's trusted office attendant and Paul Carew? Were they old acquaintances? Why had Carew made up an elaborate story about going to Boston and then not gone? Why was he riding up Sixth Avenue with Miss Addison, when he was supposed to be in Boston? About what had they been talking so earnestly?

Perhaps, though, Tilt tried to think, there was a possibility that Carew, seeking to solve the mystery on his own hook, had discovered Miss Addison as Devan had done? He tried to persuade himself that this was the logical explanation of Carew's acquaintance with the nurse. He reasoned that if

he and not Carew were Mollie's fiancé, he would have left no stone unturned to try to discover who it was that had murdered one of her best friends; yet his arguments failed to convince himself.

He felt there was something suspicious — something wrong — something about Paul Carew's conduct that should be investigated.

All through the day he gave little thought to his business. His mind kept reverting to the new problems that had presented themselves in the mystery. Again and again he found himself wondering about Carew, though his sense of fair-mindedness inclined him to attribute his suspicions of Carew's conduct to his own jealousy.

All through the afternoon he kept watching the clock, waiting for the time to come when he should start for home; he planned to go out on the five-ten, which he guessed would be the train on which Mollie would return.

As he walked to the station three questions kept recurring to his mind, — questions to which he could find no logical answers, yet questions which he felt must be answered before the mystery of the murder was solved.

What was the mystery in Rhodes's life that was shared by old Hodder and Mrs. Manners?

Who could it have been that had mailed the missing message to Mollie, and for what reason had it been mailed to her, of all persons?

And why had Paul Carew lied to her about going to Boston?

CHAPTER VIII

GROUND FOR SUSPICION

THERE was a chance that Mollie might be going out on the same train. That was the thought in Tilt's head, as in true commuter fashion he rushed through the station with hardly a second to spare and flung himself on the last car. Making sure she was not in that car, he began a march through the long train, studying the backs of all the passengers, half-hoping, half-fearing that he might find her.

If she should happen to be there, he was bothered about just what he ought to say to her. It hardly seemed right to keep from her the news of his discovery. If Carew were deceiving her, she surely ought to know it. That Mollie's fiancé had deliberately lied to her about going to Boston was Tilt's firm conviction, and common sense argued that it would be better for Mollie to learn that Carew was untrustworthy now, before her marriage, than when it was too late.

Yet how was he to tell her? He couldn't. It would be the act of a cad. Yet, on the other hand, he argued with himself, there were the long years of friendship between them. He had been almost like a brother to her. Surely that gave him the right to speak. If he didn't tell her, who would?

Still arguing the question with himself as he finished his journey through the train without finding her, he flung himself into the only half-seat vacant in the smoker, only to discover, somewhat to his annoyance, that the occupant of the other half of the seat was Smithers, the village grocer and police chief.

"S'pose you've heard the news, Mr. Tilt," Smithers began. "We had to let that fellow Pincus go this morning. They alibied him out of the murder. All that night he was drunk and blind to the world in the Dutchman's place. There was six or eight people that saw him there. Tough place that is, but being just outside the town limits, it ain't none of my business what goes on there."

"Of course they let Pincus go," said Tilt. "I knew he was no murderer."

“ We’ve got some new clues, though, good ones,” Smithers continued.

“ What are they? ”

“ I ain’t telling them yet,” said the grocer mysteriously, “ but between you and I, Mr. Tilt, it’s my private opinion that when the murderer is found, it’ll be one of Rhodes’s own friends, somebody right there in Rockmont, more’n likely somebody right in the club.”

“ Somebody in the club — our club,” echoed Tilt, more perturbed than he would have let Smithers know at hearing him proclaim the same thing that Devan had suggested.

“ Yes, siree,” said Smithers, letting his voice sink to a whisper, as he bent toward Tilt confidentially, “ it wouldn’t surprise me if that there Manners family wasn’t connected up with it, not that I’m saying that any of them done it.”

“ What makes you think that? ” said Tilt, steeling himself to make his voice sound natural, although inwardly he was boiling with rage and indignation at the suggestion. He was determined, however, to make the most of his opportunity and to try to worm from Smithers all that he knew or

thought he knew about the case. While he resented, as he would if his own family had been involved, this ridiculous effort of the village police to fasten the crime on the Manners family, he was wise enough to see that his best policy would be to keep cool and find out all he could from the grocer.

“What have you found out?” he asked.

“Well, there’s that girl — the oldest one — her and Rhodes was extra good friends. I’ve seen them lots of times riding around together. She was there at the clubhouse early that morning.”

“She came there to meet me — to play tennis.”

“Yes, I know that’s what you both said, but she was there before you, and I venture to say you don’t know for how long. Then there was that slip of paper the kid sister of hers let slip about. Ed Manners acted mighty funny about that, trying to make out like he thought you took it. Then, on top of that, Mrs. Manners — the old lady — disappears, and now Ed’s gone.”

“What,” cried Tilt, “Ed Manners gone away.”

“Yep,” said Smithers, nodding his head satisfiedly. “My daughter, Clara, works in the ’phone exchange. A long-distance call come in for him

this morning from Boston. 'Twas his mother that was talking to him. My girl didn't know that I had Ed Manners under suspicion and didn't listen in, so she doesn't know what they was talking about, but when she came home at noon, she just happened to mention it. Right away I smelled a rat, and I hustled into town and went right down to Manners' office. I ain't saying I'd have arrested him if he'd been there, but I was going to question him. I was too late and missed him. They said he'd gone out of town on the eleven o'clock train, and nobody seemed to know where he'd gone or when he was expected back."

"Probably he's just off on a business trip," Tilt suggested, eager to allay Smithers' suspicions, although himself vastly puzzled by the news. That Mrs. Manners herself should have unexpectedly gone on a journey was perplexing enough, but her sending for Ed to join her surely indicated that something important must have happened. As he hurried homeward, he was hoping that Devan would be there when he arrived. There were many new developments that he wished to discuss with him.

To his annoyance, on reaching home, the cook informed him that Devan had telephoned, saying that he might be a little late for dinner. Impatiently awaiting his guest's arrival, Tilt sat on the porch trying to assemble the new facts he had learned and to piece them together so as to make them mean something, but in vain.

An inspiration came to him. He remembered the telephone number where Devan had reached Rose Addison. He would call her up and ask her about Paul Carew.

Miss Addison herself answered his call.

"Oh, Miss Addison," he said. "This is Mr. Tilt, Bill Tilt of Rockmont — You met me ——"

"Oh, yes, I remember you. Have you learned anything new? Have you found the man who did it?"

"No, but there's something I wanted to ask you. How long have you known Mr. Carew?"

"Carew — I don't know any one named Carew."

"Paul Carew," repeated Tilt, surprised. "You know him, don't you?"

"Never heard of him in my life. Who is he?"

came the prompt response, and amazed though Tilt was by it, still he recognized in her tones, even over the telephone, the ring of truth.

“But I saw you with him,” he expostulated excitedly, “only this morning, going up Sixth Avenue in a taxicab.”

“I did that all right,” she replied, “but the gentleman with me wasn’t Mr. Carew. It was Mr. Raymond of the Trust Company.”

“I guess I must have been mistaken,” said Tilt weakly, as he rang off.

More perplexed than ever, he returned to his seat on the porch. Despite her denial that she knew Carew, he was positive he had not been mistaken. From her manner he was almost convinced that Miss Addison might have believed that her companion *was* “Mr. Raymond of the Trust Company.” But who was Mr. Raymond? Was it a name that Carew had assumed in making Miss Addison’s acquaintance, and if so, what had been his purpose? He wondered if there really were any person of that name. The longer he thought about it, the more mystified he became. His first impression of Miss Addison had been that she was wholly to be trusted. Could

it be that both he and Devan had been mistaken in her?

Seven o'clock, the hour for dinner, came and went. Devan had not yet arrived. At seven-thirty Tilt, deciding to wait no longer for him and mindful of the engagement that he had made with Mollie to read her the will, ordered the cook to serve his dinner. To his annoyance there was still further delay, and it was nearly eight before the food was brought on the table.

Wondering what could be keeping Devan, he sat down alone, hungry and out of temper with everything, and just then the telephone rang. Thinking of course it must be Devan, with further apologies for his tardiness, he sprang up to answer it. It was the telegraph operator at the station.

"Telegram for William Tilt," she announced.

"This is Tilt. Go ahead," he answered, half expecting that it might be some word from Mrs. Manners or Ed.

"It's dated Stamford. 'Gone to Boston on important business.' Signed 'Dick.'"

"All right," he answered.

"You understand it?" queried the operator.

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently, as he hung up the 'phone and sat down to his chilling soup.

He didn't understand it at all. First it was Mrs. Manners who had departed mysteriously, and then Ed and now Devan. What was happening? Surely he had a right to know. His friendship with the Manners family certainly should entitle him to their confidence. Besides, was he not the executor of Walter Rhodes's will? That in itself, he reasoned, gave him a right to know all the moves that were being made in the case.

But particularly with Devan did he feel exasperated. They had been working together, and he had told Devan everything he knew. "It was a dirty trick of Dick's," he growled to himself, "to go off this way." There were so many new angles developing right here at home that demanded Devan's attention.

There was the missing message that had been mailed to Mollie. There was Carew's strange conduct, telling Mollie that he was going to Boston, and then not going. Then, too, what had Carew been doing in Miss Addison's company? And why had Miss Addison denied knowing Carew?

As he pondered over all these unanswered questions, vague alarm began to possess him. He recalled the certainty with which Smithers had expressed the belief that the Manners family was in some way concerned in Walter Rhodes's death. Of course, the very idea was absurd, but — what could have been the mission that had taken them all to Boston?

At any rate, he felt positive that Mollie knew nothing about it. Her mother more than likely was the custodian of the secret in Rhodes's life, and perhaps she had shared it with her son, but Mollie, he still felt confident, had been entirely frank with him. And as his thoughts turned to his conversation with her, he hastily finished his solitary meal. She would be expecting him, and first he would have to stop at the doctor's house and get the will out of the safe. Fortunately he had the combination. John Dixon had turned over to him as executor the slip containing the figures. Stopping only long enough to get the figures out of his desk, he set out for Rhodes's house.

As he neared a corner where he would turn into the lane leading to the house, he saw advancing

through the gathering darkness a slender figure and would have passed it by, had not a hand reached out and clutched his arm.

“Oh, Bill,” cried a voice gleefully, “I’m so glad I met you.”

He groaned inwardly. It was the Terrible Kit.

“You remember,” she cried excitedly, “that message I told you we got. I’ve just been over to Gertie Small’s house, and we’ve had another one — another message.”

“Tommyrot,” exclaimed Tilt. “I haven’t any time to listen to such nonsense. Run along home.”

“Where are you going? I’ll go with you,” said Kit calmly, falling into step beside him. “I’ve got to tell somebody about it, and as we told you about the other message, you just must listen to this.”

“You can’t come. I’m going over to Doctor Rhodes’s house to get some papers.”

“Why shouldn’t I? There’s nobody there now but old Mrs. Grady.”

“All right, come on then,” said Tilt crossly, knowing from experience that it would be hard to shake off the Terrible Kit if once she made up her mind

to accompany him. "Fire away — what was the message this time?"

"Now remember," warned Kit gravely, "you promised the last time not to laugh at us, and you did. I hate you for it, but I've got to tell it. It sounds dreadfully important."

"Fire away. I promise not to laugh."

"Well, I was over at Gertie's house and there was nobody there but us and we were talking about the murder and all at once an uncanny feeling came over us. It was just as if some one was trying to talk to us and couldn't. We both felt a presence, just as plain. We didn't have a ouija board there — Gertie's mother burned hers up — but we both of us just knew there was somebody there trying to talk to us — to tell us something."

"And what did you do?" asked Tilt, his curiosity aroused in spite of his disbelief.

"We got a pad and paper and Gertie took a pencil in her hand and then we turned out the lights. I put my hand around her wrist and held it and we both sat there waiting — waiting. By and by it seemed as if we could feel the Presence nearer and nearer and we got all tingly and it was all we could

do to keep from shrieking. Then something happened."

"What was it? What happened?"

"All at once the pencil in Gertie's hand began to move. She tried to hold it still but the power kept moving it and moving it all over the paper. We both of us sat there just too scared to breathe and all at once it stopped. We just sat there terrified for ever and ever so long and by and by I got up courage enough to turn on the lights." Kit lowered her voice to a mysterious whisper. "And we read the message."

"What did it say?"

"Scrawled all over the paper in funny looking writing — it didn't look a bit like either Gertie's or mine — were the words, 'find the girl,' 'find the girl' — just that and nothing else."

"And what do you think it means?" Tilt asked, mentally determining that as soon as Kit's mother came home she should be informed about these nerve-wracking venturings of Kit's into the spirit world.

"I don't know," said Kit impressively. "You remember the other message about Paul Carew.

Gertie and I have decided that in some way Paul and some girl are mixed up in the case. If only we could find the girl, maybe we could solve the mystery. You will help us, won't you, Bill?"

As they talked, they had come close to the Rhodes house, passing between two tall rows of poplars that marked the path to the front door. The front of the building, with the blinds tightly drawn, presented a gloomy and forbidding aspect, reminiscent in its very appearance of the tragedy that had befallen its late occupant.

"Let's go round to the back door," suggested Kit. "We'll probably find Mrs. Grady in the kitchen."

With Kit still hanging on to his arm, he made his way around the side of the house. As he did so, a ray of light coming from a side window of the front room caught his eye, and stopping quickly, he detected the movement of some one in the room.

"There's a man in there," whispered Kit.

His own first impression confirmed, they both crept softly up to the window for a better view, for the blind here had been drawn to, leaving only a scant inch at the bottom.

Curiously they peered into the room, wondering

who the man was and what business he could have at this hour in a house supposed now to be tenanted only by the old housekeeper.

“Oh, look,” cried Kit in a tense whisper. “He’s trying to open the safe.”

CHAPTER IX

A MYSTERIOUS INTRUDER

THE first sensation of which Tilt was conscious when he realized what the intruder was doing was one of indignation. Burglary was unheard of in Rockmont. What with the murder and everything, the whole place seemed all at once to be going to the devil. But quick on the heels of this thought came a sharp realization of his own carelessness, coupled with bitter self-reproach. Rhodes's will had made him the legal custodian of Mollie's fortune. Much of it was in negotiable securities right there in that safe. He ought to have known better than to leave so much valuable property with no one but the old housekeeper to guard it.

Of course, only John Dixon and Pressly Hart and himself — and, to be sure, Richard Devan — had known of the wealth concealed there, but then some one of them might have tattled to his wife. There was a possibility that by now the whole village knew about it. It was sheer carelessness on his part.

All these thoughts flashed through his mind in the

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second he stood there stupidly, watching the man at the safe, then came the galvanizing thought that something must be done about it — at once.

“Quick,” he whispered to Kit. “We’ve got to capture him. We’ll slip around to the back of the house. Probably he got in that way. Maybe he has left the door there open for his get away. You stand guard there, and I’ll slip in and nab him.”

“Oh, Bill,” moaned Kit in a scared whisper, as they ran, “I’m scared. Maybe he’ll — he’ll kill you.”

“Nonsense,” said Tilt. “I’ll grab him before he knows I’m there.”

“But — but — there may be two of them,” blubbered the terrified youngster. “Oh, Bill, please, please, let’s go for help.”

“And let him get away,” scoffed Bill. “I’ll take the chance that he is alone.”

Though far from being anything of a coward, Kit’s suggestion that there might be more than one of the burglars had for a second given Tilt something of a shock, and he found himself vainly wishing that he had a revolver with him.

He realized that he would have to trust to a

surprise attack. The glimpse he had had through the window had revealed a tall, powerful, roughly dressed figure, with a dark hat or cap pulled well down over his eyes. And there might be two, but he must take a chance. Gathering wrath at this intruder, this robber who was planning to plunder Mollie of her fortune, seemed to add to his strength. He wanted to get his hand around the fellow's neck, to strangle him, to punish him for his temerity.

As they reached the porch in the rear, they found the kitchen door standing wide open, which was almost to be expected. It was quite within possibilities that Mrs. Grady might have gone off to the village and left it that way. Half the people in Rockmont went to bed at night leaving their doors and windows unlocked, such was their confidence in the peace and quiet of the little colony.

"Stand here and keep your eyes open," he whispered to the trembling Kit, as he shook off her clutching hand and slipped noiselessly in at the kitchen door. The room was in darkness. For an instant he stood there stock-still, listening but hearing no sound, trying to visualize the arrangement of the rooms in the house. In the left corner, as he re-

called it, there was a door that led into a butler's pantry, which opened into the dining room. Between the dining room and the room where the burglar was ran a wide hall.

Noiselessly but swiftly he crept through the kitchen, cautiously pushing open the swinging door of the pantry and holding it so that it would make no sound behind him. On through the dining room, step by step, he advanced, feeling his way, his presence still undiscovered. As he reached the hall, the door into which stood open, he became aware of a dim light ahead, apparently a reflection from the pocket flashlight the burglar was using.

Poised on tiptoe, he paused again to listen.

He could hear a slight sliding sound, the noise made by the burglar as he turned the safe knob this way and that on the dial, seeking the click that would give him the clue to the combination. Still Tilt listened, straining his ears to catch the sound of breathing, wondering not without trepidation if in the darkness ahead of him there was one man — or two. Apparently there was only one, and with a feeling of relief, he moved once more swiftly forward.

Still unnoticed by the burglar, he reached the doorway of the room where the man was at work. Tilt, from where he stood, could see the man plainly now, still on his knees, intent on the safe before him, the radiating rays of his flashlight making a murky halo about him, although all the rest of the room was shrouded in darkness.

Crouching with muscles tensed, gauging the distance with his eye, Tilt sprang for him, — only to come crashing to the floor with a terrifying racket. He had come to grief on a small tabouret that the burglar, as a precaution against being surprised, had thoughtfully placed between the scene of his activities and the doorway.

Instantly the flash went out. Tilt, as he struggled desperately to regain his footing, heard a muttered oath from the burglar and a frightened cry from Kit. Recovering himself as quickly as he could, he sprang to the door, intent on blocking the man's escape, but realized at once that he was too late, that the man had slipped by him in the darkness as he lay prostrate. He could hear the thud of running feet in the hallway, and he turned in pursuit.

Again there rose from the terrified Kit, out on the porch, a frightened cry:

“ Bill, Bill, where are you? What’s happened? Are you hurt? ”

Desperately he dashed on in pursuit. At the pantry he was close behind his quarry, but the door swinging back in his face delayed his progress just long enough to enable the man ahead of him to reach the kitchen door.

Roughly thrusting Kit to one side, the man sprang off the side of the porch and vanished in the shrubbery.

Kit, now shrieking at the top of her voice, clutched desperately at Tilt as he emerged, but, shaking her off, he ran on in pursuit, intent only on capturing his man. As he plunged through the shadows in the direction he imagined the man had taken, he tripped on something or somebody in the bushes, and all but fell a second time. The impression he received was that a foot had deliberately been thrust out in his path, with the intention of tripping him. Quickly recovering his balance, he turned to grapple with his assailant, whoever it had been.

To his wonderment he found his arms encircling a slender, girlish figure.

Realizing that the delay had served its purpose and that further pursuit of the fugitive would be fruitless, in spite of his bewilderment, he held tightly to his captive, feeling sure she was a confederate of the burglar, and began dragging her back to the kitchen porch.

“For God’s sake, Kit,” he commanded roughly, “stop that screeching and find where the lights turn on. I’ve got one of them.”

As he waited for the lights, still clutching his captive, he could feel her heart pounding in fright against his body and could hear her breathing in quick, convulsive jerks, though she uttered no word. Confident that he had captured a sentinel the burglar had posted, he determined to make every effort to extract from her the man’s identity. He felt that in her lay the only possible clue to his capture. As Kit at last found the place to turn on the lights, he half-dragged, half-carried the girl across the porch and into the kitchen, and thrusting her into a chair and still holding her by one arm, turned to look at her.

He found himself gazing into the black, limpid, frightened eyes of a pretty Italian girl, perhaps seventeen, whose great shock of hair, loosened in his struggle with her, had come tumbling about her chalky face.

“Who was the man — that man who got away?” he demanded.

“Why, Bill,” cried Kit, “I know this girl. It’s Conchita.”

As Kit recognized her, the girl, pulling her arm loose from Tilt’s grasp, covered her face with her hands and began to weep audibly, violently.

“Who’s Conchita?” Tilt asked wonderingly.

“She’s old Marta’s daughter. She lives down in the village. I went one year to the public school for a month or two, and she was in my class.”

As Tilt looked at the weeping girl, his anger toward her vanished. After all, she was only a youngster, a mere child. If some evil-minded person had persuaded her to join in the burglary, she surely was far from being a hardened criminal. It would, he felt sure, be comparatively easy to learn from her all she knew about the attempted robbery. Soothingly he began to comfort her, and as she be-

came calmer, to question her about her presence there.

“I come to see Miss Grady,” she insisted. “I see a light in the house and a man there. I got scared and hide in the bushes.”

Try as he could, that was all Tilt could get out of her, and she was firm in her denial that she knew who the man was, calling on the Virgin and all of the saints to attest that she was telling the truth. While he still was questioning her, Mrs. Grady arrived, out of breath, indignant, and much perplexed. With many an exclamation she listened wonderingly to Tilt’s narrative of what had happened in her absence.

“It’s meself that was called away by the tili-
phone,” she explained volubly. “Nora Dolan —
her that lives at the other end of the village and used
to be Father Riley’s housekeeper — my own cousin
once removed, was hurted, so they said, and was
asking for me.”

“Who said it?” asked Tilt eagerly. “Who
called you on the ’phone?”

“It was a man’s voice — the doctor, he said he
was — and he said Nora was hurted bad, and when

I got there there was nothing the matter with her at all, at all, and she never had sent for me.”

“ Did you close and lock the kitchen door when you went out? ”

“ It’s that rattled I was I couldn’t be saying for sure. Belike I left it just the way it was, standing wide open.”

“ This girl here — do you know her? ”

“ Do I know her? ” the old woman bent down and scanned the face under the tumbled hair. “ Sure, and I know her well. It’s Conchita Burreli. One of the doctor’s patients, she was, God rest his soul. She’s often after coming here.”

Her friendship with Mrs. Grady confirmed, Tilt began to fear that he might have been overhasty in judging the girl. At least her tale had all the earmarks of probability. While it was obvious that the telephone call had been a ruse to make sure that Mrs. Grady would be out of the way, it seemed entirely likely that the girl’s presence in the bushes was a coincidence. At any rate, since both Kit and Mrs. Grady knew her and knew where she lived, it would be an easy matter at any time to investigate her story further. The pressing problem that now con-

fronted him was what to do with the securities in the safe.

He had made up his mind, after listening to Mrs. Grady's story, that it was unsafe to leave them where they were, even for a single night longer. But where could he find a safe place to put them at this hour of the night? Ah, the station-master's strong box at the station!

That was the very place for them. Right now he would seal them up in a package and take them over there and leave them. In the morning he would take them into the city with him and place them in a safe-deposit box.

Wonderingly the Terrible Kit watched him as he opened the safe. One document only he left out of the parcel, — the will. That he slipped into his pocket to show to Mollie.

“What's that paper?” asked Kit curiously.
“What are you going to do with that?”

“That is Doctor Rhodes's will,” he explained.
“He made me his executor.”

It was none of Kit's business, he felt, and ordinarily he would have told her so, but somehow the exciting events they had been through together

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seemed to have brought them into closer and more mutually appreciative relations. After all, Kit was a game little thing, even if she always were telling him that she hated him.

“Who’d he leave his money to?”

“I can’t tell you that. It’s a secret.”

“Do you suppose that was why he was killed — because of the way he left his money?” questioned Kit, her vivid imagination already at work. She just revelled in mysteries.

“No, of course not,” said Bill bluntly, but as he trudged over to the station, with Kit still sticking at his side, her question turned his thoughts in a new direction.

Was it possible, he wondered, that the doctor’s will had supplied the motive for his murder? There might have been some one who had expected to inherit his wealth, and learning of his intention to leave everything to Mollie Manners, had made away with him in an effort to thwart his plans. Perhaps the murderer, learning too late that the will already had been signed, had made a desperate attempt to open the safe in order to destroy it. Tilt cursed himself for the stupid way in which he had permitted

the burglar to escape unidentified. If he could only identify the man, he might be in a position to solve the murder.

But who was there who could have hoped to have profited by Rhodes's death? It must have been some relative. But what relatives had he except that mysterious wife from whom he had been separated for so many years? It might have been her — or her child.

That child must be a man grown by now.

The longer he pondered over this theory, the more probable it seemed to be. If only there were some one with whom he could discuss it — Devan, for instance. If Mrs. Manners would only return and tell him what she knew of the secret in Rhodes's life, he began to feel confident that he quickly could locate the murderer. The doctor's child — that's who it must have been!

His precious parcel safely deposited with the station-master, he walked back with Kit to her home.

“What do you know about Conchita?” he asked.

“She's a bad girl,” answered Kit promptly.

“What do you mean?”

“She had a baby, and she isn't married,” Kit

answered with amazing frankness. She was the one member of the family who kept well posted on village affairs.

Disinclined to discuss such a delicate subject with her, Tilt, somewhat aghast at her statement, stopped his inquiries right there, and for a moment or two they plodded along together in silence.

"Say, Bill," said Kit, snuggling up a bit closer to him, "you and I have a lot of secrets together, haven't we?"

"I suppose we have," he answered.

"There's that message we got from ouija. I didn't tell that to anybody but you. And the message to-night. And there's nobody but us knows about the burglar."

"That's right."

"Having so many secrets together, we'll just naturally have to trust each other, won't we?"

"Look here, young woman," he warned her, suspicious that she was trying to worm something else out of him, "if you think you are going to get me to tell you what's in the doctor's will by any such tactics, you're much mistaken."

"You're entirely wrong," cried the girl with of-

fended dignity. "I don't care a rap what's in the old will. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to. I was thinking of something entirely different."

"What, then?"

"You remember that message I was telling you about — that message Gertie and I got — with the pencil and paper. It said, 'Find the girl.'"

"What of it?" asked Bill shortly, his mind still busy with his own theories of the murder.

"I was just wondering if it meant Conchita. It seems awfully strange our finding her the way we did, the very night I got the message, doesn't it?"

"Tommyrot."

"It isn't tommyrot, and I'll prove it to you yet," cried Kit vexedly. "I hate you, Bill Tilt. You're always laughing at me."

With a vicious pinch of his arm, she fled, skipping into her home ahead of him and entering by the side door, leaving him to follow more leisurely, and — to his joy — spend all the rest of the evening with Mollie — alone.

CHAPTER X

AN ERROR IN JUDGMENT

TILT found Mollie waiting for him, not in her accustomed corner on the porch, but in her mother's den, his arrival thus bringing to him the bitter thought that no longer was his presence welcome in the hallowed cosy corner. That was now Carew's.

"Sorry to be late," he said stiffly, his manner reflecting his inward resentment of the situation. "It took me longer than I expected to get the papers. Here's the will."

"It doesn't matter," said the girl, apparently unobservant of his frigidity, as she eagerly took from his extended hand the document that gave her a fortune.

As she sat there, reading it line for line, Tilt sat cogitating whether or not to tell her of the attempted burglary. After all, he reasoned, what was the use of worrying her about it? With her mother and Ed both away and Kit to manage, with the recent

tragedy still fresh in her mind, why should he add to her worries by telling her of the encounter he had just had?

There were other reasons. Inclined to be a little vain about his physical strength, Tilt was not at all certain that the outcome redounded to his credit. In the first place, he felt that it had been decidedly careless of him to leave the securities that had been entrusted to him as executor wholly unguarded in that old-fashioned safe. That they all might have been stolen, had he and Kit not arrived at such a fortuitous moment, was an appalling thought. In the second place, he was vastly vexed with himself for having let the burglar escape. The telling of it could hardly present him in any other than a ridiculous light. Even though Mollie now was engaged to another man, he hesitated at a recital of facts that would give her cause to laugh at him.

Besides, what could be accomplished by telling about the burglary? Before leaving Rhodes's house he had warned the old housekeeper to hold her tongue, and there was little likelihood of the Italian girl telling about it. Kit, too, he felt sure, would say nothing. Whatever other faults she might

have, Tilt knew she was close-mouthed and not at all given to taking the other members of the family into her confidence. He recalled that on the way home she had spoken of the incident as one of the "secrets" she shared with him. Manifestly she had taken it for granted that he did not wish it talked about.

There was another matter that Tilt was thinking of as Mollie pored over the will, something that still was bothering him very much. Ought he not to let Mollie know that her fiancé was deceiving her? Was it not his duty, the duty of their long-established friendship, to tell her and put her on her guard? If Carew were in the habit of lying to her and deceiving her now, before their marriage, it surely augured ill for her future happiness. Mollie was a wonderful girl — too wonderful, Tilt decided, to be permitted to bestow her affections on a man without being certain that he was worthy of her trust.

He must find some way to tell her — to warn her — even at the risk of cheapening himself.

Just then she looked up from the paper she was reading with her dark eyes brimming with tears.

“What a dear he was,” she murmured. “To think of his leaving me everything he had. Do you know, Bill, I always had the feeling that he cared more for me than for any other person on earth.”

“It looks that way. I haven’t checked things up yet, but he must have had over a million.”

“It isn’t the money I care about. It’s the thought of it — that he wanted me to have it.”

“There are two things, though, about that will that puzzle me,” said Tilt. “I can’t understand why he should have made me the executor; and there’s another funny thing — did you notice the date?”

“What about it?” said Mollie, consulting the paper to see when it was dated.

“That will was drawn the very day after your engagement to Carew was announced.”

“That certainly is peculiar — very peculiar,” said Mollie thoughtfully. “I can’t understand that. Do you know, Bill, I’m going to tell you something I have never breathed to a soul. Doctor Rhodes didn’t like Paul Carew. I learned of it when I told him of our engagement.”

“What did he say?”

“That was the strange part of it. He didn’t say a word but just stood looking at me in a sorrowful way. It looked to me as if the news had been a great shock to him. ‘Aren’t you going to wish me happiness?’ I asked him. ‘Would that I could,’ he answered, and then he turned and walked away and never spoke to me again about it. There was only one way that I could account for it. I felt that he must have loved me very dearly himself, and the idea of my marrying any one else was almost too much for him.”

“Maybe it wasn’t that. Perhaps he didn’t trust Carew.”

“Why? What do you mean?” cried Mollie, bridling at once.

“Have you always found him trustworthy?”

“Why, of course I have. What a silly question. Paul Carew is the soul of honor.”

“He told you last night, didn’t he,” said Tilt, not without a vicious feeling of joy, “that he was going on the midnight train to Boston?”

“Yes. What of it?”

“What would you think if I told you that he did not go — that not ten minutes after I had left you

this morning I saw him riding up Sixth Avenue in a taxicab — with a woman? ”

“ I’d say,” cried Mollie proudly, “ that either you were entirely mistaken, or else that you were lying deliberately — trying to make trouble between Paul and me.”

“ I am not lying,” said Tilt tensely, casting caution to the winds. “ I did see him. I know the woman he was with.”

The angry red that colored the girl’s cheeks should have warned him on what dangerous ground he was treading, but he blundered on:

“ Mollie, you know how much I always have thought of you. You know I wouldn’t tell you this sort of thing if I didn’t feel that you ought to be warned. It isn’t as if you had known Carew all your life, as you have me. He’s a comparative newcomer here. Nobody knows much about him, in fact, except that he has been coming out here for a couple of summers.”

“ Stop! ” cried the girl wrathfully, rising and confronting him. “ How dare you come here to my house to tell me those lies about Paul? ”

“ It is because I love you,” cried Tilt, in desper-

tion. "I tell you I love you. If Carew hadn't come along, I was going to ask you to marry me."

"You — love — me — YOU!"

She burst into mocking laughter.

"You love me. You were going to ask me to marry you. Why, Bill Tilt, I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth, you great, big, clumsy lummax. The very idea, just because I've been nice to you on the family's account and let you play tennis with me once in a while — to think that you had the presumption to imagine I ever could care for you."

"But," mumbled abashed Bill in confusion, "you used to like me."

"As a pal, perhaps, but that is no reason why you should try to trespass and come here endeavoring to poison my mind against my future husband." Her voice was cold, hard, merciless. Into her eyes had come a look of anger, of hate almost insane in its intensity.

But just then quick steps on the porch reached the ears of both, and the conflict between them was suspended, as they turned to see who it was. Breathlessly Carew entered the room.

“ Oh, Paul,” cried Mollie, greeting him with outstretched arms, “ I’m so glad you’ve come. Bill Tilt has been trying to make me believe dreadful things about you.”

“ What’s this?” cried Carew, giving a nervous start. “ What things?”

“ I merely told her,” Tilt hastened to explain, “ certain things that I know to be facts. I told her that you had not gone to Boston. That I myself had seen you this morning riding up Sixth Avenue in a taxicab.”

Carew, it seemed to Tilt, wavered for just a moment before replying, and then, turning toward Mollie, he said with studied calmness:

“ What he says is perfectly true. I did not go to Boston last night. When I got back to my rooms, I found a letter there which made the trip unnecessary. That’s the reason I came over to-night, to explain it to you. And it is also perfectly true that I rode up Sixth Avenue in a taxicab this morning. Tilt may have seen me, although I didn’t see him.”

“ But, Paul,” cried Mollie, the angry glare coming once more into her eyes, “ he said there was a woman

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in the taxicab. You weren't with a woman, were you?"

"It seems to me," said Carew stiffly, "that Mr. Tilt has been concerning himself a great deal with affairs that are none of his business."

"But," persisted Mollie, her voice rising shrilly, "he said you had a woman in the cab. He said he knew who the woman was."

At this statement, it seemed to Tilt that Carew's face suddenly paled. At any rate, he gave a violent start.

"That also is true," he stammered. "I was with Miss Addison, Rose Addison, whom Doctor Rhodes employed as his office attendant."

"Perhaps," interjected Tilt maliciously, "you can also explain why you gave Miss Addison a false name, why you told her that you were Mr. Raymond — Mr. Raymond from the Trust Company."

Tilt, turning to watch the effect of this shot on Mollie, read in her face the first sign of doubt that he had seen there. With pitiful anxiety she leaned forward to hear Paul's words. Tilt felt that now he was about to be vindicated, and that his last

question would be no easy matter for Carew to clear up, but he counted his triumph too soon.

“While I must protest against this interference of Mr. Tilt in my affairs,” said Carew, giving his rival a glance of hatred, “it is all easily explained. Knowing how interested Mollie was in trying to solve the mystery of Doctor Rhodes’s death, I have undertaken an investigation of it. Naturally one of the persons likely to have valuable information about the doctor’s private affairs was the nurse who was in his office every day. I located her, and as a ruse to try to get her confidence, I told her that I was Mr. Raymond from the Trust Company.”

He turned apologetically to Mollie.

“I have told you nothing of this, dearest, because I wanted to clear the whole thing up and surprise you. I knew how much it was worrying you.”

“There,” cried Mollie vindictively, “I told you Paul was perfectly trustworthy. Even you, Bill Tilt, with your evil mind, must admit that he has explained everything satisfactorily.”

“Yes,” admitted Bill, not at all enthusiastically, “he has explained it.”

“And,” cried Mollie, her voice rising once more

in anger, "I want you to get out of my home, Bill Tilt, and never, never, while I am in it, do you dare to come here. I hate you, I hate you, I hate you."

Weeping passionately, she flung herself into her fiancé's arms, as Tilt stood looking helplessly on.

"You heard what she said," cried Carew vindictively, over Mollie's shoulder. "Will you go at once — or shall I be compelled to put you out?"

"I'll go," stammered Bill.

Feeling as if his feet had been pulled out from beneath him, as if he had been barred from Paradise, Tilt, grabbing up his hat, fled from the house, and with angry, rapid strides sought the deserted porch of the little clubhouse and flung himself down on a bench overlooking the water, cursing himself for a silly fool.

It was not that Carew had so successfully refuted the doubts that he had endeavored to stir in Mollie's mind. His opinion about Carew remained unchanged. Although his glib explanation had seemed logical enough, Tilt still distrusted him. Nor did the fact that the Manners home was henceforth barred to him give him much worry. A greater trouble — a greater grief than that — was his. In

Mollie, his friend, his pal, his ideal, in Mollie, the girl whom he had been so confident that he loved, in that moment of anger had been revealed to him in her eyes, her voice, her manner, an evil, uncontrollable, murderous temper that he never dreamed she had possessed. Never again, he told himself sadly, could he look upon her with the same feeling. The mantle of sanctity, of sweetness, of perpetual charm somehow had been stripped from her. Always, always, no matter what their future relations might be, he would remember and know that somewhere deep within her lay a stratum of evil, of hate.

It came over him that he was wretchedly alone, that there was no one for whom he cared, or who cared for him. He was nothing but a blundering fool. He was just what Mollie had called him, "a great big clumsy lummax," always doing things the wrong way, always putting his foot in it. Rhodes at least had trusted him and had made him his executor. Surely that was a proof of friendship, but now Rhodes was dead — murdered.

In an unwonted mood of self-analysis, he sat there alone on the porch of the deserted clubhouse,

feeling strangely depressed and abased. He had considered Ed Manners a friend, yet at the inquest it was Ed who had tried to throw on him the suspicion of having destroyed or secreted the note that Rhodes had been writing. He had looked on Mrs. Manners with almost the same affection as upon his own mother, yet when he had asked her a simple question about Rhodes's marriage, she had acted most peculiarly and had refused him her confidence. And Mollie — almost as far back as he could remember, he and Mollie had been the best of pals, yet when he had tried to do her a friendly act, she had turned venomously on him.

Was he a failure in life? What was there about him that was at fault; what failing in character or personality, he wondered, made them hold his friendship so lightly? As morosely he meditated over what had happened, he felt a light touch on his sleeve, and turning with a start, discovered in the moonlight a slender figure beside him, — the Terrible Kit.

“Oh, Bill,” she whispered sympathetically, “wasn't it rotten — perfectly rotten, the way they talked to you?”

“Where were you?” he demanded suspiciously, at the same time conscious of an unusual feeling of warmth toward her.

“At the head of the stairs — listening,” she answered unshamedly.

“A nice, ladylike thing to do,” he rebuked her.

“Pooh!” scoffed Kit, “manners don’t count when you are trying to solve a mystery. I wanted to find out what was in Doctor Rhodes’s will and why you brought it over to show to Mollie. I saw you when you picked it out from the other papers and slipped it into your pocket.”

“Humph!” snapped Tilt. “And you heard everything that was said, I suppose.”

“Not quite everything,” said Kit regretfully, “though I came down a few steps when things got hot. I wish I could have seen Paul Carew’s face when he was talking. I wanted to see if he was lying.”

“Oh, bosh,” said Tilt, trying to be fair, “I guess I went off half-cocked. The explanations he gave sounded all right.”

“Too much all right,” commented Kit.

“ Well, anyhow,” said Tilt, “ I put my foot in it. Mollie has forbidden me the house.”

“ Don’t you care. It’s as much my house as it is hers. You can come to see me.”

“ I’m not apt to come where I’m not wanted.”

“ Well, Mother’ll want you when she gets home, and it’s her house,” Kit persisted.

“ Have you heard from your mother? When’s she coming home?” Tilt asked, seeking to change the subject.

“ She’ll be home to-morrow. There was a telegram from her to-day.”

“ Well, in that case,” suggested Tilt, “ you’d better be getting home and getting your beauty sleep, so that when she sees you, she won’t think that you’ve been up to any mischief. Come on, I’ll walk as far as the porch with you.”

“ I’m often up later than this,” Kit protested, nevertheless, in an acquiescent mood entirely foreign to her ordinary conduct, making no further argument about it. Clinging to his arm she strolled back with him, saying nothing more until they were nearing the house. Then she burst out with:

“ Say, Bill, did it strike you as funny that when

Paul Carew arrived at the house he was all out of breath. He acted as if he had been running."

"Now that you speak of it, he was out of breath."

"I wish I knew why he'd been running," said Kit meditatively.

Tilt did not answer her. He was too busy puzzling over the many mysterious aspects of the case. For one thing, he was determined to see Mrs. Manners as soon as she had reached home. Surely she would be willing to tell him the secret of Doctor Rhodes's past when she heard that all his fortune had been left to Mollie and that Tilt was the executor.

"I came out the side door," whispered Kit, as they approached the house, steering her escort toward the side of the house by a path that led almost directly to the dining room and den. As they were within sight of the windows of the den, they both stopped suddenly and looked ahead in amazement.

Silhouetted against the window of the room where Mollie and Carew still sat talking was a head, — a woman's head.

“It’s that girl again — it’s Conchita,” cried Kit in surprise.

At the sound of Kit’s voice, the figure at the window turned with a start and fled noiselessly across the grass, leaving Tilt and Kit standing there dumbfounded, gazing blankly after her.

“Bill,” breathed Kit excitedly, “I’ve just got to get my ouija board out again and ask about her. That girl knows something. I wonder what it can be?”

“I wonder,” said Tilt, as he bade Kit good night and strode off toward home.

CHAPTER XI

A THEORY SHATTERED

ALTHOUGH the first thing that Tilt did the next day was to hurry into the city with the securities of which he had been made custodian and place them in a safe-deposit box, his action brought him neither a sense of security nor of relief. Each day's developments added to his conviction that the same evil mind that had contrived Rhodes's death still must be in some way plotting against the safety of those who had been most closely associated with Rhodes, — the Manners family and himself. In no other way could he account for the sequence of strange happenings.

His quarrel with Mollie, too, hung over him like a black cloud. As he reviewed the incident with the clearer vision of the morning after, he found himself almost inclined to justify her actions. If she really loved Carew, she could hardly have done otherwise. It was stupid of him, without having

verified his suspicions, to have blurted them out to Carew's fiancée. Well-intentioned though his motives had been, he certainly had made an egregious ass of himself. No wonder they both were furious at him.

It seemed to him, too, that with each day the mystery surrounding Rhodes's death was getting into a more hopeless muddle, and that as time advanced there was less likelihood of its ever being cleared up. The county authorities, when their case against Pincus had collapsed, apparently had abandoned the search for the murderer, and the activities of Smithers he was inclined to disregard as entirely futile. Devan was still unexplainedly absent. Probably he was off following something that he regarded as a clue, but as to where he was or what he might be doing, Tilt had not the faintest idea.

What possible relation the little Italian girl could have to the mystery was another poser to Tilt, yet he felt certain that in some way she must be involved. Why else would she have been watching at Rhodes's house, and why was she peering in at the Manners' windows? Her plausible story the night before, coupled as it was with Kit's identification of

her and Mrs. Grady's statement that she was a frequent visitor, had for the time allayed his suspicions, yet his discovery of her spying two hours later on Mollie and Carew had instantly revived his worst thoughts about her. He was confident now that she had been the burglar's confederate and that she purposely had tripped him in order to enable the burglar to escape.

But who was the burglar?

The fact of the girl's nationality suggested that the man whom he had seen attempting to open the safe might have been an Italian, too. There were a number of Italian families in the village. It might be that some one, Dixon or Pressly Hart, had gossiped about the doctor's wealth and had inspired the attempt at robbery, yet it seemed more logical to assume that the murder and burglary were links in the same chain. Recalling Devan's description of his method of work, Tilt began trying to fit all the facts that were known to him into a picture.

Even if there had been a woman at the bottom of it, everything seemed to point to a man as the central figure in the picture.

A man, according to Miss Addison's statements,

had come several times with secrecy to Doctor Rhodes's office, and they had heated arguments there.

A man had telephoned to the doctor's house, and Rhodes had gone in the early morning, presumably to meet him.

A man had shot him there; a woman would never have used a rifle.

A man had tried to rob the doctor's safe, perhaps with the intention of stealing the bonds, perhaps in an effort to recover some document he believed to be locked up there.

Who was this man? That was the question Tilt kept vainly asking himself. What could have been his motive, — a motive sufficiently strong to cause him to commit a cold-blooded, deliberate murder, to attempt a daring robbery?

Was he some Italian, as Conchita's appearance in the case naturally suggested? To Tilt's way of thinking this did not seem probable. He could conceive of no reason that would induce Rhodes to go to the club at one in the morning to meet an Italian from the village. Who, then, could it have been? Was it, as both Devan and Smithers had suggested,

some one who knew Rhodes well, was familiar with his habits, possibly some member of the club?

Mentally Tilt ran through the list of members. He knew them all. There was not a single one of them, so far as he knew, who had not been on the best of terms with Rhodes. All of the members were respectable, peaceable family men.

Where, then, was the murderer to be found? The more Tilt thought about it, the more strongly convinced he became that the clue to the man's identity would be found in Rhodes's mysterious past. Rhodes had been married years ago and had gone to the Philippines and had been reported killed there. He had returned and had found his wife married to another. So much Mollie had told him, — undoubtedly all she knew about it. And there had been a child!

All day long, as he mechanically fulfilled his duties, he kept pondering on this tragedy in Rhodes's early life, trying to link it up with his untimely end, but it was not until he was walking home from the station in the evening that a great light dawned on him.

There had been a child!

That child, Walter Rhodes's child, must be a grown man by now. His mother discredited and separated from the father, what would be more natural than that the son should grow up hating his father. There was no mention of this child in his will. Was it not more than probable that the son, arriving at maturity and learning of his father's prominence and of his wealth, should demand a share of it? It might have been he who had visited Rhodes in his office with such secrecy. Suppose, reasoned Tilt, this son, having learned that he was to be disinherited, after a final plea for recognition, in a rage had shot his father. Naturally the next step would be to destroy the will.

At last Tilt was satisfied that he had a theory that would account both for the murder and for the burglary. But did it account for Conchita? It seemed not impossible that the son, secretly spying on his father, might have learned that Conchita visited the doctor's house and might have beguiled her into playing the spy for him. Confident that he at last was on the right track, Tilt hurried on homeward. He must get in touch as soon as possible with the two persons who would know about this

child. If Mrs. Manners were not home yet, he would see old Hodder and make him talk, but as he entered his home the telephone was ringing. It was Mrs. Manners.

“Is that you, Bill?” she said. “Can I come over to see you? There are things — important things — I must tell you.”

“I’ll wait for you,” he answered, though in his voice there was a shade of disappointment. Ordinarily, Mrs. Manners, wishing to see him, would have asked him to go to her house. Mollie must already have told her of their quarrel, and apparently he still was on her black books. All day long he had been hoping against hope that the girl, her temper over, would be ready to forgive him, but seemingly she hadn’t.

Presently Mrs. Manners appeared, looking tired and worn. She carried a small traveling bag, from which, as she sat down, she drew forth a packet of papers.

“You remember, Bill,” she said, “how startled I was when you asked me about Walter Rhodes’s wife. I could not conceive how you could know about her.”

“It was in the will,” Tilt began.

“Yes, I know that now,” she interrupted. “Mollie told me about the will and told me that he had made you his executor, but of course I didn’t know that then, and the mention of her brought a dread possibility to my mind. I had not thought before that it might have been her — that she might have escaped ——”

“Escaped,” echoed Tilt amazedly.

“Yes,” explained Mrs. Manners, “Walter Rhodes’s wife for years has been in a private sanitarium near Boston, hopelessly insane — with homicidal mania. It’s the saddest story you ever heard.”

“Tell me about it,” cried Tilt excitedly, feeling sure now that Mrs. Manners’ revelations would support the theory he had formed of the murder.

“Walter Rhodes and my husband,” she began, “first met at the Naval Academy when they were cadets and became the closest of friends. My husband left the service soon after graduating to earn a salary that would enable him to marry, but Walter stayed and became a lieutenant commander. Somewhere down in the West Indies, during the Spanish War, he met a beautiful, auburn-haired Irish girl

who had been left stranded there by the death of her parents. He fell violently in love with her, courted her for a week and married her, sending her north to us until the war was over. When he returned from Cuba, he was assigned to the Boston Navy Yard, and taking her there with him, he established her in a cottage in the suburbs of Boston. They were hardly settled before he was ordered to the Philippines. We went on to Boston and urged her to come and make her home with us until his return, but she decided to remain in the cottage.

“Two months later there came a report that Walter had been killed in a skirmish with the natives and that his body had not been recovered. Three days later his wife gave birth to a child.

“For a few months I kept track of her, but gradually our correspondence waned and died. Fifteen months later word came from the Philippines that Walter was alive. He had been wounded and captured. A blow on his head had injured his brain; and for months he had lived in a native village, not knowing his own identity. When the village was finally captured, his presence was discovered, and he was removed to the hospital at Manila. There was

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an operation to remove the bone that was pressing on his brain, and his reason was restored.

“Meanwhile his wife had disappeared. My husband, on hearing that Walter was alive, made several trips to Boston to try to locate her but without success. We employed detectives but could find no trace of her. She had sold off everything in the cottage and had vanished with the child. As soon as Walter was able to travel, he came home under the care of a boatswain’s mate, Malachi Hodder, whose enlistment had just expired — that’s old Malachi, who looks after the boats.”

“Yes, I know,” said Tilt. “At the inquest he spoke of Rhodes as ‘the Commander.’”

“Walter, taking Hodder with him, spent weeks and weeks traveling about, trying to find his wife. At last he located her and found her married to another man. There was a dreadful scene. She was the type of woman who seems to inspire violent passion in men. Her new husband loved her madly, and learning that their marriage was illegal, killed himself. She became a raving maniac and tried to kill Walter. Old Hodder saved his life.

“Probably there was insanity in her blood. We never knew. Even Walter had learned little of her history or parentage, but from that day to this she has been hopelessly insane. An uncle of Walter’s, dying about this time, left him a fortune, and he put it all in trust for her, arranging through a trust company in Boston that she should have the best of care in a private sanitarium run by a Mrs. Sophie Karuski, just outside Boston. Ever since she has had every comfort that money could provide, special nurses of her own day and night and the best medical attention, though Walter, I believe, never saw her again after she attempted his life.

“He resigned from the navy and in an effort to forget his troubles took up the study of medicine and quickly made a reputation as a skilful surgeon. I do not think through all these years he ceased to love her. He seemed to find some comfort in relieving the sufferings of others, having himself suffered so deeply. Although I doubt if he ever knew happiness, after he had come out here to Rockmont to be near us, he seemed more content. It all happened long ago, and as he never spoke of her even to us, I had almost forgotten her existence until your

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question the other evening suggested the possibility of her having been the murderer.

“After you had gone, I lay awake all night. There seemed to be only one way that I could satisfy myself that it was not she who had done it. Early the next morning I talked with old Hodder, and we decided that the best thing for me to do was to go to the sanitarium and make certain that she had not escaped. When I saw her, I knew there was no possibility of her having done it. Even if Mrs. Karuski had not assured me that she had never been outside the sanitarium walls, her physical condition is such as to make it out of the question. She is very feeble, and for months she has not left her bed, but lies there day and night, moaning incoherently.

“While I was there, the question came to my mind whether the doctor’s death would require any new arrangements with the trust company, and I sent for Ed to come up. Since my husband’s death, he is the only one who knows anything of the matter. And now, tell me, what have they discovered? Have they arrested any one yet for the murder?”

“Not yet,” said Tilt, “but there will be an arrest

shortly. I know who killed Rhodes. I have a theory of the crime. I know who did it."

"You know," cried Mrs. Manners. "Who was it?"

"I know I'm right," said Tilt with conviction. "Your story has made it perfectly obvious. It establishes the motive."

"My story — the motive — I don't understand."

"Certainly. You said there was a child, didn't you? That child is grown up by now. It is perfectly obvious that it must have been Rhodes's own child that killed him."

"No, no! My God, don't say that," Mrs. Manners fairly shrieked at him, rising and facing him with an agonized face. "Oh, my God, no! No! Not that!"

"I have thought it all out," Tilt persisted, though vastly amazed at her vehement manner. "It is perfectly obvious. It couldn't have been any one else."

"You don't understand. You don't know what you're saying," cried Mrs. Manners, sinking back into her chair and covering her face with her hands, as if to shut out the thought that Tilt had suggested.

“Let me explain,” he began.

“Don’t,” she cried hysterically. “You can’t! You mustn’t. It’s too terrible. It couldn’t be.”

“But it was, I tell you,” he insisted doggedly.

“Mollie wouldn’t have done it. She couldn’t have.”

“Mollie!” he exclaimed in bewilderment. “Mollie — what are you talking about?”

“Oh, I never meant you to know. We promised we’d never tell any one. Mollie — our Mollie — is Doctor Rhodes’s child. We adopted her.”

“Mollie!” cried Tilt, in utter amazement. “I took it for granted the child was a son.”

“No, no; it was a daughter. It was Mollie. She never did it.”

“Of course not,” said Tilt, feeling now more at sea than ever, as he saw his theory of the murder rudely shattered.

“It was a man who killed Rhodes. I’m sorry, Mrs. Manners. I didn’t know. I hadn’t the slightest idea that Mollie wasn’t your own daughter.”

“Of course, you couldn’t have had. We took her when she was hardly two years old. Walter didn’t want her ever to know about her mother. He said

that where there was a tendency to insanity, the knowledge of a parent's insanity had a most baleful influence. My husband, who had grown fond of her, suggested that the best way of keeping the knowledge of the mother's fate from her was for us to adopt her, and Walter assented. We had just come to the city then and had few acquaintances, so no one knew the difference. No one knows it but Ed and myself and old Hodder — and you."

"And I shall never tell it — never," said Tilt, thinking now of his recent quarrel with Mollie not with anger but with regret, as he recalled the almost maniacal expression that had come into her eyes as she had denounced him.

Poor, poor Mollie! What a dread inheritance was hers!

CHAPTER XII

MISSING — A MOTIVE

PRESSLY HART came fussily up on to the Tilt porch, where Bill lay sprawled in Sunday morning comfort behind a disorderly heap of newspapers. John Dixon was with him.

“Look here, Tilt,” he began, “something’s got to be done.”

Ordinarily on any pleasant summer Sunday, Tilt, like most of the other members of the colony, would have been found over at the club, but the pall of the recent tragedy still hung heavily over the little clubhouse, leaving it practically deserted, even on the days of rest. Both the courts and the piazza now were generally without occupants. Even the bridge players seemed to shun it, and were holding their nightly games at each other’s houses. As a result, there had been fewer opportunities for conversation between the residents, and this was the first time that Tilt had seen either Hart or Dixon since Mrs. Man-

ners had made the astounding revelation to him about Mollie's parentage.

He felt instinctively, as he saw them coming up the walk, that they could have come but for one purpose — to discuss the mystery — and he did not wish to talk about it, at least not with them. It seemed to him that each time he discussed it or that there was any new development, it only left things in a more amazing, unfathomable tangle.

“Something's got to be done,” repeated Hart. “Here it's days and days since poor Rhodes was done away with, and nobody has the slightest idea yet who murdered him. Nobody's been arrested yet. Even that star investigator I hired — that friend of yours — has gone off God knows where, and nobody knows what he's doing. Do *you* know where Devan is?”

“I don't,” said Tilt. “He 'phoned me several days ago that he was going to Boston, but whether or not he is still there I cannot say. I haven't heard from him since.”

“Have you any idea what he went up there for?”

“He didn't tell me,” said Tilt, although he might have added that he had his suspicions.

“Anyhow,” said Hart, his manner becoming more assertive, “I don’t like the way things are going. As long as this mystery is unsolved, our club is under a sort of a cloud. And what’s more, I think the Manners family have been acting most peculiarly.”

“What do you mean?” asked Tilt anxiously. Even if he and Mollie were no longer friends and he had been forbidden the house, he was determined that the family should not be gossiped about if it were in his power to prevent it.

“It was Dixon here who first called my attention to it. You tell him, Dixon, what you told me.”

“Everybody knows,” explained Dixon, “that the Manners family and Doctor Rhodes were very good friends. They were the closest friends he had in the colony. The three of us here know that Rhodes left all his money to Mollie Manners. I merely said to Hart that under the circumstances it was damned queer Mrs. Manners didn’t attend the funeral. Only the two girls and Ed were there.”

“Mrs. Manners was away,” Tilt put in promptly.

“Yes, but why did she go away just then?”

Where'd she go? Ed Manners went away, too, right afterward. He's still away."

"That's it," cried Pressly Hart excitedly. "That's it. Ed Manners' conduct certainly ought to be looked into. Just between ourselves, I believe he knows who did it, if he didn't do it himself. His mother knows about it. That's why she has hidden him away somewhere."

"Oh, bosh, Hart," cried Tilt. "You're letting your imagination run away with you. Ed Manners is no murderer. It's absurd."

"Hold on," said Dixon. "He has acted strangely about the case. You can't have forgotten how at the inquest he tried to throw suspicion on you. He certainly did his best to make people believe it was you who had taken and secreted that message the doctor was writing when he was shot. What was his purpose in doing that? I'm free to say that I suspected him right from the start."

"It was not he who took that slip of paper," Tilt insisted. "I'm positive of it."

He spoke with such conviction that both of his callers turned to regard him suspiciously, wonder-

ing if there was anything he knew which they did not.

“Who took it, if he didn’t?” asked Dixon.

“You know?” challenged Hart.

“I don’t know who took it. I know I didn’t. I’m equally positive that Ed didn’t. He couldn’t have.”

Tilt was sorry now that he had said as much as he had, but he could not help wondering what they would say and think if they knew that right at this very minute he had the slip of paper they were talking about in his wallet, in the envelope in which Mollie had received it. He had kept it, exactly as she had handed it to him on the train, for the purpose of showing it to Devan.

Pressly Hart sat picking nervously at a leaf on one of the porch vines and then burst out:

“There’s only one way I see to bring the thing into the open. Tilt, as executor, you must file your papers at once and make the will public. You must let people know that the Manners family are hooked up in it.”

“What good would that do?” objected Tilt. “It would only start up a lot of talk.”

“The more talk there is, the more likelihood of our finding out something.”

“Have you told Mollie Manners yet?” asked Dixon.

“Oh, yes, she knows, and her mother, too.”

“Well, Tilt,” announced Hart, in his most officious and offensive manner, “all I’ve got to say is that you’ve got to make that will public right away — to-morrow — or else I will. This secrecy is getting us nowhere.”

“Devan wanted it withheld for the present.”

“Yes, but where’s Devan? He’s disappeared. For all we know, the murderer may have bought him off. Ed Manners went to Boston, and then Devan. Maybe they’ve fixed things up together. I’m sorry now that I ever hired Devan. I don’t like the way he has acted. He ought to have taken us into his confidence right from the start. The news about the Rhodes fortune is bound to come out some day. I’m going to see that everybody hears about that will at once.”

“Very well,” said Tilt quietly. “Since you wish it, I will file the papers to-morrow.”

He realized that if Pressly Hart had made up his

mind to spread the news, there was little use in trying to stop him. The burden of keeping the secret was already weighing too heavily upon him. A small-minded man, delighting in petty glories, Hart was eager to shine among his neighbors as he related the story of what they had found in the Rhodes safe.

Tilt had another reason for agreeing so readily to the proposal. At any minute he was expecting Rose Addison to arrive, and he wished to be rid of his callers before she came. For several days he had been trying to get into communication with her, but it appeared that, left without an occupation by the death of Rhodes, she had gone back to private nursing. When he had called up her apartment, all that he had been able to learn was that she was "out on a case." Hoping a letter might be forwarded, he had written to her, and only the evening before had come a wire from her saying that she would be out to see him Sunday morning.

To his annoyance, both Hart and Dixon lingered, discussing the mystery in all its aspects, both of them apparently intent on assembling all the known facts and many more conjectures of their own in such a

way as to cast suspicion at Ed Manners' door. As Bill sat there, irritably listening and taking little part in the conversation, he could not help wondering what the effect would be on their opinions if they knew what he knew:

That the missing message had been mailed to Mollie and was now in his pocket.

That Mollie wasn't Mollie Manners at all but Rhodes's own daughter.

That Mollie's mother and old Hodder knew the secret of Rhodes's past.

That Mollie's fiancé, under an assumed name, had been trying to pump the doctor's office assistant.

That an attempt had been made to rob the doctor's safe.

That an Italian girl, a village drab, had been mixed up in the burglary and had also been spying on the Manners home.

As he reviewed his own knowledge of the matter, he was glad that he had kept it to himself. While he was positive that none of the Manners family could have had any part in the murder, he was compelled to admit that others — Pressly Hart, for example — would instantly accept all this as evidence

pointing to Ed as the guilty person. Although, as time after time he assembled these strange circumstances and tried to interpret them, the mystery seemed only to grow deeper and more confusing, Tilt had made up his mind to tell the whole story to only one person — Richard Devan, even though Devan's unexplained absence was as perplexing and annoying to him as it was to Hart.

At last, to his relief, his callers rose to go.

“It's agreed then,” said Hart, “that you'll file the papers and make the will public to-morrow.”

“Certainly I'll do it, since you and Mr. Dixon advise it,” Tilt hastily agreed, eager to obviate any further argument. He watched them with relief as they left the porch and vanished around the corner not five minutes before Miss Addison arrived.

“I'm sorry,” she apologized; “I couldn't get here any sooner. I didn't get your note until last night. You know how it is in my profession. When we get a case, our time is seldom our own. Have you found the murderer?”

“No,” said Tilt, “we are still as much in the dark as ever, and Devan, who is making the investigation, is away, but there is something I wished

to ask you — something important — most important.”

“What is it? Anything I know I’ll be only too glad to tell if it will help discover who killed Doctor Rhodes.”

“What do you know about Paul Carew?”

He purposely shot the question at her, hoping to catch her off her guard and, if she were trying to conceal anything from him, to read it in her face, but her expression showed only blank astonishment.

“Paul Carew,” she repeated. “That’s the man you asked me about over the ’phone. I don’t know any such person.”

“Are you sure?”

She looked at him blankly, as she stood apparently trying to ransack the shelves of her memory.

“The name means nothing to me whatever.”

“Yet,” said Tilt, still watching her face closely, “you were talking to him last Monday — I saw you.”

“You couldn’t have,” she protested. “I tell you I don’t know any Paul Carew. I never heard of him.”

“I saw you riding up Sixth Avenue with him in a taxicab.”

“That wasn’t Paul Carew,” she exclaimed in astonishment. “I told you that was a man from the Trust Company where Doctor Rhodes had an account.”

“Are you positive?”

“Why, of course. At least, when he looked me up and said he was from the Trust Company, I took his word for it.”

“Did he give you his card?”

“No. He called me on the ’phone first and made an appointment to meet me. He said he was Mr. ——” she hesitated for a moment, as if trying to recall the name — “Mr. Raymond of the Trust Company.”

“What did he want with you?”

“He explained that the Trust Company had charge of the doctor’s affairs and asked me if I could accompany him to the office and let him in to look over the papers there.”

“And did you?”

“I supposed, of course, that it was all right; I knew the doctor had had an account there. I went

with him up to the office and let him look over the papers.”

“What papers?”

“There were no private papers of any sort in the office. The doctor kept nothing there but the record of his cases. The man, I recall, seemed rather disappointed. He went through all the papers, apparently searching for something that was not there. I told him I thought all the doctor’s private papers were in his house at Rockmont. But why are you asking me all these questions? Who was he?”

“That man,” explained Tilt, now thoroughly convinced that Miss Addison was keeping nothing back, “didn’t come from the Trust Company at all. His name wasn’t Raymond. He was Paul Carew.”

“And who on earth is Paul Carew?” cried the astonished nurse. “What on earth was he trying to find there?”

“Carew is engaged to Mollie Manners — to the girl to whom Doctor Rhodes left all his money.”

“I can’t understand it,” cried Miss Addison, perplexed. “Why did he use an assumed name? Why did he want to go through the doctor’s papers? What was he after?”

“I can’t understand it, either. He told Miss Manners that he was trying to make an investigation of the mystery, and that he thought among the doctor’s papers he might find some clue.”

“Why was he investigating?”

“He told her that it was because he knew she was worrying about the murder, and he wanted to get it cleared up.”

“Well, I must say,” the nurse commented, “it seems to me a mighty funny way to go about it, taking an assumed name and everything.”

“That’s exactly the way it struck me,” said Tilt, “but his story seems to fit with yours. Anyhow, his explanation seemed to entirely satisfy Miss Manners.”

Rose Addison shook her head doubtfully, and for a moment or two they sat there pondering over the explanation that Carew had given. Although, now that he had heard Miss Addison’s version of it, Tilt was compelled to admit that Carew’s explanation seemed logical, he still was inclined to believe that there was something fishy about it, and he was sure that Miss Addison agreed with him. As he sought to analyze Carew’s actions, he wondered if his feel-

ings toward Mollie were responsible for his seeing everything lopsided where Carew was concerned.

But what were his feelings toward Mollie?

The more he thought about her now, the more puzzled he felt about his own attitude toward her. Ever since they were youngsters, he and she had been the best of pals. When her engagement had been announced, he had been conscious of a distinct feeling of annoyance and resentment. More recently he had been certain — that is, almost certain — that he loved her. Yet now, whenever he thought about her, there came to his mind the picture of her as he had seen her last, her brilliant dark eyes flashing with rage at him as she heard him accuse the man she loved. That one moment had revealed to him an ungovernable temper that he had had no idea she possessed. Somehow his ardor for her seemed to have been consumed in the flame of her wrath toward him. Nor had the story Mrs. Manners had confided to him of her birth served to stimulate his affection. His feeling toward her, he realized almost regretfully, was not, — if indeed it really ever had been — love. It now was more akin to pity, — pity for what lay behind her.

“Isn't there some way,” suggested Miss Addison, “that we could check up Mr. Carew's story and see if he really has been making an investigation?”

Before Tilt could answer her, the telephone rang, and Tilt rose to answer it.

“It's Devan,” he cried delightedly, as he recognized the familiar voice.

“I'm speaking from Boston,” said Devan. “I'll be home to-morrow morning.”

“What luck?” asked Tilt guardedly, mindful of what the local police chief had told him of the possibilities of listening in.

“I know who did it,” said Devan calmly.

“You know,” cried Tilt excitedly, while Miss Addison, all a-tremble at what she had heard of the one-sided conversation, rose and stood expectantly beside him. “Who was it?”

“I must not tell that yet,” replied Devan. “The motive is missing. I've got to establish the motive before I make any statement. Good-by.”

Tilt vainly jiggled the receiver, trying to recall Devan; and then he disappointedly put up the receiver and turned to Miss Addison.

“Devan says he knows who did it, but he won't tell until he establishes the motive.”

“I wonder whom he means?” said the nurse thoughtfully. “I wonder whom it could have been?”

“I haven't the slightest idea,” admitted Tilt. “I'm all balled up about the thing. Anyhow, he'll be here to-morrow, and I'll make him tell us everything. He has it all cleared up but the motive, and if he knows who did it, that ought to be easy to establish.”

“The motive,” said Miss Addison, as if thinking aloud. “That's going to be the hardest part of it. What motive — what possible motive could any one have for murdering such a man as Walter Rhodes?”

CHAPTER XIII

A NEW ALLIANCE

“BUT Dick,” Tilt protested half-angrily to Devan, “it isn’t fair. Here I have told you everything that has happened while you were away, and there was a lot, and you haven’t told me a thing. You’re as silent as a clam about what you learned in Boston. You might at least tell me who it is that you suspect.”

“No, Bill,” his friend replied. “It isn’t fair of you to ask me. Murder is too grave a charge to make against any one until the proof is absolute.”

“But you persist in saying that you know the murderer.”

“That is correct,” said Devan, with provoking calmness. “I told you my method. I have assembled all the facts about the murder that I have been able to gather. The completed picture indicates only one person. It is the sort of person who might have done such a crime. There was plenty

of opportunity for this particular person to have done it. But one important detail in the picture is missing. So far as I have been able to discover, this person had no motive to commit such a crime. That's the puzzling part of it. Before I say anything, before I accuse any one, I must establish a plausible motive for the murder."

"Tell me this much — was it an Italian?"

"I think I can answer that. The person who killed Rhodes was not an Italian."

"Then," cried Tilt disappointedly, "you don't think that little Italian girl, Conchita, is mixed up in it?"

"I'm positive that this girl had nothing whatever to do with the murder."

"But the burglary — the attempt to rob Rhodes's safe. You've got to admit she was concerned in that. She tripped me up. I don't care what you say, I know she did it to let the burglar get away. And remember, I caught her afterward spying on the Rhodes house."

"If you are so certain that she knows about the murder, why don't you hunt her up and tax her with it?"

“Well, at least you’ll admit that the burglar and the murderer must have been the same person.”

“I haven’t gone into that phase of it yet,” Devan replied, “but I hardly think it likely.”

“Damn it,” cried Tilt, “I am going to get hold of that girl and make her talk. If you don’t watch out, I’ll solve this mystery and have the murderer in jail while you still are hunting a motive.”

“Go ahead,” said Devan calmly. “I’m going over to have another chat with Mrs. Manners.”

As his friend departed, Tilt flung himself angrily down in the porch hammock, feeling aggrieved with all the world. He had counted confidently on learning from Devan the result of his investigations, but Devan, since his return from Boston, had been persistently reticent about everything. He still was apparently busy all day long on the case, but most of his evenings he now spent at the Manners home, talking it over with Mrs. Manners and Mollie, and with Ed and Paul Carew, when they happened to be there. The privilege of sharing in these conversations was denied to Tilt, for Mollie still was relentless in her attitude toward him. Mrs. Manners, it

was true, the time or two that he had met her since his quarrel with Mollie, had seemed friendly enough, but as she seldom left the house he had no opportunity for talking with her. Ed Manners he had not seen at all. Only Kit — the Terrible Kit — it seemed to Tilt had remained loyal in her friendship toward him. Recently, while Devan was chatting with the rest of her family, she had acquired the habit of slipping in for a few minutes every evening for a chat with Tilt, keeping him posted on the village gossip.

As he had anticipated, the publication of the will, following his filing papers as executor, had set the tongues wagging in the whole community. Both in the colony and in the village there had been much speculation as to why Rhodes's money had all been left to Mollie Manners. Apparently, too, Pressly Hart had been busy spreading his malicious theory that it was Ed Manners who had committed the crime, for while nothing was being said openly, there were many covert hints both in the gossip and in the newspapers that Ed might soon be arrested. All the neighbors of the Manners family seemed to have taken sides one way or the other, and half of

the little colony now was not on speaking terms with the other half.

Was it Ed that Devan suspected? That was a question that Tilt kept putting to himself without finding a satisfactory answer. Was that Devan's reason, he wondered, for spending so much time at the Manners home. Was he watching Ed, hoping that he might say or do something to betray the motive that actuated the murder?

Or was it Paul Carew?

To Devan, but to no one else, Tilt had voiced his suspicions of Carew, as he told of the visit he had paid to the doctor's office and the ruse he had employed to persuade Miss Addison to let him have access to Rhodes's papers, but Devan merely had listened in silence, without making any comment. Yet, Tilt recalled, right at the beginning Devan had seemed to think the murderer must have been some one in the colony, more than likely some one in the club. That would seem, Tilt argued with himself, to indicate that Devan suspected either Ed or Paul Carew, but which?

As he lay there going over the situation for the thousandth time, Kit slipped noiselessly up on the

porch, and plumping herself down on the top step, proclaimed her presence by hurling a porch pillow into his face.

“Say, Bill,” she said soberly, as he rose up to toss it playfully back at her, “there’s something I want to ask you.”

“How unusual. You’re always a human question mark.”

“But this is important — dreadfully important.”

“Oh, in that case,” he said, with mock solemnity, “we will give the matter our best attention. What is it you wish to know, Miss Manners?”

“When people have babies, don’t they make records of them?”

“What on earth are you driving at? What kind of records?”

“I don’t mean records; certificates — birth certificates, I think they call them.”

Tilt hesitated a minute before he answered her. He wondered what she was trying to get at. Kit had an uncanny way of learning things she was not supposed to know. He wondered if in some way she had gained knowledge of Mollie’s adoption. The secret of Mollie’s birth, so far as he knew, was

confined to Mrs. Manners and Ed, Carew and himself, and old Hodder. He certainly had dropped no hint of it to Kit, and he was positive that none of the others would intentionally have revealed it to her.

“Yes,” he answered after a pause, “whenever a child is born, there is supposed to be filed a certificate of birth.”

“Who files it?”

“The doctor, I believe.”

“Where is it filed?”

“I’m not sure. In the county clerk’s office, I suppose.”

“Does it tell everything — the baby’s name and the father’s name and the mother’s name?”

“I suppose so. I never filed one.”

Tilt was positive now that Kit was on the trail of Mollie’s secret, and he was wondering what he ought to do about it. If Kit had a suspicion that Mollie was an adopted sister, he knew Kit’s character well enough to realize that she would keep at it until she found out what she wanted to know. Should he tell her everything and pledge her to secrecy? That would probably be the wisest course,

he decided, but Kit's next question revealed that all his surmises were wrong.

"When a baby hasn't any father — like Conchita's — what do they do?"

"I don't know," said Tilt, relieved, reassured that Mollie's secret was safe. "I suppose that if the father's name can be ascertained, it is put in the record. Why are you asking?"

"You know, Bill," said Kit, rising suddenly and coming over to the hammock and sitting down confidentially beside him, "ever since that night, I've had a feeling that Conchita knows who killed Doctor Rhodes. I'm confident she's mixed up in it some way. There's that message that we got, 'Find the girl,' and then her being there at the burglary and watching our house and everything; so I've been trying to find out everything I could about her. I found out when her baby was born. It was on October 10 last year, but I haven't been able to find out who its father was."

"How did you find out when it was born?" asked Tilt curiously.

"I went down to Conchita's house, the Burrelis', in the village," explained Kit calmly. "Conchita

and her grandmother were there, and I made a fuss over the baby and asked when its birthday was. It is a cunning thing."

"Why are you so anxious to know about its father?"

"I was thinking," explained Kit. "Why should a girl help a burglar? It's a risky business, and I wondered what would make her do it, taking a chance on getting arrested and everything. There could only be one reason. She was doing it for some one she loved. A girl would do anything for a man if she really loved him. So I figured it out that the reason Conchita was there outside that night was because some one she loved had asked her to do it. More than likely the man she loved would be the father of her baby. If we could find out who he was, maybe we'd find out, that he was the burglar."

"By Gad," cried Tilt, "I think there's something in that. It's certainly worth looking into. I'll try to-morrow to dig up that birth certificate."

"I expect it was Doctor Rhodes who made it out," said Kit. "I know he went there to see Conchita when she was sick. And say, Bill, promise

me"—she laid one of her hands appealingly on his arm—"don't say anything about it to any one, Mr. Devan, or anybody. They might laugh at me, and I don't like to be laughed at."

"You bet I won't," said Tilt, delighted at the prospect of putting something over on Devan and getting square with him for his reticence about the case.

"And say, Bill," said Kit, snuggling a little closer to him, "there's something else. You remember the other day you showed me that message—the one that Doctor Rhodes was writing—and told me about some one having mailed it to Mollie. You showed me the envelope it came in. Have you still got it?"

"Yes, it's in my wallet."

"Can I see it again?"

In reply, Tilt drew out his wallet and handed it to her. Kit sprang up and ran into the hall where there was a light, and an instant later called out excitedly:

"Oh, Bill, Bill Tilt, come in here, quick."

Puzzled to account for her behavior, he vaulted out of the hammock and ran into the hall. Kit, her

face ablaze with excitement, was holding up the envelope under the light and with it another piece of paper.

“Look, look, Bill!” she exclaimed. “It’s the same writing.”

Wonderingly, Tilt snatched the two pieces of paper from her hand and examined them. On the envelope Mollie had given him was her name and address scrawled in a childish, untrained hand. On the other paper was written the words, “Miss Mollie Curran” and an address.

Unquestionably the handwriting was the same. The “M” that was used in both was the same ill-made capital. The same badly formed, irregular letters, the same uphill slope appeared in each.

“Where’d you get this?” he asked eagerly. “Whose writing is it?”

“It’s Conchita’s,” said Kit. “They are the same, aren’t they?”

“You bet they are,” said Tilt jubilantly. “Kit, you’re a wonder. How’d you ever get it?”

“When you showed me that envelope, that writing looked sort of familiar, and I kept thinking and thinking and trying to remember where I had seen

it before, and it wasn't any use. I just couldn't remember. Then one day — it was after we had caught Conchita at the doctor's — I was thinking about her. You know she was in the same room with me that winter I went to the public school out here, and I remembered the funny scrawls she used to make on the blackboard, and it looked like hers, but I wasn't sure. Writing with chalk and with a pen looks different."

"But how did you get this?" interrupted Tilt. "Tell me about that."

"That's really what I went down to Conchita's house for this afternoon. I remembered there was a girl, Mollie Curran, that used to be in our room at school, and I pretended I wanted to find her and asked Conchita if she knew where Mollie lived. She gave me the address, and I asked her to write it down for fear I'd forget it."

"You'd make a wonderful detective, Kit," said Tilt admiringly. "I didn't think you had it in you."

"You're always used to be so busy with Mollie that you never did notice me," said Kit half-plaintively. "I know lots more than you think I do, Bill Tilt."

Could it be that the child had been jealous of his attentions to Mollie? Tilt shot a quick look at Kit as she stood there under the light, and caught his breath. He always had thought of her as just a child, an awkward, bothersome youngster, all legs and arms; but as he looked at her now, her bobbed black hair shining under the light, her eyes sparkling with excitement, her parted lips revealing two regular rows of beautiful white teeth, her tanned cheeks reddening under his gaze, he realized suddenly that right under his nose she had grown up, that she was almost a woman, and more than that, that she already was a ravishing little beauty.

“Well, anyhow,” she said, letting her eyes drop confusedly, “we’ve got the goods on Conchita, haven’t we, Bill?”

“We certainly have. There’s no question that it must have been she who mailed that scrap of paper to Mollie. But the devil of it is, how did she get hold of it, and why did she mail it to Mollie?”

“I know,” said Kit confidently. “The man who did the murder, the same man that tried to get into the safe, is her lover. She must have been watch-

ing at the clubhouse, just as she was at the doctor's. Maybe she was watching there the next morning to see who discovered the body, and when she saw that paper lying there, she must have slipped in and grabbed it while you and Ed were telephoning."

"That sounds logical, but it doesn't account for her mailing it to Mollie."

"Maybe he made her do it to throw suspicion away from him. Maybe she was afraid to tell him about it and didn't know what else to do with it. Bill, you've just got to find out right away who the father of Conchita's baby is — if there's any name at all on the certificate."

"You bet I will," said Tilt determinedly, "and if there is any name on that certificate, it's a hundred to one that we have the name of the murderer."

But not a word of this did he tell to Devan, for he was now more determined than ever to see if he himself couldn't solve the mystery, — that is, he and Kit together. He left the house as usual the next morning, but from the station he telephoned his office that he would not be in until afternoon and then took a train in the opposite direction for the

clerk's office in the county seat. As he rode to his destination, his thoughts kept constantly reverting to the Terrible Kit. What a wonderful young person she had shown herself to be. Her intuitions were simply marvelous and her logic was surprising for so young a girl. How old was she? He counted back and was surprised to discover that Kit was seventeen. He had always thought of her as much younger than that. And how pretty she had grown — really much prettier than Mollie. She was a nice kid, too, loyal and likable, and he flattered himself there was no question but that she thought a lot of him.

He was whistling merrily as he strode up to the courthouse, in better spirits than he had been for many a day, in fact since that morning when he had set out for the early game of tennis with Mollie at the club.

No obstacles were put in his way for obtaining the information he sought, but search of the records took some time. When at last the birth certificate of Conchita Burreli's baby was laid before him, the facts it set forth proved most astounding.

With eyes almost starting from his head, hardly

believing what he read, Tilt scanned the original of the certificate, filed in Walter Rhodes's well-known hand.

“Mother, Conchita Burreli, unmarried.”

“Father (putative), Paul Carew.”

CHAPTER XIV

A PLAN THAT FAILED

WITH a certified copy of the birth certificate in his pocket, Tilt felt that at last he was in a position to supply the missing motive for which Richard Devan had so vainly sought. As he took the train back to the city, he was busily piecing the whole thing together, surprised to discover how well this last discovery accounted for so many of the circumstances that had puzzled him.

Rhodes, of course, knowing Paul Carew's character and relations with Conchita, must have threatened him with exposure unless he broke off his engagement to Mollie. It must have been Carew who had been the mysterious visitor at the doctor's office, the man the doctor himself had admitted so secretly a few days before the tragedy. Carew apparently had persisted in carrying out his plan to marry Mollie, and it seemed most probable that it was he who had telephoned to Rhodes and had ar-

ranged to meet him at the club. Rhodes would have been eager to meet Carew and settle the matter.

As Tilt racked his brains now to recall the events just preceding the murder, he remembered that Carew had not taken Mollie home but had begged off on the plea of business. He recalled, too, that Carew on that night had seemed somewhat nervous. Paul had been in the army, so naturally would be familiar with the use of a rifle. If Carew were the murderer, and Tilt was now firmly convinced that he must have been, it would account for Conchita having been a witness of the crime and perhaps for her discovery of the slip of paper.

It was entirely conceivable, too, that she might have mailed it to Mollie out of sheer jealousy. She must have known of Carew's engagement. Perhaps she might even have been trying to direct suspicion toward Mollie in the hope of thwarting her marriage to Carew. This explanation would account, it seemed to Tilt, for all of Carew's extraordinary actions, — his efforts to prevent Mollie from taking any part in the investigation, his ruse for gaining an opportunity of examining the doctor's papers. More than likely, haunted by guilt, he

feared that the doctor might have left some written record that would betray his relations with Conchita and forever bar him from marrying Mollie.

Undoubtedly, Tilt decided, it had been Carew who was trying to open the doctor's safe, while Conchita stood guard. Failing to find any of the private papers at the office, he naturally would have planned to raid the safe, to make certain that it contained no evidence of his guilt. As Tilt recalled the figure he had seen kneeling before the safe, he wondered that he had not recognized it at once as Carew's. He recalled, too, that when Carew appeared a few minutes later at the Manners house, he was all out of breath, as if he had been running.

Every single fact — even to the sight of Conchita jealously peering through the window at Carew and Mollie — seemed to point to Carew's guilt.

Detained from his office for several hours by his visit to the county seat, Tilt was much later than his usual time in leaving the office, and snatching a hasty bite at the station, caught a train that got him home a little after eight. He was eager to reveal his amazing news to Devan and would have enjoyed crowing over him, but he felt that the news

was not rightfully his to proclaim. It surely belonged to Kit to get all credit for solving the mystery. He must tell her first, before he told any one else. It was her shrewdness in getting the sample of Conchita's handwriting and her cleverness in suggesting the birth records be looked up that had supplied the missing clues. The news was Kit's — not his.

When he reached home, he was surprised to find quite an assemblage there, — Pressly Hart, John Dixon and Chief of Police Smithers. Devan was there, too, busy splicing an extra receiver to the telephone in the living room.

“Hello, Bill,” said Devan. “You're just in time. I was hoping you'd get here. We are just arranging a little test that I think will establish the identity of the man who murdered Doctor Rhodes.”

“What is it?” asked Tilt wonderingly.

“I'll explain it a little later,” Devan replied, as he completed his arrangements and sat down with the group, “but first, gentlemen, I wish to tell a story, to explain what I was doing in Boston.”

“It's about time you did,” interjected Hart.

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“As some of you know,” continued Devan, “Walter Rhodes had been an officer in the navy. He went to the Philippines just after the war with Spain and was reported killed there. Just before his departure he had married, and in his absence a child was born — a girl. Believing him dead, his wife remarried. Months afterward, he was found in a Filipino village, his memory gone from a blow on the head. Restored to health by an operation at Manila, as soon as he was able to travel, he returned to this country, escorted by old Hodder, the man who looks after your boats here, eager to find the wife of whom he had lost all trace.

“After weeks of searching, he found her married to another man. Her second husband, in despair over the situation, committed suicide, and Mrs. Rhodes herself broke down under the strain. She became violently insane and tried to kill Rhodes, and old Hodder saved his life. Assured by medical advice that there was no hope of his wife ever recovering her reason, Rhodes eventually placed her in a small private sanitarium just outside Boston, run by a couple named Karuski. He came into some money about that time and placed it all in

trust for his wife's maintenance; and there, in the custody of the Karuskis, or rather of Mrs. Karuski, for the man died years ago, she has remained ever since."

"And the child — what became of it?" questioned Dixon eagerly.

"It was adopted by a friend of Rhodes and reared without ever knowing that Walter Rhodes was any relation."

"It wasn't ——" Pressly Hart hesitated, appalled at the thought that had come to him — "It couldn't have been Mollie Manners."

"Yes," said Devan. "She is Rhodes's own daughter."

"So that's why he left her all his money," commented Dixon. "That explains the will."

"That's not all it explains," Devan continued. "Sophie Karuski had a son. With the ample funds she received for taking care of Mrs. Rhodes and other patients, she was able to see that he had a good education. This son went to Cornell and later was an officer in the army. Naturally he and his mother must always have been interested in following the career of this husband of their best-paid patient."

The son, learning of Rhodes's prosperity, turned up here in Rockmont."

"You don't mean Paul Carew?" cried Hart.

"Yes," said Devan. "He had Americanized his name. I do not imagine Rhodes ever associated him with the sanitarium that so long had sheltered his wife."

"What did he want here? What did he come for?" asked Chief Smithers.

"What his original idea may have been I do not know," said Devan. "He may have had some idea of putting his knowledge to criminal use and blackmailing Rhodes. He must have known that Mollie was the doctor's daughter. Apparently, after looking over the situation, he decided that the easiest way to gain the Rhodes fortune would be to marry Mollie."

All the while Devan was talking, Tilt had sat listening in silence, regretting that Devan had considered it necessary to tell the story of Mollie's parentage. Presumably it was bound to come out before the murder could be explained, but it seemed a pity to recite it in the presence of such an inveterate gossip as Pressly Hart.

“Yet,” continued Devan, “though many things point to Paul Carew or Karuski as the murderer of Rhodes, there is still one thing that puzzles me. Nothing that I have discovered seems to establish a motive, a motive sufficiently potent to make him commit a murder. His marriage to Miss Manners assured, he must have known that Rhodes sooner or later would leave the girl his fortune. It seems incredible that he should have been so money hungry that he would risk disgrace and punishment to get in advance what was certain to be his wife’s. While all these facts have been in my possession for a week, I have hesitated to tell them to you and have been spending night after night with Carew, hoping that he would in some way betray himself, but he seems to be on guard.

“With a motive lacking, I hesitated to suggest his arrest, but finally I decided to lay the facts before you and be guided by your judgment, after making one other test. You recall, gentlemen, that an hour before Rhodes was murdered, he was called to the telephone. Mrs. Grady talked with the person who called him. At nine o’clock to-night I have arranged for Paul Carew to call me here. Mrs.

Grady is waiting out in the kitchen. I propose to have her listen at this second receiver. If she recognizes the voice of Carew as the person who called up Rhodes that night, what do you say, gentlemen — should he be arrested? ”

“ Sure, arrest him — the hound — coming around here under another name,” said Pressly Hart.

“ I would say, arrest him,” said Dixon.

“ I’m for it,” announced Chief Smithers.

“ And you, Tilt,” asked Devan, “ what is your answer? ”

“ You can make no mistake in arresting Paul Carew,” said Tilt, speaking with confidence because of the discoveries that he and Kit had made, yet still keeping his knowledge to himself. Time enough to tell it, to explain the motive, when Carew had been arrested.

Devan looked at his watch, and disappearing into the kitchen, returned with Mrs. Grady, whom he seated near the telephone.

“ Mrs. Grady,” he said, “ you remember at the inquest that you told of some one having called Doctor Rhodes to the telephone after midnight, on the night he was killed.”

“Sure, I remember.”

“Would you know that voice if you heard it again?”

“Sure an’ I would that — a quare voice it was.”

“It was, I think you said, a man’s voice?”

“It sounded like a man’s voice, sort of husky like.”

“But it was a man’s voice?”

“It sounded like it, I’m telling you, though how could I be saying for sure and me not seeing who was talking?”

“But you’d know the voice again if you heard it?”

“That I would, what with it keeping ringing and ringing in my ears all the time, the very last message I ever took for the doctor, God rest his soul. Would I know that voice again? I would, I’m telling you. Just let me hear it once again, and I’ll be telling you who killed Doctor Rhodes.”

“Very well,” said Devan, consulting his watch again, “in a minute a man is going to call me here. I want you to take this extra receiver and listen. If it is the voice you heard, raise your hand like this.”

The telephone bell sounded. Breathless, the little group sat watching as Rhodes answered it. Mrs. Grady, her face screwed up ridiculously, sat holding the extra receiver to her ear.

“Hello, this is Devan,” they heard the investigator say, noting that he was careful not to mention the name of the man to whom he was talking. “No, there’s nothing new. I thought there would be when I asked you to call me up, but there isn’t. I’ll see you to-morrow — to-morrow night — Good-by.”

Eagerly they all had been watching the old housekeeper, confident that at any instant her hand would be raised, confirming their suspicions, but as Devan hung up the receiver, she dropped hers abruptly and looked about at their questioning faces with a comical air of bewilderment.

“And what’s it all about?” she asked. “Is it a joke you’re playing on me?”

“The voice,” cried Devan, “the voice — did you recognize that voice?”

“Sure an’ I did that. It was Mr. Carew’s voice — him that’s engaged to Miss Manners.”

“And that wasn’t the voice you heard that night?”

“Mr. Carew? It was not. Sure, I’d have known his voice any time.” She looked about her, gazing into their faces with sudden suspicion. “My God, it ain’t him you’re suspecting of killing the doctor?”

“We suspect nobody,” said Devan in baffled tones, “we just wanted to make sure that it was not he who had called the doctor that night.”

“It was not. I’ll swear to that,” said Mrs. Grady firmly. “It was a quare husky-sounding voice, a voice I never had heard before, I’m telling you.”

“That will be all, Mrs. Grady,” said Devan, adding sternly, “and I must warn you that you are to say nothing of this to any one.”

“And it’s not like me to be telling what’s none of my business,” snorted the old woman indignantly, as she flounced out of the room.

Left alone, the four men looked at each other blankly. All of them, even Tilt, had been confident that the experiment would confirm their theory.

“Well, if it wasn’t Carew who called the doctor, who was it? That’s what I’d like to know,” said Pressly Hart nervously.

“It may have been some confederate,” suggested Dixon.

“Nothing that I have discovered indicates that he had any confederate,” said Devan. “I don’t know what to make of it. I was positive the old lady would identify his voice.”

“Maybe she did and is lying about it,” suggested Chief Smithers.

“That’s out of the question,” said Tilt quickly. “She was devoted body and soul to Rhodes and is as anxious as any of us to see his murderer discovered and punished.”

“Well, Mr. Hart,” said Devan, “it is up to you to decide. Do you think the story I have related is sufficiently strong to order the arrest of Paul Carew?”

“I — I — really don’t know what to say,” stammered Hart.

“I don’t see what harm it can do,” said Dixon judicially. “If Carew is innocent, he ought to have no difficulty in proving his innocence. At any rate it will do no harm to have his real identity revealed. It seems to me it would be a shame to let his relations with Miss Manners continue without her

knowing who he is — a masquerading fortune hunter.”

“By all means his arrest should be ordered at once,” said Tilt. “I am confident that once he is arrested the motive for the crime will be quickly revealed. I myself expect to be able to make public to-morrow some facts that will supply the missing motive.”

“What have you discovered, Bill?” asked Devan quickly, sensing from the confidence with which Tilt spoke that he was possessed of information he was keeping to himself.

“I can’t tell it even to you until to-morrow,” said Tilt. “All I can say is that I’ll produce some documents — some amazing documents — that will supply all the motive you want.”

“Where’d you get them?” demanded Pressly Hart eagerly.

“That is my secret — and somebody else’s,” said Tilt mysteriously.

“Perhaps in view of what you have said,” cautioned Dixon, “it might be well to postpone the arrest until after these documents have been made public.”

“I’m agin that,” said Chief Smithers. “The old woman knows we are suspicioning this fellow Carew, and what a woman knows, soon everybody knows. By to-morrow morning it’ll be all over town that we are after him, and he may skip out. I’m for taking no chances. I’m going to arrest him to-night — right away.”

“No, no,” cried Devan, “you mustn’t do that. He’s over at the Manners house. Don’t arrest him there.”

“Very well,” said Chief Smithers, “if you insist upon it, I’ll wait. But I warn ye, I’m taking no chances. I’m going to get out the whole police force — both of them — and we’ll trail him home and arrest him when he gets to the Inn. There ain’t no murderer going to slip through my fingers. I’m off right now.”

It was an hour before Hart and Dixon left, and soon afterward Tilt and Devan retired, going to bed as soon as Smithers had telephoned that Carew had been arrested and was safe in the village prison under guard.

Neither of them could sleep. In the minds of both Devan and Tilt there was the same unanswered

question. How would Mollie Manners take her fiancé's arrest?

What would Mollie say?

CHAPTER XV

INDISPUTABLE PROOF

KIT MANNERS came bounding in on Bill the next morning as he was at breakfast. Devan, arising earlier, had already departed, and Bill was alone.

“Oh, Bill, Bill,” cried Kit, all excitement. “Is it true? Has Paul Carew been arrested?”

“Yes, it’s true. He was arrested last night at the Inn just after he left your house.”

“What did you find out? Did you have him arrested? Was he — had he been mixed up with Conchita?”

Kit fired her questions at him in quick succession, her eyes shining with eagerness, and her lovely red lips parted, tense, quivering.

For a moment Tilt did not answer her. He was wondering how she would take the news that Mollie was not her real sister. There was no use trying to conceal it from her any longer, for now that Devan had told it to Pressly Hart, it soon would be com-

mon knowledge. At any rate, Kit, with her uncanny way of finding things out, would quickly learn it. He might as well tell her the whole thing, he decided.

“Go on, Bill,” she urged him. “Tell me everything.”

“How did you know that Carew had been arrested?”

“I heard Mr. Devan telling Mollie. He came over to the house this morning early, before breakfast. I heard him asking for Mollie, and I wondered what he wanted of her at that hour. When she slipped on a kimono and went down to see him, I was in the dining room eating my breakfast, and I guess they didn't know I was there. ‘I have some bad news for you,’ I heard him say, ‘but I wanted to be the first to tell you.’ Then he told her about Paul being arrested.”

“What did she do? What did she say? How did she take it?” asked Tilt.

Remembering the whirlwind of wrath he had stirred up when he had ventured to suggest to Mollie that her fiancé had been deceiving her, he was inclined to believe that Mollie's affection for Carew

was deep-rooted. There was no question in his mind that Devan, when he sought to break the unpleasant news to her, must have let himself in for a bad time of it.

“I didn’t wait to hear,” answered Kit, to his great disappointment. “I jumped up from the table and slipped out the side door and ran over here to find out what you’d done. What *did* you find out about Paul and Conchita? Go on, tell me. Tell me everything.”

“The birth certificate signed by Doctor Rhodes gives Paul Carew as the putative father of Conchita’s child.”

“I knew it,” said Kit. “What’s ‘putative’ mean?”

“It means ‘supposed’—can’t be proved.”

“That explains everything then, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, it undoubtedly does, but the strange part of it is, that nobody knows about this but you and me. I haven’t told a soul.”

“Then why’d they arrest Carew?”

“Devan has been gathering a lot of information about the case. He put it all before Pressly Hart and Dixon and Chief Smithers last night, and they

decided to order Carew's arrest, even though a test that Devan had planned was a complete failure."

"What test? What was it?"

"You remember the night before Doctor Rhodes was killed somebody called him on the telephone after midnight. Well, last night Devan had Mrs. Grady here and got Carew to call him on the 'phone at nine o'clock. He had the old woman listening in and was confident that she would be able to identify Carew's voice, but she didn't. She knew at once whose voice it was but said positively it was not the person who had called her up. She insisted that she would know the voice again if she heard it, said it was a queer, husky-sounding voice, but she didn't seem quite sure whether it was a man's or a woman's."

"If it wasn't Paul who called up the doctor, who could it have been?" asked Kit thoughtfully.

"I give it up. Do you suppose it could have been Conchita?"

"No," said Kit, "she has a clear, sweet voice."

"Or her old grandmother?"

"She hardly speaks English. It couldn't have been her. Besides, I don't believe she knows about

Paul and Conchita. I'm certain she doesn't know who the baby's father is. But tell me, Bill, if Mr. Devan didn't know about this, why did he want Paul arrested? What has he found out?"

"It's a long story," said Tilt, as he proceeded to relate in detail the strange tragedy that had befallen Rhodes in the early years of his marriage, of the insanity of his wife and her confinement in Sophie Karuski's sanitarium and of the adoption of the child by her own parents.

"So Mollie was Doctor Rhodes's daughter and not my real sister at all," said Kit, her keen mind jumping ahead of his narrative. "Do you know, Bill, that explains a lot of things to me. I've often wondered if Mollie were really my sister. We're not a bit alike."

"How? What do you mean?"

"We don't look a bit alike, do we?"

"No," confessed Tilt. "I don't believe you do, but there is often a difference in looks in families."

"Of course, everybody's different, but there's always a sort of family resemblance; but it's in our characters that I think we're mostly different. Now

I get mad easily, and I'm hopping mad for a second or so and then it's all over. Mollie hardly ever gets angry. I only remember seeing her that way twice, and then she is terrible. I'm really afraid of her. She seems to go almost insane, and she never, never gets over it. She keeps on hating and hating the person she got angry at. I couldn't do that."

"There is a big difference between you," admitted Tilt.

"But still," said Kit, "I don't see what made Mr. Devan suspect Paul?"

"Paul Carew's real name is Karuski," explained Bill. "He is a son of the woman who runs the sanitarium where Doctor Rhodes's wife has been kept all these years."

A whistle of astonishment escaped Kit.

"I see it all now. All his life he has known about this rich man's wife in his mother's place, and he must have known about Mollie being the daughter. He must have deliberately planned it all out, coming here and getting acquainted with everybody and then starting in to court Mollie to get her fortune. I can understand, too, why he wanted Doctor

Rhodes out of the way. Doctor Rhodes knew about him and Conchita and must have been trying to prevent his marrying Mollie. That explains it, doesn't it, Bill?"

"That certainly supplies a motive. It also accounts for the mysterious visitor at Rhodes's office a few days before his murder. To my mind it even explains the attempted burglary. I haven't the slightest doubt that Carew was trying to get hold of the doctor's papers to make sure that there was nothing in them that would betray his relations with Conchita."

"And it explains why Conchita was watching our house that night, too," said Kit, "and why she mailed that letter to Mollie. Poor, little Conchita! She must have been having a bad time of it. She must have loved Paul and to see him engaged to Mollie must have been terrible for her. It's perfectly awful when the man you love loves somebody else."

"Probably Paul made her all sorts of promises about what they would do when he got hold of the money. I'm convinced that he is a thoroughly bad egg — coming here under an assumed name, getting

that girl into trouble, plotting to get Mollie's money, and then killing Rhodes. There'll be no difficulty at all in convicting him."

"But, say, Bill," said Kit meditatively, "isn't it strange how it has all worked out, just the way ouija said?"

"Shucks!" said Tilt, "ouija had nothing to do with it."

"You've got to admit," retorted Kit, "that when we asked ouija who killed Doctor Rhodes, right at the start it kept saying, 'Ask Paul Carew'; and that night we tried the automatic writing my hand kept writing, 'Find the girl. Find the girl.' Everything that has come out is right in accord with that. How do you explain it? You've just got to believe in ouija."

"I don't explain it. I can't. But it's not ouija. Probably it's this: you never liked Carew, and your subconscious mind made the board say that. That's all there is to it. When you asked if Mollie were going to marry Paul Carew, don't you remember it kept saying my name?"

"Well, she isn't going to marry Carew, is she?" cried Kit triumphantly.

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“She isn’t going to marry me, either,” said Tilt gloomily. “She won’t even speak to me.”

“Maybe it’ll be different now,” suggested Kit, though her face darkened as she made the suggestion, but before Tilt could make any further comment a caller was announced.

It was Police Chief Smithers.

“Good morning, Mr. Tilt. Good morning, Miss Manners,” he said almost gaily as he entered, feeling very self-important over his work of the night before. “I just come to notify you, and you, too, Miss Manners, that you both are to be on hand this afternoon as witnesses in Judge Dickinson’s court at three o’clock, when there’ll be a preliminary hearing. I’m summoning everybody that knows anything at all about the case, old Hodder and everybody.”

“Tell me,” said Tilt, “how did Carew take it when you arrested him?”

“You remember how Mr. Devan wouldn’t hear to his being arrested while he was at the Mannenses. Well, as soon as I’d left here, I hurry back to the village, and I rout out the force. I take Casey and Muldoon both with me, and I post Muldoon near the Inn where he can see everybody who goes in. Casey

and me goes out to the Mannerses, and Casey hides in the bushes. I wait about in the road until the suspected party comes out. Then, just casual like, I walks along with him, chatting about this and that, with Casey following along about a half a block behind, and him none the wiser."

"Did he seem nervous or suspicious?"

"Not a bit of it. He walks along just as cool as a cucumber, never suspecting a thing. I walks with him right up to the door of the Inn, with Casey closing in behind like we'd agreed upon and Muldoon edging up closer. Then just at the very door, I seizes him by one arm and Muldoon by the other, and Casey jumps around in front of him with drawn revolver, and I says, 'Paul Carew, alias Paul Karuski, I arrest you in the name of the law for the murder of Doctor Walter Rhodes.'"

"And what did he do?" asked Devan, who had come in unobserved and had been standing listening intently to Smithers' narrative.

"He just laughed," said the Chief indignantly.

"Laughed?" echoed Kit, horror-stricken at the idea of levity under such thrilling circumstances.

"Yes," said Smithers; "he laughed and said,

'Smithers,' says he, 'you've been going to the movies too much.'"

"He certainly is a cool one," said Devan. "But he'll soon laugh with the other side of his mouth. The case against him is perfect, all but the motive. If I could only supply the missing motive, the case would be absolute."

"Suppose you ask Kit about it," suggested Tilt. "I think she can tell you the motive."

Kit, visibly delighted at being thus thrust in the center of the stage, beamed triumphantly at Devan as he turned inquiring eyes in her direction.

"It's perfectly simple," she said. "Paul Carew was the father of Conchita's baby and Doctor Rhodes knew it and wouldn't let him marry Mollie, so he killed Rhodes to get him out of the way."

"What's this?" cried Devan, his interest at once aroused. "What are you talking about?"

"It is perfectly true," said Tilt, producing the certified copy of the birth certificate.

"Well, I swan!" exclaimed Smithers, as he and Devan together inspected the document.

"And here's something else," said Tilt, taking from his pocket the envelope that had been mailed to

Mollie. "Kit has discovered that the handwriting on this envelope that contained the missing message Rhodes was writing that night is Conchita's. See, here is another sample of it. There is direct evidence of the connection of Carew and Conchita with the murder."

"I congratulate you, Tilt," said Devan. "You have found the motive that baffled me."

"Don't thank me," said Tilt; "thank Kit. She did it all. Right from the start she suspected Carew, and she has gone about trying to solve the mystery with such intelligence that the entire credit should be hers."

"It certainly should," said Devan enthusiastically. "But tell me what made you suspect Carew in the first place?"

Flushing delightedly under Bill's enthusiastic praise, Kit at Devan's question seemed at once to be strangely embarrassed and at a loss what to say. She still firmly believed in the message that ouija had given her, but since Bill scoffed at it, it seemed to her that to mention it now would be almost like a breach of faith with him. Besides, they might laugh at her, and she did not relish such a prospect.

"I don't know," she said stumbingly. "I guess I never liked him and — and — my subconscious mind maybe made me suspicious of him."

"Will the other Manners girl — Miss Mollie — be at the hearing this afternoon?" asked Chief Smithers suddenly, turning to Devan.

"Oh, yes," said Devan, "she'll be there. She'll be glad to testify."

"How'd she take it when you told her?" asked Tilt eagerly. It hardly seemed good form to be discussing such intimate matters before the village grocer, but he felt that he just must know.

"I think," said Devan judicially, "that Miss Manners for some time past has gradually been becoming aware that there are serious defects in the character of her lover. Even if he had not been arrested, I doubt if she would have continued in her engagement. She took the news quite calmly; indeed, it appeared to me that it came to her with a sense of relief."

"Do you think she suspected him?" asked Tilt quickly.

"I would not go so far as to say that. My observation has been, however, that while a criminal

may for a time mask his character when among decent people, it is a hard rôle to sustain. When brought into intimate relations with the innocent-minded, he is sure, sooner or later, to betray himself. A sweet girl like Miss Manners, even though she may at first have been strongly attracted by Carew's personality, would be disillusioned as she became more intimate with him."

"I never did think she really loved him," interjected Kit.

"Anyhow," said Chief Smithers, "I guess his goose is cooked. With these here documents that Miss Kit and Mr. Tilt have dug up, we've sure got the goods on him right and proper, for all of his boasting."

"What boasting?" asked Tilt. "You didn't tell us anything about that."

"I ain't had a chance to tell it," said the police chief aggrievedly. "Things have been happening so fast around here I never did get to finish my story about arresting him."

"Go on, tell us the rest of it," directed Devan.

"As I was saying, when I took him under arrest, he just laughed, and all the way to the station where

I locked him up in a cell and put Muldoon on guard all night, he kept chuckling to himself. It made me sort of sore the way he kept chuckling and laughing, and I did my duty and warned him that anything he might say or do might be used as evidence against him."

"Didn't he say anything at all?" asked Tilt.

"Not from the time he was first arrested, when he made that there scurrilous remark about my going to the movies too much until I locked him in the cell."

"But you said he was boasting."

"He did all right. Just as I was leaving, he chuckled again, and he says to me, says he, 'Smithers, you've made an ass of yourself arresting me. I didn't kill Doctor Rhodes. I couldn't have. I've got indisputable proof that I couldn't possibly have done it.'"

"What do you suppose he meant by that?" asked Tilt, turning inquiringly to Devan.

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Devan.

"If he didn't do it, who else could have done it?" cried Kit.

"I don't know nothing about it," said Smithers.

“All I know is that them were his very words, ‘ indisputable proof.’ ”

“ Indisputable proof,” repeated Devan, puzzled.

CHAPTER XVI

AN OUTCOME UNEXPECTED

THE last half-hour in Judge Dickinson's court before the time set for the hearing of Paul Carew kept the court officers busy. The room began filling up with members of the Rockmont colony among whom the news of Carew's arrest had spread with amazing rapidity even before the afternoon editions of the papers came out with great headlines. With one accord, the neighbors of the Manners family flocked to the court, where they sat gossiping in excited whispers, exchanging significant nods and every once in a while turning with interest toward the entrance as some of those more intimately concerned in the case came in.

There was a flutter as Mollie Manners entered with her mother, escorted by her brother and Richard Devan. Kit was with them, but she slipped away as they passed the doorway and sat down beside Bill Tilt, who in guarded whispers was discussing the case with John Dixon.

"I don't see," Dixon had just observed, "how

there is a possible loophole for Carew. Devan and I have just gone over every angle of the affair with the county prosecutor, and he says the case is perfect.”

“I’m inclined to think Carew was only bluffing about being able to prove his innocence.”

The entrance of Chief Smithers accompanied by the Italian girl caused considerable commotion and much wonderment among the spectators, who had not yet learned just what Conchita’s connection with the case was. As she entered, Conchita was in tears, and from the tight grasp Smithers kept on her arm, it was evident that if not a prisoner, at least she had come most unwillingly to the hearing. As the hour approached, Doctor Dooner, the county physician, bustled in, busily important, followed by Mrs. Grady and old Hodder.

At three o’clock precisely an officer of the court led in Paul Carew, escorting him to a seat before the judge, where he at once became the observed of all eyes. Jauntily, insouciantly, he met the gaze of his friends and neighbors, looking as trim and dapper as if he had just come from his office instead of a night in a cell.

“He’s certainly brazen about it,” muttered Tilt.

“Seems cocksure of himself,” said Dixon.

A keen-faced lawyer, whom no one recognized, took his seat beside Carew, and after a whispered conversation with him glanced about the room as if to see that his witnesses were present. The county prosecutor made a brief recital of the facts regarding the murder of Rhodes, offering Doctor Dooner as his first witness. As the latter advanced, visibly delighted at the opportunity for publicity, Carew’s lawyer — Max Schreyer, it developed that his name was — arose.

“Your Honor,” he said, “there is no use wasting the time of the court. We admit the known facts — that Walter Rhodes was killed by a rifle shot in the Rockmont Club.”

To Doctor Dooner’s great disappointment, the judge waved him aside, and Richard Devan was called.

As briefly as he could, at the prosecutor’s direction, Devan recited the facts as he had gathered them, telling of Rhodes’s marriage, of his being lost in the Philippines, of his wife’s remarriage, of his restoration to health and return to this country, of

his finding his wife married to another man, and of the tragedy that followed. He told, to the utter bewilderment of most of the Rockmont colony present, who Mollie was — the daughter of Rhodes — and that her mother for years had been confined in the sanitarium of Sophie Karuski.

For a moment or two the attention of every one was diverted from Carew to Mollie, who sat, her face hidden by a heavy veil, apparently unmoved by the recital. But quickly, as Devan went on with his story, the gaze of the audience shifted to the prisoner.

“Investigating the fate of Rhodes’s wife,” said Devan, “I learned that Mrs. Karuski had a son. This son, familiar with the history of his mother’s patient, learning that Rhodes was a wealthy man and knowing that Rhodes’s daughter had been adopted by the Manners family, after his return from the war came to Rockmont, came under an assumed name, and after establishing himself in the colony there, began an ardent suit for Miss Manners’ hand, undoubtedly with the intention of possessing himself of Rhodes’s fortune.”

“So far,” interrupted the judge, “I fail to see

that you have introduced any evidence that warrants accusing Mr. Carew of the doctor's murder. If he were about to marry the doctor's heir, what object would he have in making away with Rhodes? Surely if your theory of the crime is correct, he would not have planned to murder Doctor Rhodes until after the marriage had taken place. It seems most improbable that he would have endangered his matrimonial plans by committing this murder."

"I admit, your Honor," said Devan, "that your point is well taken. Up until last night, I was utterly at a loss to account for the murder, but a fortunate discovery permits me to offer in evidence documents that tell beyond doubt why the death of Rhodes was necessary for him to carry out his nefarious plan."

For the first time since his appearance in the courtroom, Carew exhibited nervousness. As Devan spoke of documents, he gave a start, and his gaze roved about the courtroom. Catching sight for the first time of Conchita sitting beside Chief Smithers, he stared at her for a moment as if taken by surprise, and then, turning quickly, began a conversation with his lawyer in agitated whispers.

“Unfortunately for the success of his plans,” Devan continued, “Carew became involved with a girl in the village, an Italian girl. Conchita Burreli had a child, and I have here a birth certificate, signed by Doctor Rhodes, in which the putative father is given as Paul Carew. Knowing of this incident in Carew’s life, Rhodes demanded that Carew break the engagement, threatening him with exposure.”

“Your Honor,” interrupted Carew’s lawyer. “This attack on my client’s character is unwarranted. It in no way proves him guilty of murder, whatever other wrongs he may have committed. To expedite matters, however, we will admit that my client is a son of the woman in whose charge Doctor Rhodes’s wife has been for many years. We will admit that he knew the identity of Doctor Rhodes’s daughter, that he came here with the intention of marrying her if he could. We object to the statement that he used an assumed name. The records will show that his name was legally changed before he sought a commission in the army. We will even admit that Doctor Rhodes suspected him of being the father of Conchita Burreli’s child, and we will

further admit that Rhodes was trying to prevent my client's marriage to his daughter."

Tilt and Dixon exchanged bewildered glances. They neither of them could understand the tactics of the defence. What possible motive could the attorney have in admitting all these circumstances that on their face so damaged his client's case?

"Bill," whispered Kit, clutching his arm, "they're up to something — something crooked."

"Your Honor," said the lawyer, "since we admit everything the prosecution has advanced, I would like now to call some witnesses who will prove beyond any question that my client did not kill Walter Rhodes, that it was a physical impossibility for him to have done so."

Judge Dickinson, like the others in the courtroom, plainly puzzled by the turn affairs had taken, nodded assent, and Schreyer at once called to the stand Harry Dane, the night clerk at the Rockmont Inn.

"Mr. Dane," said the lawyer, "do you recall seeing Paul Carew on the night before Doctor Rhodes was murdered?"

"Yes. He hurried in to the hotel in his dinner

coat after midnight, and as he rushed up to his room to change, he asked me to get a taxi and have it waiting. He said he had to catch the 12:40 into the city. I got the taxi for him, and he went off in it."

"That's all," said Schreyer, calling the taxi driver, who corroborated the night clerk's story in every particular. He had driven Carew directly to the station, getting him there at least five minutes before train time.

The station agent was called and asked if he remembered the circumstance.

"Sure, I remember it. While Mr. Carew was waiting, he stood at the ticket window talking to me. I was joshing him about going to the city at that time of night."

"What did he say?"

"He told me that he had an important engagement the first thing the next morning."

"Did you see him get aboard the train?"

"Yes. I closed the station as I heard the train coming and went out on the platform with Mr. Carew. I saw him get aboard."

A railroad conductor was the next witness. While

he was not positive in his identification of Carew, he identified a punch mark in Carew's ticket as his, and swore that he had been in charge of the 12:40 train on the night mentioned. As the final link in the alibi the lawyer was establishing, he introduced as a witness the night clerk in one of the big city hotels.

"Do you recognize the defendant?" asked the lawyer.

"I do," said the witness, after he had carefully inspected him.

"When did you last see him?"

"He came into the hotel one morning several weeks ago about two in the morning and asked for a room. I told him we were full up. He said that it was important that he should be there at six the next morning, as he had an engagement to meet some one there, and asked if there was not some way in which I could fix him up."

"And did you?"

"Yes, I let him occupy the room of one of our permanent guests who I knew was out of the city that night."

"Do you recall just what night this was?"

“The register will show. He registered his name and address.”

“Did you bring the sheets of the register with you for the date that I requested you to?”

“Yes,” said the clerk, unrolling a small package he was carrying.

Schreyer inspected it for a brief instant and then handed it to the judge, observing:

“Here, your Honor, you will see that on the night in question, on the night that Walter Rhodes was murdered, is Mr. Carew’s signature, and the hour — 2 A. M. When Mr. Carew sent for me after his arrest, the first question I asked him was to account for where he was on the night of the murder. He said that he had gone to the city on the last train and gave me a detailed account of his movements. Fortunately I was able to collect these witnesses to verify his statements. I submit that it was an impossibility for him to have committed a murder in Rockmont at or about one o’clock in the morning when his actions from the time he left the club at midnight are fully accounted for, when the records show that at the time the murder must have been committed he was miles away. In all my

experience as a criminal lawyer, I have never seen so perfect an alibi. I therefore demand my client's immediate discharge."

It was plain to every one that the alibi that Carew had succeeded in establishing had come as a bomb-shell into the midst of those who had been accusing him. The prosecutor glanced inquiringly at Devan, who shook his head despairingly. Tilt and Dixon, their heads close together, were holding a whispered conference, but any one could see from their disappointed faces that they realized how utterly their case had collapsed. Of all those concerned only Kit Manners seemed unaffected. As she had listened to the alibi as it was developed, she had turned to look at Carew, studying his face intently as if trying to read his thoughts. A look of annoyance that had come over her countenance as she saw the growing confidence with which he listened to the witnesses had all at once given place to a flash of quick understanding. Turning around in her seat, she let her gaze rove to every corner of the courtroom, watching the faces of the people, quickly passing by those whom she recognized, but studying the others carefully, thoughtfully. Had any one been watching

her instead of what was going on in the front of the courtroom, they must have recognized something more than mere curiosity in her glance, something purposeful, portentous.

“Mr. Schreyer,” said the judge, “I congratulate you. However reprehensible your client’s conduct may have been in other respects, whatever his relations may have been with the Italian girl, or whatever his plans may have been for gaining possession of Rhodes’s fortune, or whatever his matrimonial intentions were, the alibi he has offered assuredly makes it physically impossible for him to have committed this crime.”

Turning to the prosecutor, he asked, “Have you any evidence to offer — anything to offset the testimony of the witnesses we have just heard?”

“Nothing, your Honor,” stammered the prosecutor.

“Mr. Devan,” said the judge, “you have been investigating this case, and it was upon the facts that you assembled that the defendant was arrested. Are you convinced, after hearing these witnesses, that it was impossible, physically impossible, for Mr. Carew to have committed the murder?”

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“I’m convinced,” said Devan, “though I can’t understand it at all. Every known fact points to Paul Carew as logically the guilty man.”

“But,” said the judge, “the alibi these witnesses establish is proof — indisputable proof — that he could not have done it.”

Tilt, as he heard the judge repeat the very words that Carew himself had used, slumped down in his seat, dejected and disheartened, puzzled to know what to make of it. Only a few minutes before, as he and Devan had discussed the case with the prosecutor, it had seemed to him that there was no possible loophole by which Carew could escape. The evidence against him had seemed complete, positive, damning. Yet the alibi — the alibi so perfect that it seemed almost as if it had been prepared in advance — had shattered their case.

The mystery of the murder now seemed more baffling, more unsolvable than ever. If Carew hadn’t done it — who could have — Mollie? The possibility of her — the daughter of an insane mother, possibly tainted with homicidal mania — being the guilty one loomed up, horrifying him beyond all measure. Resolutely he tried to shut out

the repellent thought, but it kept coming again and again to his confused mind.

A damaging sequence of memories flocked into his brain. Mollie loved Carew. Mollie had become insanely furious at him when he made reflections on Carew. If Rhodes had tried to warn her against Carew, would she not have been enraged — almost beside herself? Could it have been Mollie who had met Doctor Rhodes there in the clubhouse at one in the morning?

Reason against it though he tried, Tilt had to admit that there was no circumstance of the murder that could not be accounted for by laying it at Mollie's door. In dazed bewilderment he hardly heard the rest of the proceedings or the commotion in the court as the judge's voice rang out:

“I therefore discharge the defendant, Paul Carew, from custody.”

But as Carew, with a nod of thanks to the judge, turned to shake hands with his lawyer, and as the crowd, already buzzing with gossip, at the word of adjournment made a rush for outdoors, where freer discussion might prevail, Tilt was brought to by a

quick jerk at his sleeve and an agonized cry from Kit.

“ Bill, Bill! Stop that woman. Don't let her get away! ”

CHAPTER XVII

TWO DISCOVERIES

AT the sound of Kit's shrill cry, everybody in the courtroom stopped where they were. Even the judge, turning to retire to his chambers, paused to see what the commotion was about.

"Quick, Bill," urged Kit, her voice rising above the tumult of the many voices and the shuffling feet. "See that woman near the door, that tall woman in black. Don't let her get away. She mustn't. Stop her!"

Tilt's glance, and that of every one else, following in the direction in which the girl was pointing, saw near the door, struggling to get through the throng, a tall, muscular, masculine-looking woman with graying hair, garbed in rusty black. Her face now wore a malevolent look as she fought vainly to reach the door. Without understanding what it was about, or what possible interest Kit could have in stopping the woman, Tilt sprang quickly into the

aisle, thrusting through the throng in a regular football rush to reach the woman's side. Up in the front of the courtroom, Carew, standing by his lawyer, gave one hasty look at the person under observation and sank into a chair, covering his face with his hands, as there burst from him an amazed, agonized cry —

“ Oh, my God — she! ”

Mollie Manners through her veil cast a quick glance at the woman, but seemed not to recognize her or be in any way affected by her presence, but just as Tilt laid a restraining hand on the old woman's arm, from the front of the courtroom came a startled cry. It was from Mrs. Manners.

“ Why, it's Sophie — Sophie Karuski! ”

At the sound of Mrs. Manners' voice, carrying her name, the woman renewed her struggles to reach the door.

“ Let me pass, ” she screamed hoarsely, as she endeavored to shake off Tilt's hold.

“ Hold her! Stop her! ” came an excited cry from old Mrs. Grady. “ That's the voice — the quare husky voice — that called up the doctor the night he was murdered — the voice that I thought

was a man's. I told you I'd know that voice again when I heard it. Hold her — it's her that killed the doctor, bad cess to her."

Tilt's prisoner ceased to struggle and turned defiant eyes to meet his.

"Why did you kill Rhodes?" he asked.

"He was trying to block my son's marriage — the marriage I'd planned and worked to bring about," she answered, with grim malevolence. "I fixed him."

"Devan thinks," said Tilt, "that she's undoubtedly insane, though she was shrewd enough in laying her plans. The confession she made to the police this afternoon shows that."

He and Kit were seated as usual that evening on the Tilt porch, talking it over. Devan was over at the Manners house, apparently still finding pleasure in the habit he had acquired during his investigations.

"But what gets me," continued Tilt, "is how you happened to spot old Mrs. Karuski in the courtroom and what made you suspect that it was she who had committed the crime."

“Pooh!” said Kit. “That was easy. There couldn’t have been very many persons that wanted Walter Rhodes killed. The only person whose plans he seemed to be upsetting was Paul Carew. I saw from the way things were going there that Paul himself couldn’t have done it, and I asked myself who else was there. It must have been somebody that was interested in his plans — some one who loved him. Naturally I thought first of Conchita, but that didn’t seem logical. If she was going to kill anybody, she’d have killed Paul after she had that baby and he didn’t marry her. Then I tried to think who else there could be, and I thought of his mother, and all at once it was perfectly plain. She knew all about Mollie and everything, and about her son’s plan to marry Mollie. She loved her son, and when the doctor tried to thwart Paul’s plans, she just made up her mind to put him out of the way.”

“You’re certainly a wonder, Kit,” said Bill admiringly.

“You only think it’s wonderful, Bill,” said the girl, “because you don’t understand women. When a woman really loves a man, she’ll do anything for him. When I got to thinking about Paul’s mother,

I realized that she must have done it because she loved him. Then all at once it came to me that if she loved him that much, maybe when he was there in that courtroom she'd be close at hand. I looked about, and I saw her. They look something alike, and I was sure it must be she. She looked sort of coarse — almost like a man — and I remembered what you had told me that Mrs. Grady had said about the voice over the doctor's 'phone, and I wanted to hear her speak to make sure. Then the minute she spoke, Mrs. Grady cried out that it was the voice — and that's all there was to it."

"I guess you must be right, Kit," said Tilt, thoughtfully, "about her doing it out of love for her son. That confession she made this afternoon entirely exonerates him. He's a weak rotter, but apparently he had nothing whatever to do with the murder. Carew says he did not know anything about it or even suspect that it was his mother who had done it."

"She's the stronger-minded of the two," commented Kit. "She planned the whole thing."

"Yes, she admitted that she did. The whole plan was hers from the start. She was ambitious

for her son, and while he was away in the war she chanced to gain an inkling of the extent of Rhodes's wealth. It was she who sent Carew here to live and kept him supplied with funds. Everything was going well, and the engagement was announced, when Rhodes, knowing about Conchita, sent for Paul and demanded that he break the engagement at once. Paul, not knowing what to do, communicated with his mother.

“I doubt if Rhodes had the slightest suspicion of Carew's identity, or ever in any way connected him with the Karuski sanitarium. He probably never had seen Mrs. Karuski's son, if indeed he knew that she had a son. The changed name, of course, concealed Paul's identity. Rhodes's only objection to the marriage was on account of the affair with Conchita.

“Mrs. Karuski cold-bloodedly confessed that as soon as she heard of Rhodes's opposition, she began to plan to put him out of the way. She carefully plotted the crime to make sure that suspicion would not fall on her son. She wired Paul, making the appointment with him at six at the hotel in the city, suggesting that he spend the night there, so as to

be sure of being on time. She made certain that he thus would be out of the way and unsuspected.

“With a rifle that Paul had had in his military equipment, she drove alone in her car from the sanitarium. Through her son’s letters she was already pretty well posted on Rhodes’s habits. Arriving in Rockmont after nightfall, she hid her car in the woods near the club and, unobserved, watched the club all evening. After everybody had gone home, she reconnoitered, getting into the building by the window in the directors’ room. From the club she telephoned to Rhodes and asked him to meet her at the clubhouse at once. Rhodes, always sensitive on the subject of his insane wife and intent on keeping the story from Mollie, naturally was worried and alarmed and hastened to the club to meet her. Slipping up on the piazza, she shot him through the window and then crept in and fired off his own revolver, trying to make it look like suicide.”

“But the note he was writing ——”

“Apparently that escaped her notice. She said nothing about it in her confession.”

“Conchita must have been snooping around, then, and discovered it and didn’t know what to do with

it and mailed it to Mollie, trying to do something that would bring a break with Paul, I guess, so that she could get him back."

"Probably. At any rate, Mrs. Karuski, after the murder, drove on into the city, throwing the rifle away in some body of water she passed, she doesn't know just where. She kept her appointment with her son. She said nothing whatever to him about what she had done but tried to cheer him up, insisting that he go right on with his plans to marry Mollie."

"What a terrible person she must be," said Kit, shuddering.

"More than likely her work with the insane has turned her brain. They tell me that quite frequently doctors and attendants in sanitariums become unbalanced through constant association with the insane."

"Anyhow," said Kit, "I'm glad that Paul won't marry Mollie. I always thought, Bill, that some day you and she would get married."

"No chance," said Tilt, by no means as unhappily as he might have said it two or three weeks before. "She hasn't spoken to me for days, and I don't

think she'll ever forgive me. It wouldn't surprise me if she married Devan some day. They've been awful thick lately."

"I'm sorry, Bill," said Kit impulsively, laying her hand on his. "I know you ——"

"Forget it," said Tilt, seizing Kit's hands in his and looking boldly into her suddenly flushed face. "If I ever marry into the Manners family, it won't be Mollie. It'll be ——"

"Oh, Bill," cried the Terrible Kit, a wonderful soft light transforming her great black eyes, and joy beaming in her transfigured face, "it isn't really true. It can't be *me* that you love — really?"

"It certainly is," said Bill, masterfully and manfully, wondering as he caught her in his arms why he never before had wanted to kiss those wonderful lips of hers, wondering when it was, or how it had come about, that right under his very eyes, without his ever having noticed it, the Terrible Kit all at once had become a beautiful woman, — the only woman for him.



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