MURDER IN THE DARK

CHARLES J. DUTTON
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By CHARLES J. DUTTON

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"The House by the Rosy", etc.

DRIVING late at night upon a dark and lonely highway, two men notice a silent car parked at a deserted cross-road. They approach it to ask directions, only to discover in the parked car the body of a famous criminal lawyer, holding the wheel with one hand, the other clutching a revolver. The police are sure it is suicide. Later, however, it is proved to be not only murder, but murder under circumstances which appear beyond belief. As the story sweeps along, the mystery, instead of being solved, grows deeper, and the reader is certain that every clue has been exhausted without success.

Only at the startling conclusion does the reader learn that he has had all the facts and clues given him, necessary to explain both the logical reason for the crime and the inevitable ending—clues, which, unless he has been unusually alert, he has failed to notice.
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CHAPTER I

It was clear when I left the city. Driving slowly between the tall buildings, one could glimpse the blue sky, its colour softened by the early afternoon sun. Though the air in the streets was fairly still, yet above the tree tops was a brisk breeze. I could see flagpoles bending in the wind, and a bit of paper went whirling up toward the sky in a crazy fashion.

For over an hour the car went over the city pavements. At times it barely crawled along, dodging the children who dashed wildly in front of the bumpers. Then would come several long blocks in which one could make speed, only to be stopped after a while by a traffic light at an intersection. It seemed as if all the cars one saw were bound for the country, for most of them were carrying luggage.

But at last there came the time when the houses began to thin out, the gas stations became fewer. Tenement blocks, through whose open windows one could catch a glimpse of unmade beds with dingy bedclothes gave place to little detached houses whose green lawns stretched to the street. And in the end, the city dropped behind and the country appeared.
At the sight of the first green field, the Airedale, that had been riding with its head far cut of the car, gave a little inviting whine—an invitation that we stop by the side of the road and have a romp in the grass. But we had far too many miles to go before dark to stop now, even though I would have enjoyed doing so.

The road swept through many little towns for the first hour, then turned to reach the Sound. As we topped a slight hill there came the first sight of the sea—its surface whipped into little waves by the wind which was rapidly rising. Far away, in the direction we were going, hung dark, heavy clouds—clouds which promised a wind long before dusk.

The big coupé I was driving was a powerful machine with plenty of speed, but I did not let it out. Holding it at thirty miles an hour, I kept my eyes upon the white ribbon of a road which stretched ahead. Up hills, from which one could see the green countryside and the Sound on my right, through valleys where woods invited one to wander through their coolness, ran the road. And for some unknown reason traffic seemed to be slight.

The dog withdrew his head from the window at last and went to sleep on the seat by my side. Having nothing else to do, I began to wonder what we would find at the end of the afternoon’s drive. I was to pick up John Bartlet at New London, and we were to drive a few miles farther to a little fishing town in Connecticut, where we would take the boat to Green Island; and I wondered what we would find when we arrived there.
MURDER IN THE DARK

Though for many years Bartley had been considered the most noted criminologist of the country, yet for the past several years he had been going into what might be called a semi-retirement. There were several reasons for this—reasons which were not surprising if one only knew his background and his personal inclinations.

First of all, he wished to find time to write books—books for which he had been gathering materials for many years. There was one work upon the literature of France, the France before the Revolution, which was almost complete. There was a half-done manuscript about the out-of-the-way and odd customs of the Middle Ages. These called to him to be completed.

But there was also another reason why his name had not appeared the papers for many months. Crime had changed, he said. That there was more crime now than ever before he would agree, but the class of criminal had changed with the increase in crime. Youths crazed by poor liquor, or their courage whipped for a moment with cocaine, were now our murderers and lawbreakers, and for an intelligent man the game was hardly worthy of the chase.

Knowing this, I wondered what we would be told that evening. When the letter had arrived from Willard Nash, Bartley had answered it at once. The letter had been an urgent request that he come down to the financier's summer place, and aid him in finding a solution to a serious problem. What the problem was the letter did not say; but as the man was a personal friend, Bartley had felt that he must...
Though I had never been to Green Island, I knew about the place. It lay seven miles out to sea, its broken shore line stretching for ten miles. On one side was the Rhode Island and Connecticut coast, on the other the dark shadow of Long Island. There was a permanent population of perhaps a thousand, which was increased to several times that number in the summer time.

As the miles slipped away behind me, I decided that no doubt our stay on the Island would be brief. Yet at the same time there was the uneasy idea back in my mind that perhaps there was something serious to be faced. 'Nash was not the type of a man who called in outside advice very often. If he could not solve the problem, which confronted him, alone, no doubt it was more serious than I thought.

For many miles my mind played with the idea. I was roused in the end by a sudden gust of wind, the sound of rain dashing against the windshield. As I straightened in the seat to grip the wheel more firmly, I saw we were running into a storm. The sun had vanished hidden from sight by dark angry clouds which were rushing by.

Turning in my seat, I gave a quick glance at the sea, which lay almost a mile away. Its surface was dark and sinister, with white splotches of foam whipped into the air by the rising wind—a wind which was starting to blow in short, heavy gusts, each one more violent than the other. Ahead the concrete of the road was already dark with rain.

Roused by the raindrops dashing against the windshield, the Airedale sprang suddenly to his feet to give
a quick inquiring glance through the open window. For several moments his brown eyes studied the passing landscape, then he turned to me with a disapproving look. It was clear to see he did not approve of the storm which had swept around us, and I agreed with his feeling.

When the first drops of rain had swept across the car, I had thought it was simply a passing summer shower. But after a few moments I saw it was more than that. The air had become cooler, while the sky seemed very close to the earth. A dark, angry-looking sky filled with black clouds—clouds scurrying like ships at sea, under an ever-increasing wind.

As the rain continued, I was forced to cut down the speed of the car until at times we barely crawled along. For a few hundred yards everything would be all right. Then would come a violent gust of wind, the car would sway for a second as the rain was flung in a blinding shower of spray against the glass. Under the slipping wheels, the concrete of the road became a thing of danger—a wet, smooth surface which demanded careful driving.

For an hour the car crept along, skidding at times despite all my care. There might have been the thought in my mind that the storm would end, but the farther I went, the darker became the clouds. It was only about four o'clock, but already there appeared to be a faint haze in the air. Then I saw the first pale wisp of fog go drifting past the front of the car—a long, grey streamer of mist. At the sight I gave a half groan.

It was bad enough trying to see through the blind-
ing sheets of rain which drove across the road. The dog had sensed my anxiety and sat staring ahead through the windshield with a tense expression upon his face. But if we were to face a fog, then it was doubtful if I would reach New London at six.

Face a fog we did, but luckily it was faint. Instead of being the usual soft dripping blanket of mist which one meets by the shore, it was mostly a matter of long thin streamers of moisture. They drifted and swirled around the car, grey, silent ghosts; then would vanish. With the coming of the fog, the rain ceased.

The road had reached the water to follow the curving shore of the Sound for many miles. Under the wind, the surface of the water was a broken mass of choppy waves; not high yet, but promising long before morning to threaten trouble. Far off from the shore there came at intervals, a moment apart, the low, penetrating rumble of a distant foghorn. As I heard it, a shiver of depression swept over me.

Perhaps it was the drabness of the afternoon—perhaps the sense of loneliness the sight of the sea suggested. I began to think of the seven-mile sail we had before us, pictured the island enclosed with fog, dreary and bleak. Long before we reached New London I was wishing we had never left the city.

It was raining again when a little before six I drew up at the kerb in front of the railroad station. The pavement was a glistening sheet of silver spattered with dancing raindrops. A few loafers were lounging on the platform, and they cast a lazy glance as the large grey coupe came to a halt. As I climbed out
of the car, beyond the glistening railroad tracks I saw the wharfs and the high outline of a ship.

I found Barley in the waiting room, the usual book in his hand. As I crossed the floor to his side, I thought how lightly the years had touched him. True, his hair had streaks of grey, but the keen, intellectual face bending over the book was youthful. A smile caused by something he was reading crossed his lips, then sensing my approach, he raised his head.

With an expression of pleasure he rose to his feet, and with the words, "A pleasant trip, Fel?" smiled. I expressed my opinion of the weather and the driving conditions rather vigorously, and he laughed. Then taking a small briefcase which was upon the seat, he followed me out to the car.

We had almost twenty miles farther to drive, and suggesting that I must be weary, he offered to take the wheel. But I knew how he detested driving and refused the offer. The dog almost tumbled out of the car in a noisy greeting, climbing all over Barley's lap before we could persuade him to sit on the wide shelf behind the seats.

Crawling through a railroad yard, we passed over several rows of tracks before we found the street we must follow. It led past rows of small brick buildings filled with cheap grocery stores and small gas stations; then it climbed an incline to come out on a high bridge; a bridge beneath whose abutments the river flowed dark and cold.

We engaged in little conversation for I had to keep my eyes on the curving road before us. It ran a wide, winding ribbon ahead; twisting, wet and slippery,
around sloping curves. We would drop down a hill, only to rise to the top of another; and a few miles we had an unbroken view of the ocean.

On a fine day the view would have been very beautiful, but this afternoon there was not much to see. The rain had vanished again, but when I glanced in the direction of the water it was to discover that the fog had increased. Far out over the Sound hung a thick grey blanket of mist; a mist which was creeping in toward shore. It promised to become dark very early.

It was almost seven when we reached the fishing village where we must take the boat to the island. It was a little place, the houses small and aged by countless storms. A traffic sign told us how to find the wharf and we drove through the narrow streets; drove until we were forced to stop by a gate which stretched across the entrance of a rather weather-beaten wharf.

The boat should have been in; but when we got out of the car with the dog in the lead, there was no sign of a boat. A search discovered a small waiting room, where a bored youth informed us that the steamer was late. We would have to wait at least an hour; the delay, he said, had been caused by the fog.

We bought our tickets, paid for the passage of the car, then placed the dog in the machine, after closing the windows so he could not escape. There was an hour to fool away, and there was nothing to do but wait.

The wharf ran far out into the waters of the Sound, but the fog was starting to enclose the end of the pier.
The waves were slapping against the piles in a steady murmur. A gull, a dejected figure of hopelessness, sat upon the rocking mast of a catboat. Out of the misty moistness floated the sound of a foghorn, apparently several miles away to be followed by a shrieking, answering blast from some steamer.

It was a gloomy scene and I said as much to Bartley. In reply I received a smile, with the remark that after all we could not change the weather. With this retort, he took his cigar case from his pocket and carefully chose a long thin panetela, suggesting that we might pass the moments in the waiting room. Here, upon a bench, he started to read.

It was more than an hour before a shrill whistle told us the boat was approaching. As I stepped out in the open air, I began to wonder if there would be a return trip that evening. I could barely distinguish the end of the wharf and the boat came warping into position as if it had suddenly appeared out of space.

But the steamer was going back. To my question regarding the crossing, the youth who took the tickets retorted that the captain could make the trip with his eyes blindfolded. I called to Bartley, and, climbing back in the machine, drove on to the dock, and in a moment came to a stop between the low decks of the steamer. Then, making sure the brake was on, I stepped out on the deck.

Apparently we were to be the only passengers, and our wait was not for long. There came the noisy clang of bells from some mysterious part of the small boat, a harsh voice yelled out a vague instruction, and we
felt the tremble of the starting engine. As there came a long, shrill blast from the whistle, the dog locked in the car gave a loud bark of protest—a protest in which I felt very much like joining.

Going to the upper deck and leaning against the rail, we stood looking out into the night. The grey opaque mist swirled in clouds around us. The boat seemed to have become a lost soul floating onward to some undetermined goal. And it was damp—a soft, penetrating dampness which clung to one's clothes until they glistened with moisture.

Every other second would come the long-drawn-out cry of the whistle, to be answered by a shrill shriek from a near-by vessel. Out in the Sound was a foghorn, which never ceased bellowing out its husky warning. In short, steady slaps the waves were pounding against the boat, which rose and fell with an uneasy motion.

The fog, together with the unearthly sound of the foghorn, made me depressed. Somewhere in front of us was the island that would be our home for the next few days. As a rule, the thought of a rest by the sea would have pleased me; but there were no thoughts of pleasure in the uneasy feeling which had crept over me. I began to wonder what the reason might be for our journey.

When Bartley had received the telegram from Willard Nash, he had thrown it across his great desk for me to read. It had been a code; a code which he had translated. There had been a quizzical look in his eyes as he watched me read it; but after all there had not been hint as to why we were wanted. Just
the simple statement that there was a problem, which was troublesome—and a serious one.

The last I would have known even if the words had not been in the message. Nash was a big man in line. Problems of all sorts were part of his daily life. But he was not a man much given to taking other people into his confidence. Knowing this, I had wondered what was behind the few words of his telegram.

Though the beginnings of his fortune had been made in the rough and tumble days of the oil boom in Texas, yet the man himself was a kindly, simple soul. Where he had become acquainted with Bartley, I did not know; but it was a rare week that did not see the tall figure of Nash seated in a big chair in Bartley’s library. Many had been the night when the two men had talked into the early hours of morning upon a kindred subject—Napoleon; for the oil man was the country’s great collector of books dealing with the famous general.

In a sense the island to which we were going was his own creation; that is, as a select summer place. He owned almost a quarter of it, and in the summer months many hundred people came from all over the East to play by the sea. In winter it stood lonely and bleak, swept by the winds and fog, with only the fishermen and others who made up the permanent colony as inhabitants.

As we neared the centre of the channel, the fog lifted a little. The thick grey blanket, which one’s eyes had tried in vain to pierce, became a half rain. I could look down and see the water, a black, rolling mass
topped here and there with foam. For the first time, one could glimpse the bow of the boat, with a torn flag flapping from a tiny pole.

With the remark that it was too damp on the deck for comfort, Bartley had retired to the cabin. Through the thick, dingy glass I could see his head bent over the book he was reading. But the close dingy room was not attractive, and after securing my raincoat from the car I had returned to the slippery deck. For some reason I felt far too restless to remain under cover.

The foghorn had been growing louder for some time. As my eyes strained through the whirling mist, I saw to my right the flash from the lighthouse in the centre of the channel. It was an odd, eerie thing, a soft circle of light which made the mist a diffused mass of soft flame; but it was cheerful to see, for it told that the Captain was running on his course.

The boat should have made the trip in an hour, but owing to the night, it was half-past nine, when it passed a little breakwater and steamed up to the long pier which ran in an uneven line out into the Sound. The air was clearer than it had been on the mainland, though it was still impossible to distinguish objects very far away.

We had been the only passengers, and after the boat had docked, it took only a moment to run the car upon the pier. There was a small waiting room where the wharf joined the land, and here we stopped for a moment to secure directions. When I climbed back into my seat after interviewing what I judged was a ticket agent combined, I was rather
perplexed. I had asked for directions, and directions had been received—a mingled mass of information and advice which became, when I left the small office, simply tangled facts.

There appeared to be three ways of reaching the summer colony where Nash had his home. The road that we could see stretching in front of us turned to the right to go through the village in the centre of the island; then, reaching the other shore, it circled the island. But if I took that road we had a ride of almost eight miles. There was a shorter route. A turn about a mile ahead; which—and it was here that I began to feel confused.

I was to turn from the main road after going a mile; follow for a short distance, then turn to the right, and cross the island. But when the agent, after swinging his arms in a circle, had finished his directions, it would have been very difficult to feel sure of what he had said. Climbing into the seat, I pushed the dog out of the way and lighted a cigarette. Starting the car, we bumped off the uneven timbers of the wharf to strike a hard-surfaced road. To the left loomed the shadow of a large building, and from the lights I judged it to be a hotel. Then after a few yards, low fields stretched away on each side.

We had gone but a few hundred yards when we saw the first road. Another road also turned to run away to our right after we had gone a half mile. Nothing had been said regarding these highways, and as the speedometer neared the point when it would tell us we had reached a mile, I began to look for the road on the left. In a moment we saw it.
As I turned off the hard surface and saw what the headlights revealed, I was half tempted to take the longer route. Ahead of us, thrown into relief by the lights, was the uneven surface of a dirt road—and far from a good dirt road. In uneven ridges, slippery from the rain and the mist, the road disappeared around a bend—a road which started to climb a little as it left the main highway.

We had a good car—many people think it is the best built—but it rocked and swayed as we started to climb the little rise. Not only that, the road was so slippery that it was necessary to go very slowly if we did not wish to slide off into the ditch—a real ditch several feet below the level of the road.

Climbing the hill, we saw that the road ran perfectly straight for a short distance; then it began to twist and turn every few feet—twist and turn, and what was worse, became very narrow. I began to wonder what we should do if we met another car, but dismissed the idea with the thought that no one else would be so foolish as to be out on such a night.

“A short distance,” the man had said, “then take the road to the right.” But after fifteen minutes of slipping and sliding, I began to wonder what he meant by “a short distance.” We had gone almost three miles and there had not been the slightest sign of another road; instead, the fences of the fields on our right remained an unbroken line.

I drove along for five minutes more, then began to feel a bit nervous. Save for the foghorn out in the Sound, we might have been alone in a dim wet world. The fields were spaces of silence, desolate blanks of
emptiness on each side. The road stretched upward ahead of us, climbing until it seemed to end in mid air. And then all at once one of the headlights went out—and as it did, I swore.

If there was any car in the world that was foolproof, it was the one I was driving; now, at the worst possible moment, something had gone wrong. Under ordinary circumstances, one headlight would have been enough, but for the narrow, slippery road we were on, we needed all the light we could get. Fumbling around in a pocket, I found a spare bulb and climbed out into the road.

For a moment I stood silently in the mud. After the sound of the engine, the world appeared very still. If only the foghorn would cease, one might fancy he was alone in the universe. Everything dripped with moisture, the grass along the ditch appearing as glistening rows of spears. For a second, I stood glancing around, then with a shudder I tried to throw off the feeling of uneasy apprehension that had crept over me.

Bending over the headlight, I discovered that my guess had been correct—a bulb had blown out. It was an easy task to put in a new one, and the headlight sprang into flame. Climbing back into the car, I restarted the engine and commenced to climb the long slope ahead.

It was a long hill, and when we reached the top it was to discover that the road ran dangerously near the side of a high bluff. The ditch on my left had vanished as the side of the road sheered off into space. It required careful driving, for a side slip would take the
car tumbling down to the beach below. Almost as I thought of this, Bartley's hand came gripping upon my arm as he pointed ahead.

The headlights of the car had done their best to pierce the fog, but not with the greatest success; but when we reached the crest of the hill, the mist had thinned out greatly—no doubt because we were above it. As I gave a quick look in the direction he was pointing, I saw someone hurriedly leaving the road to vanish in the field to the right.

The shadowy figure was so far ahead it was difficult to tell if it was a man or a woman. My impression was that it was a woman—a shadowy, indistinct figure which vanished from the road to be blotted out in the vagueness of the field, vanished as if alarmed by the lights of the car and had not wished to be seen.

It seemed odd. What any person should be doing on the lonely road this fog-swept night was a problem. But if I had been right that it was a woman, it became more of a mystery. One thing was sure; whoever it was had not cared to be seen. The figure had started into the field—the field where the grass must be high, and of course wet; darted off the road to be blotted out in the darkness.

As the car crept forward, I tried to pierce the blackness on my right as if I might make out the person who had vanished. But there was nothing to be seen. Silent and still, the vast grey expanse stretched into space. Whoever had left the road had been swallowed up in its vastness.

Puzzled, I turned to Bartley, expressing my idea
that it had been a woman. There was a silence for several moments, then he spoke;

"That is what I thought; and one who did not care to be seen." I might have replied, but at that moment the car gave a sickening sideways slide which took all my skill to correct; a skid which brought the wheels dangerously near the edge of the cliff. After the car had been straightened, I gave up any idea I might have had of talking, to pay attention to my driving.

Making up my mind we must have gone past the place where we were to have turned, I decided we might have to circle the island; that is, if the road did this, which I had little doubt would prove to be the case. And there came a groan at the prospect. At the rate we were going, it would be long after midnight before we reached our destination.

Since climbing the hill, the road had been level. It evidently ran along the top of a high bluff, and a bit too near the edge for comfort. It swept ahead of us, twisting and turning but always following the line of the cliff; but where it was going I had not the slightest idea. Then all at once, in the distance, I saw a small clump of trees; the first trees we had seen since we reached the island.

The road curved off to the right just before it reached the trees; curved away until there was some distance between the highway and the edge of the cliff. Under the headlights the trees loomed, silent and dark—small trees stunted by their battle with the wind and dampness. And then I noticed something else: parked under the shadow of the trees was a large coupe.
As we came opposite the parked car, we found the other road. In fact, we found more than one. One road ran suddenly off to the right. The highway we were on went straight ahead, following the line of the bluff; and between them was another, more of a rough outline, it is true, than a highway, but a road for all that. Puzzled as to which one to take, I stopped the machine.

I should have tried to figure out which road to follow, but something drew my eyes to the car under the trees. It was a large machine, evidently an expensive one. It stood about one hundred feet away from us, its outlines a dim, shadowy mass. The headlights were not on, nor was there anything to be seen of a light in its interior.

For several moments I studied it. It was an odd place for anyone to park—a lonely place. What was more, it was not the sort of a night one would expect anyone to be out in. But I thought that no doubt a pair of lovers were having a rendezvous; also, I decided to interrupt them to ask directions.

With a word to Bartley, I slipped out of the machine and started across the road. As I approached the car, I gave a loud "hallo" in order to avoid startling whoever was in the coupé. But there came no response to my cry. Then, almost at its side, I stopped short, looking anxiously at the silent machine.

There was something about it I did not like. The sound of the foghorn still came drifting to my ears; down below the cliff, I could hear the waves as they tumbled against the shore—a never-ceasing murmur blending with the night. There was the soft dropping
of water from the leaves; and from somewhere in the distance there floated the barking of a dog—a dog far away. But the car was silent—silent and sinister.

As I glanced at it, the odd feeling of uneasiness I had felt all evening came creeping over me. I looked back over the road to our own machine; the bright glare of the headlights was very friendly and assuring. Again I turned to the dark coupé and once more called out. "There came no response. Only the sound of the waves on the shore, and the blast of the foghorn broke the silence.

Approaching the car, I tried to look through the window, which was partly down. I could make out the dim outline of a man who appeared to be bending over the wheel—a figure which did not turn when I spoke; did not even move. And as I gazed at it, a curious feeling of evil seemed to creep into the night—a feeling of something sinister and horrible.

Turning, I gave a cry to Bartley. I saw his figure step from the car as he came hurrying over the road. A round splotch of light broke at his feet—the flare of a flashlight. In a moment he reached my side, listened to the few words I said, then stepping up to the car, he turned the light inside.

It was an expensive machine, the toy of some wealthy man. Through the half-down window, we could see the interior, a mass of glittering silver and shining wood. But we did not look at this. Perhaps at the time we never noticed the fittings; instead, the figure slumped over the wheel held all our attention.

I had asked for a direction, and there had been no answer. And in that first second when the light
slipped over the drooping figure, I knew there could be no answer. Directions would never mean anything in the future to the man who sat with the wheel clasped by his right hand. The fog and the rain, the loneliness of the place would never bother him—nothing would.

There in the darkness, while the foghorn out on the Sound boomed out a warning of danger and as the murmur of the waves drifted to our ears, sat a silent man. Those things he did not hear; would never hear again. For the man who sat huddled over the wheel, with a queer, astonished expression upon his still face was—dead. And behind his left ear was an ugly-looking wound.
CHAPTER II

STARTLED though I was, my first flashing thought was an odd one. Now I could understand, the reason for the strange unrest and depression which had been with me all the evening. As we had crept along the fog-swept road, I had felt something sinister in the night; something evil and horrible—and now it confronted us.

The round circle of light dropped down to rest upon a still face. It was not a pleasant face, not even in life could it have been called that, but there was an air of power etched into the thin lines by the lips; and the expression in the wide, staring eyes was one of shocked surprise, as if the last thought in that second before life vanished had been one of complete wonder and astonishment.

As I looked, something told me that I must know the man. Somewhere, either on the street or in the papers, I had seen him. But, though there was a curious air of familiarity about the heavy-set features, for the moment I could not recall where I had seen them. As I gazed at the silent face, trying, vainly to search my memory, there came Bartley’s voice:

“It is Van Dike, the lawyer.”

Of course, it was Van Dike. No wonder I had thought I recognized the man. Again and again his face had looked out from the pages of the yellow journals of the city. Several times I had seen him in court,
smiling his cool, sarcastic smile as he watched a District Attorney struggling against a mass of perjury he had built up. Scorns of unrelated facts regarding him flashed through my mind.

I remember Bartley once remarking that if any lawyer succeeded to the sort of practice that had made the firm of Huynh and Howe a byword, it was Van Dike. In most of the famous cases which had their roots in the underworld, you would find his hand somewhere. Most of the spectacular murder trials of the last few years had found him appearing for the defence.

There were other stories about the man, many of them; stories whispered through the night clubs, told with an admiring laugh in luxurious speakeasies; stories of blackmail, of exploits far outside the law. Criminals, it was said, consulted with him before they committed their crimes, to discover how they might avoid the law. Yet, somewhere I had heard, he owned one of the finest collections of etchings in the country.

As I thought of all this, I decided that his death might prove far more of a blessing than anything else. I turned to Bartley:

"It's no loss—his committing suicide."

There came no reply; instead, the light travelled down the well-fitting, expensive suit to rest upon the left hand. The right hand was firmly gripping the wheel, but the other lay along the seat. Clasped in the fingers was a revolver.

There was no doubt in my mind; the revolver explained what had taken place. The man had driven to the cliff and in shadow of the trees had taken his
own life. Still—I wondered. Wondered why such a lonesome spot should have been chosen—wondered more deeply what had caused this man to commit suicide.

Bartley was unusually silent. I could see he was carefully studying the hand that held the revolver, though he did not touch it. Then after a moment, he swept the interior of the car with the light, sweeping it over every inch of the machine.

It was a new car, one could easily tell that. The fittings were too bright, and showed no signs of use, for the machine to be over a few weeks old. Besides, I knew the make—an expensive toy. The model in which the dead man sat had come on the market only a month before. The fittings were of silver, the woodwork a mosaic of rare woods from all parts of the world.

For several moments the light travelled through the car. Then Bartley turned.

"Felt, there is going to be trouble out of this. Van Dike is pretty well known, and there are no doubt scores of people who would have enjoyed killing him. I can't say I blame them over—"

"But," I interrupted him, continuing in astonishment, "it looks like suicide."

"Yes," came the short reply, "it does, but I think it is murder. And if it is, it's necessary for one of us to get over to the village and find an official of some sort."

We argued over this for a few moments. We were not very clear as to just what sort of police protection the island might enjoy. But Bartley reminded me
that the summer colony was composed of families of great wealth. They would, inasmuch as they paid most of the taxes, demand adequate police protection. If we could discover the village, we would find police. Then he suggested something else.

One of us must drive to the town and seek the police. The other ought to remain under the trees until the car had been examined. There seemed no real reason for this, and I said as much. Before he spoke, I saw him fumble for his cigarette case, saw the sudden flare of the match; then came his voice:

"I have not examined that car, Pelt. If I am right that it is murder, the clue to the guilty person may be inside. Somehow I feel that one of us ought to stay by the car until the police arrive."

I cast one glance at the silent coupe, shuddered as I thought of the ghastly thing within. To remain under the trees did not promise to be a pleasant thing. Turning, I glanced in the direction of the sea. Below the edge of the bluff hung the fog, its greyness enveloping all. Out of its vastness came the sound of the foghorn.

It took a good deal of persuasion on my part before I succeeded in having Bartley agree that I should be the one to stay on the bluff. He insisted it would be a lonesome ordeal, that it might take some time before he discovered the necessary officials. Reminding him that after all I was fifteen years younger, I won out in the end.

Walking back to our car, we stood for a moment trying to decide which of the three roads would be the better to take. Bartley's opinion agreed with mine.
MURDER IN THE DARK

No doubt the freight agent had done what most people do—been wrong in his idea of how far we would have to travel before we met the cross road. Anyway the road ran in a straight line, directly away from the bluff. It must go to the other side of the island.

As Bartley went into the car, the dog was in a sad predicament; he did not wish to leave his master, but at the same time the prospect of getting out of the machine in which he had been riding all day, appealed to him. But the dog would only be in the way, and he was thrust back upon the seat. Then, slipping a gun in my hand, Bartley started the engine, and I watched the red tail light vanish in the distance.

As the red circle of light disappeared down the road, I watched it with mingled feelings. It was as dark a night as I had ever seen, a damp blackness which pressed very close about one. The sky hung very near the earth—a sky in which there was not the slightest sign of a star. For a few moments I did not move; then with a shrug of my shoulders, started over to the car.

My eyes had become better accustomed to the darkness. I could make out the dim outline of the machine, a silent shadow against the night. But I had no idea of staying close to it. The thought of the man whose still hand was clasping the wheel did not appeal to me. So I passed back of the car to walk slowly over to the shelter of the clump of trees.

They were not so many in number, perhaps a dozen in all; small, dwarfed trees, struggling always against the rain and wind. In their shadow I paused, perhaps some forty feet from the car. But after a moment I
went over to the edge of the bluff and tried, in vain, to look down at the sea.

Stumbling against a log, I sat down upon its wet surface. Below me, the cliff dropped down to the shore, and I judged the descent must be steep. In the darkness, the lapping of the waves was an uneasy murmur of sound, a steady murmur which blended with the deep voice of the foghorn out in the Sound. Behind me could be heard the soft dropping of water from the trees.

There was not as much fog as there had been when we drove off the boat. What it was out over the Sound, I did not know, for the darkness was a dense mass which my eyes could not pierce. But the air upon the top of the bluff was clearer than it had been a short time before. I thought the fog was lifting, and I hoped it was.

From time to time I would cast a backward look at the coupé. Bartley had said it was—murder. Why he thought this I did not know. There had been no real examination of the machine. The flashlight had played over the silent figure, that was all. I had seen the left hand with a revolver clasped in the cold fingers; naturally it appeared to be suicide. But something I had not noticed had suggested murder to Bartley, and I knew he must be right.

Then I began to picture the sensations the affair would make. If it was murder, it was of the type the public loved. A well-known man, whose life was lived on the front pages of the newspapers, had died by violence. The underworld would buzz with whispered comments; sporting circles and the theatrical group
would hint of this and that. If it was murder, it would be the criminal case of the era.

But the reason for the crime, if crime it was, I did not try to puzzle out. Van Dike must have been a man with enemies—many people who would feel secure if they could only know that he was out of the way. The peace and security of many a home must have been locked up within his brain. Men and women must have shuddered at his name. And at the last thought, I gave a sudden start.

Before me flashed the picture of the dim obscure figure which had darted from the road to blend with the misty darkness of the fields. There was no doubt the sight of our headlights had caused the person to seek the obscurity of the night. And both Bartley and myself had thought it a woman.

But had it been a woman? And if it was, why had she wished to avoid being seen? The parked car was only a few hundred feet from the place where the person had darted off the road. Whoever it was must have noticed the silent machine. What is more, people without a guilty conscience do not try to avoid being seen.

I began to theorize. Van Dike’s name had been connected with various women. Just what the stories were, I could not recall. Dimly I realized that perhaps these women had not entered very greatly into his life. Almost every night one would see him at his table in a night club; and, as a rule, a different woman was with him each time.

But I could picture some woman, crazed by fear of exposure, shooting in a sudden rage of frenzy—killing
to protect her name; her reputation. The lonesome road, the half-hidden point with the sheltering trees, pointed to a rendezvous. Yet, despite what Bartley had said, the revolver clenched in the left hand, pointed more to suicide, I thought, than to murder.

I gave it up after a while, reaching my hand into a pocket for a cigarette; the place was getting on my nerves. It was not a night one would wish to be alone—not under the present circumstances. The darkness hinted at evil things, the sound of the waves had a sinister warning. And then, as my fingers clutched the cigarette case, I heard a sound on the beach below. A sound which caused me to bend forward as I tried to distinguish it above the murmur of the sea.

It was not a loud noise, and I heard it only three times—a soft click, then silence, followed in a moment by another click. That I should hear it at all was a miracle, for it had to float upward above the sound of the waves. But I knew what it was. Near the shore someone was rowing a boat; rowing through the fog-enveloped water. The sound I had heard was the click of oars against a metallic oarlock.

Three times I heard the click. Then though I strained my ears, I could not distinguish the faint noise again. But it was odd. The sea was not rough, for the wind, which early in the afternoon promised to blow a gale, had died away. Yet it was no night in which to be rowing a boat.

Though it was useless, my eyes tried to pierce the curtain of darkness which lay below. For the first time, they glimpsed the flash of the lighthouse—a misty flare lasting but a second, then dying away.
MURDER IN THE DARK

But that was all that could be seen. After listening eagerly for a few moments, I gave up; one thought, however, remained.

Just how far the top of the bluff might be from the shore was a problem. No doubt the distance was not as great as I thought. It could not be, for I had heard the soft click of the oars. But was the boat coming ashore? Had someone in the fog and darkness beached his boat on the shore which lay below my feet? And if so, why had he landed?

For some moments I played with the idea. Then, in sheer disgust, there came the decision that thinking was a bad thing to do. There was nothing to base an opinion upon. I began to wish that Bartley would return. It seemed as if he had been away for hours, though I knew the time which had passed could not have been very long.

The silence began to bother me. I felt a little uneasy—a feeling difficult to express, of apprehension and loneliness. A sea bird far out over the waters gave a shrill cry which startled me so much that I rose to my feet. Then deciding it was foolish to allow my emotions to disturb me, I turned to glance toward the car—and what I saw caused me to stiffen to attention.

The machine stood but a few hundred feet away. A few trees were between us but they did not interfere with the view. I could dimly make out a high, black shadow, a deeper blackness than the night. But as I looked I saw something else—something which for a moment made it impossible for me to move.

The car was in a direct line from where I was standing. When we had looked inside, the windows had been
open, the glass level with the frame. As my eyes strained through the darkness, I saw at the window farthest away from me a light—a round splotch of light; a light which crept slowly over the head of the dead man, then went inch by inch down the length of the body. And as the light hesitated for a second—in its glare I saw a hand.

It was the barest glimpse of a hand. Only for a mere part of a second did the light fall upon it—a hand reaching into the car. With long curving fingers, fingers reaching for something I could not see. A hand clutching wildly for a second at the coat of the dead man. As I saw it I hesitated. I reached for my gun and started to run.

Just what I intended to do, I do not know, but at the sight of the clutching hand reaching into the car, but one idea leaped to my mind—to see to whom the long, thin fingers belonged; to ask what they were doing by the side of the dead man. All this flashed into my mind as I started to run toward the machine.

I had taken only three steps when my feet slipped upon a branch—a wet bit of slippery wood lying on the ground. As I struck it, felt it roll beneath my feet, I stumbled. Vainly I tried to keep my balance but without avail. With my hands reaching out wildly for support, I went sprawling on the ground—sprawling to roll over against a tree. With the sound of the crash, the light vanished and there came the sound of running footsteps.

I struggled to my feet to hasten to the car. There was no one there. As I listened, the running feet died away in the distance. It was useless to try to follow,
whoever it was, now hidden by the darkness had escaped. What was more, they knew the countryside, which was more than I did; but I was puzzled.

There had been only a momentary glimpse of the hand which had been reaching into the car. It had come when the flame from the flashlight had fallen upon the long, clutching fingers. But whether it was the hand of a man or a woman, I could not say. The light had not remained upon the hand long enough to tell.

One thing I felt was true; whoever it was had been looking for something. Next I thought of the sound that had floated up from the water, the clicking noise of oars I had heard. Had the person in the boat landed on the shore, then come up the cliff and approached the car?

The direction in which the person had run was hard to determine. It was doubtful if I would have been able to make out the running figure. The fact that it had been on the other side of the car, had made it impossible to even glimpse it. Just where the individual had run I could not tell, though it was my idea it had followed the road.

I had no flashlight; though there was one in our machine, for some reason I had never thought of taking it from Bartley’s hand. I might strike a few matches, but they would not be very beneficial. Then I remembered I might turn on the lights within the car. Even if I found nothing of value, the sight of them would help dispel the gloom.

Walking around the coupé, I reached my hand through the open window. After some little fumbling
it fell upon the switch. The next second the darkness was split by a tunnel of light. As the two small lamps upon the dashboard brought the interior of the car into sight, I looked within.

After several moments, I decided nothing was missing. The truth was, it did not seem possible anything could be missing for there was nothing to take away. A feeling of horror swept over me as I saw the still, silent face of the lawyer—a face whose strength and power had not been blotted out even by death.

The revolver was still clasped in the left hand; a black squatty revolver which appeared to be rather new. Again my eyes passed over the glittering silver fittings, the costly wood of the dashboard; but there was nothing missing. Everything was as it had been when we first looked into the car.

There was a little silver clock upon the rosewood dashboard; its hands stood at ten forty-five when I glanced at it. An eternity seemed to have passed since the distant hour I had left the city. I began to wonder why Bartley had not returned. Waiting alone beside the car was far from pleasant.

Turning on the lights within the car, I walked over to the edge of the cliff. The powerful headlights cut a shaft of flame through the darkness. Under their glare, the earth sprang into view, soaked by rain with a few discouraged blades of short grass matted to the ground.

The cliff dropped down to shore. Under the headlights it sank away in a curving heap of soft sand and earth. But it would have been very easy for anyone to have climbed up from the beach. As I noticed
this, again I thought of the sound I had heard; the click of oars which had floated to my ears.

There came the distant wail of an automobile horn. I turned quickly to see, down the road which ran across the island, the approaching lights of a car; lights that were growing brighter every second. Behind the flaring glare of the first machine could be seen the small lights of the car that was following. In a moment I would no longer be alone.

As the first car approached the cross roads, I recognized the front of our own machine. There was no mistaking the outlines of the big English coupe which came across the road. Came, to stop in such a position that the bright headlights filled the interior of the car by which I was standing. And a second after it came to a halt, the cheap little runabout which was following came into view.

Hurrying over to our machine, I gave Bartley a hasty greeting. Something in my tone caused him to give a quick glance in my direction. But the tall young man who came tumbling out of the car checked my comment. The young man paused for a second as he glanced at the parked car, which stood thrown in high relief by our headlights. For a second he stood silent, then hurried to look within the window.

As he stood with the light playing over his figure, I noticed that he was a very tall young man. In fact, about as tall an individual as I have ever seen. He had no hat, and the flaming red hair stood in all directions. Then, as Bartley touched my arm, I followed him to stand by the young man's side.

As we came up to him, he turned to face us. It
was a rather intelligent face which tried to smile at us. But the smile was forced, dying away almost before it started. The sight of the silent figure at the wheel had affected him. For a second our glances met, then came Bartley's voice:

"This is Mr. Miner, Pelt. He has charge of enforcing the law upon the island."

We each murmured something as an acknowledgment of the introduction. But though we might have said more, the sight of a fat little man coming around our car prevented us from speaking. A little man in stature, very fat, who walked at a most deliberate gait, as if sudden death meant absolutely nothing in his life. As he stepped into the light, I noticed he was carrying a bag and decided he must be the doctor—the doctor who no doubt was also the coroner for the island.

He gave a grunt when he reached the car, his eyes darting to the body of Van, Dike. Then, with the words, "He might have picked out a better place to kick off," he went around to the other side of the machine. Opening the door, he stepped inside.

He was fat and short, but the sureness with which he made his examination told me he knew his profession. From the depths of his bag he had produced a flashlight, and with its aid studied the wound behind the man's right ear. This done, he cast a glance at the revolver which was held in the left hand.

After that he appeared to have suddenly lost all interest. With a little grunt of disapproval, he placed his torch in the bag and reached in his pocket for something. The something turned out to be a thick, black
cigar which he carefully lighted before climbing out of the car. Then he came to our side.

His face was round and very red—tanned by the wind and rain in which he spent his life. But it was a shrewd face, the features of a man whose brain was keen. Better still, it was a kindly face, with the lines around the lips which told that the man laughed far more than he did anything else. His bright eyes went over the police official, passed over Bartley and rested upon my face. As he looked, there came Bartley’s voice:

“My assistant, Mr. Pelt—Dr. Trumbold.”

The doctor grunted out some sort of a reply, turning for a moment to glance back at the car. Under the strong light, the body at the wheel seemed to be asleep—as if, suddenly weary, the man had slumped down on the seat to close his eyes for a few moments.

I saw the police official study his coroner for a moment; then came a question:

“What about it, Doc?”

“Well—” came the slow, drawling reply, “he is dead all right. Thought he would be when you told me he was shot through the head.”

The young man’s eyes left the doctor’s face as he turned and studied the car for a second. The words spoken after his glance were not really a question:

“Suicide. But why Van Dike with all his money should kick himself off and pick out this place to do it in, I can’t see.”

There came a short grunt from the doctor.

“No man in his right mind ever commits suicide. But there is no doubt this chap did.”
Silence fell for a second. It was Bartley who broke it. His voice was low, his tone pleasant, but there was a determined ring behind what he said:

"You are wrong. This is murder. Everything in the car points to one thing—Murder."
CHAPTER III

There fell a deep silence. The police officer shot one startled glance at Bartley as he turned to the doctor. The coroner’s round face was expressionless, though a half twinkle flashed in his eyes. Rolling the black cigar between his lips, he gave a long look at the car; then came a little shrug of his shoulders.

“Well, you don’t expect a doctor who picks out a God-forsaken island as a place to live, will know too much. But it has always been my experience that whenever you find a man shot, holding the gun in his hand, he did the thing himself.”

There was such a good-natured tone in the slow, even voice that Bartley chuckled for a second. Then he asked:

“Doctor, you found that Van Dike was shot behind the right ear? Did you notice what direction the bullet took?”

“Went toward the left side of his head,” was the short reply.

“Yes—and the revolver is held in the left hand. It seems to me it would be a difficult thing, though not perhaps improbable, to have a left-handed man shoot himself in the place Van Dike was shot. It would be the natural thing for him to have held the revolver behind his left ear.”

The doctor took the cigar from his lips. He
watched a cloud of smoke drift slowly away on the night air, then he turned to the police chief:

"Miner, you have heard me tell you many times that it's a good thing to always think before you speak. I just reversed that good advice. Mr. Bartley's had a lot of sense in what he just said. I won't say Van Dike holding a gun in his left hand could not have shot himself behind the right ear. It could be done, but it would be rather an awkward thing to do."

"Not only awkward, but it is not the natural thing to do," was Bartley's quick retort. "When a man commits suicide, either it is the result of a period of planning or the quick, sudden impulse of a moment. If the latter, the suicide takes place in the easiest manner—the natural one; the same if it is planned. But the natural manner in this case would have been for Van Dike to shoot himself behind the left ear, not the right. But that is not all."

Instinctively we all moved nearer the machine as he continued:

"Doctor, you know that in all cases of sudden death, suicide or accident, the testimony of all medico-legal experts is this—that the attitudes and acts of the person whose life is suddenly taken away continue for a few seconds after death."

There swept a half-disgusted look across the coroner's face as he nodded. But the expression of the young police official was one of bewilderment. Seeing his face, Bartley turned to him.

"I mean this, Miner. Suppose a man has decided to commit suicide with a gun. He holds the weapon in his hand, and fires. The shot is fatal; but there
comes in the instant of death a muscular spasm, which causes the hand to grip the revolver even more tightly than in life. In fact, the hand clasps the gun so firmly that after death it is almost impossible to loosen the grip. It has been agreed that a grip of this sort, when the weapon is held in the hand, is the best evidence we can have of suicide."

There came the policeman's voice. In the tone was astonishment and doubt as if not understanding what it was all about.

"But Van Dike is holding the gun. His fingers are clasped around it."

"Certainly," was the retort, "but remember what I said a moment ago. The attitudes and acts of a person who is killed by violence—that is, meets sudden death—continue. If Van Dike shot himself, the fingers which clasped the gun would have been even more firmly gripped around the revolver because of the muscular reaction which followed. I doubt if I could have even moved the revolver. But that gun in his hand is not held firmly; you can move it."

We all cast one intense look at the left hand. The doctor, after a start, threw open the door, allowing the headlight of the car to play over the silent arm. There between the body and the side of the car lay the still hand with the fingers clasped firmly around the black, squatty revolver. The doctor studied it for a moment, then reached in and tried to move the gun. Though the fingers gripped it, he could move it to and fro.

"Of course," Bartley reminded us, "the degree of strength in the death grip is disputed. But a French physician—Lacassagne—studied hundreds of such
cases some years ago. He discovered it was possible to place a gun in the hand of a man who had just died—place the gun and force the fingers around it! As the death rigour increased, the hold would, of course, become more secure. And I think that gun was placed in Van Dike's hand after he was shot—immediately after."

"The Devil you do!" was Miner's startled cry.

"Yes. If Van Dike shot himself, the muscular reaction at the moment of the shock would have been so great that I would have found it very difficult to move the gun in his hand. It moves very easily, as you see. That is why I think: it was placed in his hand after death—to make one think it was suicide."

There came the drawling voice of the coroner:

"Miner, a while ago you dragged me out of the first poker game I have been in for over a month. When I saw this dead man in his car, the gun in his hand, I did no thinking at all. Mr. Bartley, I judge, is right. Take the position of the wound behind the ear, the way the gun is held, and I have the opinion it's just as he said. There is a chance, of course, he is wrong, but it's an outside chance at that. It looks like murder, when I think it over."

There came a little nervous gesture upon the part of the tall young man. His face was a curious study of hesitancy mingled with doubt. For a moment he said nothing; and when he did speak his voice expressed the perplexity that was in his mind.

"It means trouble, a good deal of trouble."

Bartley nodded in agreement.

"It means one thing. You are going to be in the
centre of a great wave of publicity, Míner., Van Dike was the outstanding criminal lawyer of New York. A good many people will be very keenly interested in hearing of his death—and glad he is out of the way. But until you solve the mystery of his death, you are going to find that you are a public character.”

“And that won’t be so easy,” grunted the doctor.

“No,” replied Bartley. “As a rule you have four questions to answer in a murder case: Where? How? Who? Why? We know where this crime was committed; that is, we assume it took place here. We know he was shot; but why and by whom is a problem which is going to take a great deal of thinking over before we can say we know. And there is one thing, which seems very apparent—” He paused for a quick glance in our faces. “Why this man was killed must be answered before it is possible, perhaps, to say who killed him. I will not be surprised if you discover scores of persons who thought they had a good reason for wishing him out of the world. But in the end, the person who knew it was possible to place a revolver in the hand of a man after death may surprise you when you discover who it was.”

There flashed over me the weird picture of the hand I had seen reaching into the car—the clutching hand upon which the light had fallen. With a sudden exclamation, I turned to Bartley and in a few words sketched what I had seen. Then I told of the sound of clicking oars which had floated up to my ears.

They listened with varying expressions upon their faces. Bartley’s did not change, nor did I expect it would. The round, red face of the doctor was cocked
up on one side, reminding me of a fat robin listening for a worm in the earth. Only the police official appeared surprised—surprised and at the same time a little anxious. But when I had ended, it was Bartley who spoke, nor did he refer to what I had disclosed.

"Miner, there will have to be a very careful examination of the car. I think you ought to get the best fingerprint expert you can pick up, down here at once. Guard the car until he arrives, and have him photograph all fingerprints he may find within. They may not get you anywhere but they must be taken. Then every inch of this ground must be gone over. Remember, this affair is going to be very much in the public eye."

Under the headlights, the ground at our feet was revealed as a sodden mass of trodden dirt. Footprints started everywhere, but they were mostly our own. What was worse, they were so slurred and mingled together that it would be very difficult to pick out any individual track. Out in the darkness beyond the headlights the task would prove almost impossible. The chief must have thought of this, for he ventured:

"It's going to be almost impossible to do anything tonight. I can have this place roped off, and place a man here to keep people out. The car can be towed to a garage, and gone through in the morning. We will be able to see better then."

We all agreed this might be the wisest thing to do; but I doubted if the morning would reveal anything of much value. Footprints would have been wiped out, at least on our side of the car. They had driven very close to the parked coupé, and had walked around a
good deal. But one thing was true, there was very little could be done until morning.

The chief suggested that the doctor might return to the village and send back a man with plenty of ropes and a few stakes. He himself would remain by the car until the constable joined him. It was a good suggestion, and with the remark that he hoped the poker game he had been in was still going on, the doctor turned to walk over to his machine. As he started over the slippery dirt, the red-headed young man had another thought.

"Better send the undertaker; I suppose we can move the body."

But before the doctor could speak, Bartley protested. He reminded the chief that a disturbance of the body might destroy any fingerprint evidence that existed. There would have to be an autopsy, and it was his suggestion that a fingerprint expert be reached at once. If this was done, he ought to be down from the city by morning, his work over by noon. Instead of having an undertaker, he asked that the car be towed to a garage and locked up until the fingerprint expert was through.

The doctor had paused as Bartley started to speak, and when he had finished agreed with what had been said. He reminded the chief, as had Bartley, that there would be a great deal of publicity. It would be a very fine thing if they went very slowly—a suggestion which struck the young man as a good one.

We watched the fat little figure climb into his small car, listening to the noisy barking of the engine as he turned in a wide circle. Then with a cheerful wave of
his hand, he darted down the road, his exhaust barking out every few feet. As he vanished in the distance, Bartley walked to the rear of the coupé.

There was a large compartment in the back of the car large enough to take in many suitcases if one had wished to do so. The compartment was not locked, and he raised the dark blue cover to look within. We hurried to his side to see what might be discovered.

But there was nothing out of the way in the compartment. A few tools littered the floor, and in one corner were several bottles. If their labels told the truth, the bottles contained a very good brand of Scotch. But with the exception of the Scotch and the few tools, the compartment contained nothing of value.

Closing the cover Bartley turned to the police official. Saying that there was nothing else we could do, he told him we would try at last to reach our destination. The chief expressed his gratitude, walking over to our machine with us. His last words were a fervent request that Bartley would see him in the morning. This granted, we climbed into the Rolls.

As I sank back against the soft cushion, I realized that I was very tired. It had been a difficult afternoon, a more horrible evening. Not only was I tired, but I began to think of the evening meal which we had missed. As I thought of this, the dog, who had been wild with joy at our return, decided it might be better to sit on my lap than on the ledge, and climbed down to the seat in a clumsy fashion.

Bartley had insisted he would do the driving, and I was perfectly willing he should. Leaning against the cushion, I lighted a cigarette and breathed a thankful
prayer for the man who had first discovered tobacco. Then, with a half sigh, I slid farther down in the seat.

Ahead of us, the lights picked up every hole in the muddy road—a narrow road, evidently not used to any great extent. On each side the fields disappeared in the darkness. Fields which had no fences to protect them against a trespasser. The fog appeared to have vanished though there were still signs of moisture in the air. I had the idea it might rain within a few hours.

The silver clock on our dashboard stood at a little after eleven. As my eyes fell upon its illuminated circle, I half smiled. When we had talked the trip over the day before, we had felt sure we would reach Nash's summer home by seven at the latest. But at that time we had no idea of what was before us.

Curious, I asked Bartley how he had reached the village. He had no difficulty in finding it. The road we were on went across the island—a distance of not over two miles. The village had been perhaps four miles from where we had discovered the silent figure of Van Dike. But he chuckled when he spoke of his reception by the man who headed the island police.

There was a police force on the island. The summer people had insisted they must have protection. More than that, they had raised the money to pay for this protection. Miner, who had been an officer in the war, had been chosen for the position. And Bartley told me that he felt sure the young man had brains.

He had found him in a back room of the town hall—a room which served for an office, and might be called
the police station. In this room Bartley had discovered the chief with the coroner and two other men, engaged in a noisy game of poker, a game which they hated to break up. But when they had heard his story, they had followed him across the island.

The car topped a little rise in the road, and suddenly there appeared in the distance the reflection of many lights. We were nearing the other shore and the summer colony. Soon we sped past the first large estate, with a large hour set far back from the road. Then came another as we drove out on a hard paved road.

The sea was very near; true, between us and the water were houses, but I knew they faced the ocean. They were large houses, their windows friendly squares of light in the night. Close-trimmed privet hedges enclosed the huge lawns—lawn broken by small gardens. As we reached the good road, Bartley turned the car to the right.

The side of the island we had just left had been a lonely, dreary place. If there had been any houses at all we had failed to see them in the darkness. Only gloomy, deserted fields in which the tall grass swayed in the slight breeze had met our eyes. Evidently, for some reason, the summer people had never taken to that side of the island.

But as the car sped along, I could see that we were passing through a wealthy summer colony. The houses far back from the highway were large; the type of homes that take a good deal of money to keep up. In front of many of them were parked expensive-looking cars—cars which under our lights glistened and shone in all colours of the rainbow.
Just as I had begun to think Bartley did not know where he was going, he turned through a high hedge to run along a pebbled drive. The house that loomed before us was the last one in sight; a house much larger than any other we had seen, a great rambling affair with two wide extending wings. From one of these, the one farthest away, every window was flooding the night with light.

As the car stopped under the high portico, we heard the sound of music.

Syncopated music it was, the crooning moan of a jazz orchestra. We heard the high, clear notes of the violins, followed by the unearthly wailing of the noisy saxophones. As the insidious melody came swaying out upon the air, the dog, which had been asleep on my knees, rose—rose to stick his nose through the open window. For a moment, with his head on one side, he listened to the music. Then after a quick glance which took us both in, he gave a low growl.

For a second before we got out of the car, we both looked at the lighted windows. We could see the gliding figures that drifted past; dancing figures, the gay coloured dresses of women, and the black coats of young men. As I watched them, I realized that a dance was the last thing on earth I desired.

We left the car to go up three wide steps and stand waiting before a huge door. Bartley was forced to ring twice before we heard the faint sound of footsteps within. Then the door was flung open, and a very solemn-looking butler gave us a very disapproving glance. It was plain to see he wondered what we wanted.

It dawned upon me that after all we might not ap-
pear in the most favourable light. I cast a quick glance down at my shoes—a mass of mud and dirt. The fog had taken the ease from my trousers, and they hung like wrinkled bags. The coat was soaked by the moisture; and from the look the butler gave me, I had a suspicion my face was dirty.

For a moment his disapproving eyes studied us. Then the expression suddenly changed as a smile flitted across his lips.

"Excuse me, Mr. Bartley. Mr. Nash has been worried about you all evening," and he stepped aside for us to enter.

We found ourselves in a long, old-fashioned hall. Large rooms, of which I had but a glimpse, were on each side. There floated to our ears the sound of the orchestra from the distant wing, loud and appealing. As the butler closed the door he studied us a moment, hesitating a little before he spoke:

"No doubt you will desire to change your clothes. If you wish I will take you to your rooms before joining Mr. Nash in the library. Is your luggage in the car?"

The suggestion met with our hearty approval. Assuring him the grips were in the compartment of the machine, Bartley asked that the dog be fed and given a place for the night. As we followed the butler up the winding stairs, we were assured the dog would find pleasant quarters in the kennels. A moment later we were shown into our suite.

As the butler closed the door to hurry away for our luggage, I sank down in the nearest chair with a sigh. It had been a difficult afternoon and I was weary. But
to look at Bartley one would not have known that anything out of the way had taken place. His expression was calm; his movements as deliberate as though there were nothing on his mind.

I did not rise until the butler had returned with the four suitcases. He wished to unpack them, but we told him it would not be necessary. With the words that he would notify Mr. Nash we had arrived, he left the room. As the door closed I rose to my feet and passed into the other bedroom. The light on, I noticed the great wall mirror and went over in front of it.

As I studied the figure reflected in the great glass, I smiled. No wonder the butler had disapproved of my appearance. Across the right cheek was a black streak of dirt. My coat had been made by an expensive tailor but one would never have discovered this fact by looking at it. Now it hung a shapeless mass, wet and wrinkled. As for the state of my shoes, the less said the better.

It was a beautiful room which had been given me, and Bartley's was similar in its fittings. As I unpacked a suitcase, I cast my eyes at the large windows; then gave an approving glance at the beautiful furniture. But the bed attracted me the most—a great, huge thing which called one to rest on its surface.

I felt so soiled I decided to take a quick bath. Going into the large bathroom, I turned on the water; as I did so there came a knock at Bartley's door. I heard the door being opened, the short murmur of voices, and then Bartley called out. When I hastened into his room, he motioned with a little smile to the tray which stood upon a table.
It was not a large tray though the bottle that stood by the two glasses was of good size—an appealing-looking bottle, which bore a very famous label. As I poured the pale yellow Scotch into the glasses, I was thankful for someone’s thoughtfulness; the drink, I felt, was needed.

In ten minutes I had bathed and was dressed again. As I entered Bartley’s room, I felt more at ease than I had for many hours. After the fog and the darkness, the room was a very cheerful place to be in. Bartley also had changed. With a smile he opened the door and we went down the hall to the wide stairway.

At the bottom we found the butler, who seemed a little surprised at seeing us so soon. With an invitation for us to follow, he went down the long hall to knock softly at a closed door. Then as he opened it, he stepped to one side to allow us to enter.

It was a large room—a room with a very friendly atmosphere. Etchings and pictures covered the walls, and almost all of them were of the same subject. On every side the grave, stern face of Napoleon looked out at the rows of books which filled the many cases. There was a fireplace at the farther end, and a short distance away from it was a great rosewood desk. Behind the desk a white-haired man sat smoking.

He rose to his feet with a smile when he saw us, hastening across the room to our side. That Willard Nash was glad to see us was apparent. His fine smooth face broke into a wide grin as with outstretched hands he reached our side. With the words, “I was afraid you had become lost and might wander forever upon the island,” his hands clasped ours.
MURDER IN THE DARK

I had always liked Willard Nash. So far as I knew, everyone liked him. A more kindly and generous man did not exist. Though he never spokè about it, yet again and again there leaked out stories of his charity and sympathy. There was many a poor person who blessed this wealthy man.

It was a fine face which smiled at us. A crown of white hair surmounted the keen, dark eyes—eyes that could twinkle with glee and yet must often have been stern and severe. For Nash had won his wealth in the most rough and tumble game in the world, the early days of the oil industry—and it had left him with the kindly face of an English gentleman.

We followed him to the desk, his eager voice asking many questions regarding our trip. As we sank into the chairs and took the cigars he extended, Bartley told him we had taken the wrong road and had lost ourselves in the fog. To my surprise, he said not a word about the death of Van Dike.

For a while the conversation was of not much importance. He mentioned that his son and daughter were giving a dance, and expressed his opinion of modern music—music of which wild, wailing notes drifted into the room through the closed door. He mentioned his wish that we would enjoy our stay on the island, saying something about there being good fishing. Then the conversation seemed to drift into silence.

For some reason Bartley had allowed Nash to do all the talking. From time to time I saw his keen eyes studying his friend; but whenever Nash would look his way, the glance would turn aside. In one of those
uneasy silences which comes when no one wishes to speak, I decided Nash was not only very glad to see us, but he seemed worried.

There came the moment when the oil man threw his cigar away. He moved in an uneasy manner in his chair, then turned to Bartley. His face was a little anxious as his fine eyes studied his friend. Straightening his shoulders as if there were a disagreeable task ahead, he spoke:

"You must wonder, John, why I asked you to drop everything and come down here."

Bartley smiled; it was a very pleasant smile which caused the older man across the desk to look pleased.

"You are my friend, Nash, and you wished to see me. Of course I came."

There was warmth in the look of appreciation which flashed into the eyes of our host. Yet he hesitated before he replied, playing with a pencil which had been taken from the desk. It was clear he did not wish to speak, but he did at last.

"John, I hate to bother you. But I don't know just what to do. It is about Harold; I am rather worried over him."

We both gave a start. That Nash should ever have any anxiety over his son seemed absurd. He was a rather emotional youth, it was true, given to sudden enthusiasms and fancies; but they were harmless enough. Out of the distant past, heredity had handed down an artistic soul to the young man. Books thrilled him, pictures moved him to words. It is true his likings changed as often as the weather. But that Nash should be worried over the boy appeared absurd.
MURDER IN THE DARK

The old man must have read what we were thinking, for he commented:

"I know it seems absurd. But the boy has changed a good deal this summer. He was twenty in April, and I suggested he might like to come into the office; and he went up in the air. Said he was going to be an artist."

He paused as a rather sorrowful smile passed across his lips.

"Like all men, I have pictured the time when my son might step into my place—take over the business. But I guess Harold will never be able to do it."

Within my heart I agreed with the last words. On all seas sailed the ships which bore his company’s name. In every state his oil tanks were a daily sight. The idea of Harold ever running so intricate a business was more than I could picture. But I stopped thinking about it as Nash continued:

"We came down here in May, and since then Harold has spent seven thousand dollars. Not much perhaps to me, but a tremendous amount for him! When I asked where it had all gone, he refused to say; then something happened."

His face flushed as if the recollection was a little painful. His eyes glanced down at the floor and he did not lift them as he continued:

"The first of August he asked for three thousand dollars. I refused to give it to him unless he told me just why he needed it. He refused to tell and grew very excited. Then—then two days later, the safe in my wife’s room was robbed. Twenty thousand dollars’ worth of jewelry was taken."
He raised his eyes to give a quick look at Bartley. The glance was filled with dread as if he were afraid of any comment he might make. But there came no reply, and in a moment Nash continued:

"There were three of the clearest fingerprints upon the wall by the safe I have ever seen. I had an expert come from New York. He photographed the prints, enlarged the pictures and he discovered—"

His voice failed as if he could not bear to tell the rest of the story. There fell a silence broken by Bartley asking in a sympathetic voice:

"And you found they were those of your son?"

The man threw back his head. His face was flushed, but there was a defiant ring to his voice as he replied:

"Yes, I discovered that. But I won't believe he took the jewellery. I don't think he is a thief. But I cannot understand it, I cannot understand it."

"Did you speak to him?" was the question.

"Yes. He denied knowing anything. He got very angry. I cannot believe he did it. Yet there are the fingerprints, and they never lie—"

"Sometimes they do worse than lie," was Bartley's dry comment.

Nash threw him a quick glance as if he did not understand what was behind the remark. For a moment the eyes of the two men met. Then in a despairing gesture, the older man threw out his hands in a half circle.

"I thought I would ask you to come down and see if you could do anything with the boy. He admires you more than anyone else. Why he has spent all the
money he has this summer is a mystery. But when he begins to threaten people—it is getting serious—"
"Threaten people?" was Bartley's wondering question.
Nash raised his head. There was an anxious look upon his face as he replied—a look of fear.
"Yes, threaten people. That is what I call it. When anyone remarks that a man ought to be killed, and he would not mind killing him—it is what I call threatening people.
There came Bartley's low voice.
"Who did he say ought to be killed?"
"You know the man," was the dry retort. "Robert Van Dike. Van Dike, the lawyer. He has the cottage next door."
CHAPTER IV

At the sound of the lawyer’s name, I gave a sudden startled exclamation. It had been unexpected, the last thing I had anticipated hearing. Though Bartley’s expression did not change, a slight flush passed over his cheeks. I knew he was as astonished as I had been. Nash had told us his son had threatened Van Dike. It may have been just an odd coincidence—but Van Dike was dead—murdered.

My uneasy manner must have warned the oil man that something was wrong. His dark eyes studied us both as his face suddenly grew very white. He turned to Bartley and there was an appealing tone in his voice as he asked:

"What is the matter?"

There was a slight hesitancy before the question was answered. Nash replaced the pencil upon the desk. As he pushed it away from him, the long slim fingers trembled.

But at last Bartley replied:

"Van Dike is dead, Willard."

"Dead?" came the gasping question. "What do you mean—when did he die?"

Bartley slowly shook his head. I knew he wished he did not have to answer.

"It is far worse than that—he was murdered."

The news was too much for our host. He sank back
in his chair while a frightened expression passed over his face. I saw a shudder sweep through his body. As if wishing to assure himself his ears had deceived him, he leaned forward as if appealing to Bartley. Seeing he had heard aright, he sank back again in his chair.

In a few brief words came the story of our taking the lonely road, of finding the parked car under the trees. Then followed the account of the trip across the island, and the return with the police chief and the coroner.

As Bartley talked, Nash sat slumped far down in his chair with his head in his hand. When we had entered the room there had been nothing unusual in his manner. Perhaps his attitude had changed a little when he mentioned his worry over his son. But one thing had been clear. Though he might have worried over the boy—yet deep down in his heart, he felt sure his son had done nothing wrong.

But now as his dejected figure sagged in the chair on the other side of the desk, I knew the man was worried. Not only was he worried, but also afraid. Fear was the meaning of the look which flashed out of his dark eyes—not for himself but for his son. And when Bartley had finished speaking, there was a frightened question in the look he received.

Rising slowly to his feet, Bartley walked over to the desk, and took a cigar from the box which stood in its centre. Very carefully he cut the end, more carefully lighted it. Then walking over to the side of his friend, he gave him a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

"I would not take an odd coincidence too much to
heart, Nash. There was nothing evil in the remark the boy made about Van Dike."

"There wasn't?" was the astonished groan. "You say there is nothing wrong when anyone says a person ought to be killed, and he would like to kill him?"

There was a smile on Bartley's face as he slowly shook his head.

"As a rule, it does not mean much. After all, as someone has said, words are simply a disguise. That may not be true. Every day thousands of people speak about other people. They say 'he ought to be dead—someone ought to kill him'; and it does not mean they are going out to commit murder. Far from it."

Nash listened to his words as if not understanding what he was trying to infer. Then he barked:

"For God's sake, John, what are you trying to say?"

"Simply this. Your boy said, 'Van Dike ought to be killed!'. What he meant was this: That the lawyer was the sort of a man whose departure from life would perhaps be a benefit to the world. I agree with the thought he had. But it does not mean he intended to kill him, far from it. What I am wondering, however, is what did Harold know about Van Dike which caused him to have the violent hatred he must have felt for the man. What has happened this summer to him?"

"Then you don't think his saying what he did; meant—" and the man's voice trailed away as if he did not care to even express what he feared.

"By itself, I doubt if the remark he made means anything—that is anything more than an expression of disgust upon his part."
MURDER IN THE DARK

For a moment Nash studied his desk as if he had noticed its surface for the first time. Then with a sudden start, he jumped to his feet and started across the room.

"The boy and his sister are giving a dance to-night. We will go down and get hold of him."

We went out of the room, down through the hall. The music was louder as we approached the intersecting hallway which led to the wing where they were dancing—music which rose and fell as the saxophones shrieked out an unearthly moaning. Just before we reached the end of the hall I looked at my wrist watch and saw it was midnight.

It was a long hall we hurried down. It ended where two large glass doors allowed us to see the dancing figures which were sweeping by. Under our feet were thick soft rugs. Open doors on each side invited us to look into large rooms—rooms of which we had but a passing glance as we followed the hurrying footsteps of our host.

Pushing the glass doors aside, we stepped into the extending wing. The room ran the entire side of the house. The rugs had been swept aside, and upon the polished floor perhaps twenty couples were dancing; dancing to the music which ended in a loud burst of sound just after we came through the doors.

The swaying figures disentangled themselves to walk slowly back to their seats. A number directed their steps to the old-fashioned table which stood a few feet from one of the bay windows—a table upon which stood a great punch bowl flanked by glistening glasses. For the moment no one noticed us.
It was a colourful scene. In every hue of the rainbow, the gay dresses intensified the youth of their wearers. For most of them were young, carrying themselves with the easy air of confidence of the young people of to-day. Over the room hung a ripple of laughing voices.

We had paused just inside the doors. I saw Nash give one quick glance around the room. Then as if not discovering whom he was seeking, his eyes began to pass slowly over each person. Down one side of the room, then over the other went the gaze. And when he had ended, it was evident he was disappointed.

With a loud crash, the orchestra swept into a popular waltz. There came the sound of chairs being shoved aside as the young women and men jumped to their feet. The next second the room was a mass of swaying figures—swaying white-powdered shoulders reflected against the black coats of the men.

It was what they call a dreamy waltz. Its strains rose and fell with an even rhythm. As I listened I wondered why it was that people could not see that the waltz was the most beautiful of all dance music. Then all at once, I noticed a man threading his way through the dancers, coming in our direction.

He was a small man, perhaps fifty years of age. He walked with little mincing steps with his head held high. The grey goatee was trimmed to a sharp point, and the little moustache lay a sharp etched line above the narrow thin lips. The face was an intellectual one, though every line expressed abundant self-appreciation. By the side of Nash the man stopped, with a sharp birdlike glance at Bartley and myself.
"Looking for someone, Mr. Nash?" came a high-pitched voice.

For a moment Nash did not speak. Again his eager searching eyes went over the dancers—looking for a figure which apparently he had been unable to find. Then he turned, his glance passing over the nervous man standing in front of him.

"Looking for Harold, Professor. Have you seen him?"

The sharp eyes turned to give a quick look over the room. There was a doubting tone in the thin voice as he shook his head.

"Cannot say that I have, Willard. Have an idea he was around here a while ago. What do you want him for?"

The oil man did not answer the question. For some reason he seemed a little nervous as he made an impatient gesture with his hand. In the silence which had fallen, the Professor studied both Bartley and myself. There was curiosity in the look we received. Nash must have noticed it. With an impatient air, he said:

"Excuse me, Professor. This is my old friend, Mr. Bartley—and Mr. Pelt—Professor White of Hartley College."

We acknowledged the introduction, Bartley smiling as he took the outstretched hand. But I observed that the name meant little to the Professor. His face expressed no interest as for a moment we exchanged the usual greetings. In fact, it was my impression he did not think we were worth bothering with.

The music had come to an end, and the couples were
standing on the floor, applauding. The orchestra at once swung into another waltz. For a while, wit' Nash searching every couple that drifted past, we waited. It was evident his son was not in the room. To me it looked odd. We had been told the young man and his sister were giving the dance, and he was not present.

A girl twisted herself from the arms of her partner and came walking over in our direction. A rather beautiful girl, young, filled with vitality. Her closely bobbed black hair only made her golden dress more colourful. The white shoulders were finely moulded, the contour of her youthful body, shapely. As Nash saw her approaching, a little smile crossed his lips. I could see she was a favourite.

With her head on one side, she paused in front of us. There was character in the face that turned its dark eyes upon our host—character and beauty. The voice which spoke had a lilting quality in its husky tone.

"Anything the matter, Mr. Nash?"

His hand went out and rested on the white shoulder for a second.

"I was looking for Harold, Lorraine."

Their glances met. In the dark eyes of the girl was a question.

"Harold went out a little before eight. I don't know where he went, but he has not returned," she replied.

"Did he appear to be in a hurry?" came Bartley's voice.

With her head a little on one side, the girl studied him gravely before she replied. Then, as if liking
wha she saw in his face, a little smile broke across her lips.

"He was rather excited. We were to dance; you see the dance had just started. Harold came over from the window, and told me he would have to call it off. Said he would be back in a short time. I was a little surprised at his leaving the floor. But I know he went somewhere; I heard his car a few moments later going out of the drive."

I made a rapid calculation. Our boat had left the mainland after seven. Because of the fog, the trip had taken longer than the usual hour—but not such a great deal longer. Though I had not looked at our clock, yet it was my idea we had seen the parked coupé some time around ten. As I thought of this, I began to feel troubled.

The young man had made the remark that Van Dike ought to be killed. Someone had killed the lawyer; worse than that Harold Nash, though he was host at a dance, had left the house. Left it some time before the lawyer had met his death. I realized he could have driven across the island in a little over fifteen minutes. And I wondered—

The same thought must have been in Willard Nash’s mind. I saw him give a start as he looked across the wide room. Directly opposite us were large bay windows—windows through which one could look over to the next house. And suddenly I remembered he had told us that Van Dike was his neighbour.

The girl’s eyes studied the anxious face. I saw her lips become a thin straight line as a curious expression swept across her face. Then throwing back her head,
she came to his side and a shapely arm went slinging around his shoulder.

"When he comes in, Mr. Nash, I will send him to you," came her husky voice.

He nodded, and motioned that we would return to his library. The Professor watched us go. I knew he was bursting to ask what was the trouble, and he made a half motion to follow. As we went down the hall, I knew that he was standing where we left him—standing watching our retreating backs.

Re-entering the library, Nash went slowly over to his desk, and dropped into his chair. He was far from calm, his face twitching a little as he took some time to light his cigar. With a sudden gesture, he threw it aside raising his head to look at Bartley.

"I don't like it," were the words which fell from his lips.

"There is nothing to be worried about," came the calm reply. "I know what is in your mind. But no doubt the boy will explain it all when you see him."

The white head shook violently in protest.

"Maybe he will; but I don't like it."

For a while no one spoke. Then all at once, Nash gave a sudden start as he looked at us.

"Heavens! I forgot to ask if you have had anything to eat."

It was a pleasing question. I had not eaten since noon, and for the last few hours had been rather hungry. As Bartley with a half laugh confessed we had forgotten to have an evening meal, our host rose to his feet and went over to the wall. Pushing a button, he walked back to our side.
The butler came through the door, and in a few words Nash asked him to serve us a meal. He suggested we might enjoy eating in the library instead of going to the dining room. This being agreeable, the butler hurried out to speak to the cook. As the door closed, Bartley spoke:

"Willard, you mentioned Harold had spent a large sum of money this summer. You never discovered what he did with it all?"

The man shook his head.

"No, never did. I guess I gave Harold about a thousand dollars a month as a rule. It is a big sum for a young man, but I remembered my poverty-stricken boyhood. Wanted him to be spared what I went through. Never had a cent, never could enjoy myself at the time I should have been finding pleasure in life—when I was young."

There was a regretful smile as he said this, then he continued:

"But after all Harold never threw the money away. He bought a good many etchings and books each month. Spent a good bit on his fast motor boat and his car. Then all at once he wanted money, then more and more."

That Nash was puzzled as to why his son had needed an increased allowance could be seen from his face. He was an indulgent father, perhaps not paying very much attention to what his children might be doing. But knowing both his son and daughter, I knew they had never needed much watching. I was thinking this when Nash gave a little oath. Rushing over to his desk, he pulled out a letter from a drawer.
"That reminds me," he grunted. "The last time I gave Harold any money, he asked for three thousand dollars. If I had not been dictating to my secretary, I might have refused to give him what he wished. But I thought he wanted to get a new car. There were five thousand dollars in the safe, and I told him to take three. And ever since this morning, I have been expecting to hear that he got into trouble."

"What do you mean by that?" was Bartley's question.

"A funny thing. You know we started a bank down here, mostly to save us the trouble of always having to bother with going to the mainland when we had any banking to be done. I got that five thousand I spoke about from the bank here. This morning they wrote to tell me that in some manner five counterfeit twenty-dollar bills—which they had intended to destroy—had got into that five thousand."

He paused for a moment, walking over to his desk to take a cigar from the box. When it was lighted, he turned to us.

"Harold took three thousand dollars, and he must have taken every one of those five counterfeit twenty-dollar bills. I have wondered all day who got stuck with them."

"When did you give him this money?" was Bartley's question.

"About three weeks ago. He wanted more a few days later—that was the time the wall safe was robbed."

He might have said more, but the butler came into the room. He was even hurrying, pushing before him a serving table. Under the snowy white linen could
be seen the shape of dishes, and the silver coffee pot sent a pleasing odour through the room. Behind him was a smiling coloured man, who busied himself at once in plating the dishes upon a table he had produced from some mysterious place.

We sank into the chairs and busied ourselves with the lunch. The coloured man served us with a wide grin on his black face, evidently pleased by the fact that we were hungry. While we were seated, Nash walked nervously to and fro. Once he spoke in a low voice to the butler, and the man left the room at once. When he returned just as we had finished, he shook his head.

I knew what the gesture meant. He had been sent to discover if Harold had returned. From the disappointed look which swept across the father's face, I saw the search had been hopeless. Again I wondered, as I had ever since we had watched the dancing young people, where the boy had gone.

We rose to our feet to watch the coloured man and the butler remove the dishes from the room. When the door had closed and we were alone again, Nash made a gesture. It was a gesture which expressed all the anxiety that was in his mind.

"It is no use your staying up any longer. You must be tired."

We were tired. At least I was, and I felt sure Bartley felt the same. I could see Nash had no intention of retiring; at least, not until the dance broke up. And in my heart I was glad he did not expect us to sit up with him, while he waited for his son to return.

He went out with us to the hall. As we climbed the
wide stairway, we could hear the music from the ving. Jazz now; wild barbaric music which set one’s feet dancing. At our door he stood hesitating a moment then said good-night.

The reading light was on, and our pyjamas were laid out across the beds. But I had no intention of reading. Going into my bedroom, I sank down in a chair and slowly started to undress. I was tired, and for some reason, nervous. As I took off my clothes, I tried to puzzle out the even’s of the evening. In the end I decided they could not be untangled.

But I wondered. Was there any connection between the fact that Harold Nash had walked away from his own party, and the coupe with the still figure of Van Dike at the wheel? Yet I could not picture the youth committing a violent crime. But because I wondered, I rose and went into Bartlev’s bedroom.

He was seated in the lounge chair near the bed. His dark-blue silk dressing gown was on, in his hand was the usual book. As I sank down in a chair, he threw me a smiling glance, then placed the book on the stand by the reading lamp.

“Well, Pelt,” came his even voice.

I put the question which had been in my mind all the evening:

“What do you think he did with that money?”

“It is hard to say. As a rule it is always the old expression, ‘Wine, women and song’; but from what we both know of the boy, it is not the first two, and the third we will have to change to something else—”

He paused for a moment to take a cigarette from his case. The thin vapour floated upward to drift away
through an open window; then a thoughtful expression crossed his face.

"You remember Nash said there were five counterfeit twenty-dollar bills in that three thousand dollars he gave Harold. I have been wondering if he might be gambling—"

"Where could he?" came my question as I remembered the quiet life upon the island.

He knew what I was thinking, for he smiled:

"Not here perhaps. But you know that Wynecliff Point is only ten miles from the other side of the island. Danny Clark has had his gambling house there for years. It is easy to sail across, and it may be the young man has been doing some playing in the place."

I had not thought of Wynecliff Point. The famous summer resort was only a few miles away. It attracted a far sportier group of people than did the island. For years one of its attractions had been the quietly run gambling house of Clark. The oil man’s son could very easily sail over to the Point; but I doubted very much if he had been in Clark’s place.

I expected Bartley to carry the idea further, but when he next spoke, it was to present another thought.

"We will have to say, perhaps, that though we hope he knows nothing about the death of Van Dike, I think we will find in the end that the two are connected. It is my idea that Van Dike was mixed up with his leaving the dance to-night."

I looked at him in astonishment. Seeing the glance, he nodded:

"That fine-looking young lady told us that Harold was standing by the windows just before he left. They
overlook the lawn toward Van Dike's summer home. It is my idea he saw the lawyer's car leaving the yard, and the sight caused him to rush away from the dance."

"But why—?" I started.

He laughed. "I do not know why. I wish I did, but there is a connection. It is going to be a damaging fact when they stop to think the lawyer must have been killed after Harold rushed away from his own dance. And I think—"

As i̇ not sure of the possibility of what was passing through his mind, he paused.

"What?" came my impatient voice.

"I have been wondering if Van Dike was killed at the place we found the car. Three roads come together there. True, they are all lonely, but it is the natural thing, I would say, that if one were driving across the island from here—he would take the road which came out by the trees. Van Dike must have expected to see someone."

He shook his head, as if he were unable to picture what had happened. Then he continued:

"If Van Dike had made an appointment with someone, two things seem clear. As that side of the island is a lonesome spot, it was chosen because they did not wish to be seen. But i̇ that was true, a shrewd, keen mind like Van Dike's would not have picked a spot where three roads meet, for a meeting place. That is why I wonder if he was killed there."

His voice died away as he rose to his feet. Going to the window, he stood looking out into the night. Then with a little shake of his head, he crossed over to the bed.
“What it is all about I do not know... and there is no use bothering our brains about it now. We ought to be in bed.”

Accepting the hint, I rose to my feet, saying “Good-night.” Back in my own bedroom, I turned off the light. Just as I was about to slide into bed, I thought of the windows. Were they open? Crossing the floor, I drew the long, silk curtains aside. Then with my face pressed against the upper glass, I looked out into the night.

The fog had vanished. A faint moon stood high in the sky. Across its surface drifted white fleecy clouds like ships scurrying before the wind. It was very still, and though the music from the dance came to my ears, it was very faint. Far away in the distance I could hear the sound of some automobile, but it died away almost at the second I heard it.

For a few moments I studied the scene before me. A few hundred feet away, the sea broke softly upon a curving, sandy beach. Though it was dark, yet there was sufficient light from the faint moon, to make out the surface of the ocean. It stretched away into space—a vast expanse which lost itself in the dim distance.

Through the open windows drifted the night air with its salty tang. The wind had fallen away to a slight breeze, a breeze which barely lifted the silk curtains of the windows. And it was still—a deep silence, broken only by the murmuring waves upon the shore. A silence which invited sleep.

As I slid between the cool linen sheets, I gave a sigh. It had been a strange afternoon and evening. What it might all mean, what might come out of it, I spent no
time in thinking about. The future would take care of that. It is true, for a second I wondered what the morning would show; but I put the thought aside.

I was tired. For a while I lay without moving. After the noisy city, the night seemed very still and very close. For a moment or so, I tried to catch the sound of the sea as it broke against the beach. It came in a gentle murmur which caused my eyes to close. I had a faint recollection of hearing a strain of "Home, Sweet Home," but it was very faint. And after that, I knew no more.
CHAPTER V

I was awakened the next morning by the sun shining in my eyes. Its bright rays came flooding through the open windows, filling the room with warmth. There came to my ears the laughing voices of children, followed by the sudden noisy barking of a dog—a dog whose voice I knew. Evidently down on the beach, Trouble had discovered someone to play with.

For a while I did not move. As the events of the night came back to my mind, I wondered if Harold Nash had returned home. I half smiled as I pictured the greeting he must have received from his father. Then growing suspicious that it might be later than I thought, I reached out a lazy hand for my watch. One glance at the hands standing at nine-thirty and I jumped out of bed.

It was a beautiful morning after the rain and the fog of the night. The air was warm, and there was not the slightest hint of a breeze. Except for the voices of the children and the bark of the dog, no other sounds came to my ears. Going into the bathroom, I turned on the water, and while I waited for the tub to fill, looked through the window.

At my feet the closely-cropped lawn stretched away to a close-trimmed hedge. The lawn was broken by several flower-gardens; gardens in which gay-coloured flowers were thrown into sharp contrast by the green
grass. Beyond the hedge lay the fields stretching away in the distance—a tangled mass of small stunted bushes and tall grass.

Turning my head a little, I could see the shore. A sandy beach lay between the curving walls of a two-stone breakwater. I could glimpse small children running with glee, followed by a bounding dog—our own dog, who leaped around the children with loud barks.

The sea stretched away to lose itself in the distant horizon. It was very calm, the bright blue water not broken by even the slightest ripple. Under the bright sun, it lay a surface of glittering silver. Far out from shore, a great steamship was going slowly down the coast.

After I had bathed and dressed, I peered into the other bedroom for Bartley. He was not there. Deciding he must be eating breakfast, I went out in the hall and down the stairs. But when I reached the first floor, I found no one but the butler, who informed me that Bartley had taken the car and driven down to the village.

I had breakfast alone. Instead of sitting in solitary state in the large dining room, I ate out in a little breakfast room. Glass enclosed me on all sides, and I had a clear view of the sea. A climbing rosebush tried to look within the room, and a fat robin landing upon the window sill, studied me nervously for a moment.

As the butler busied himself serving, I noticed that his face was very grave. At the best he was not a very cheerful-looking individual, but this morning he would have done very well as an undertaker's assistant.
And when I noticed his expression, I asked if Harold Nash had returned home. The man slowly shook his head. It was not only a decided negative shake, but it seemed a sorrowful one. His eyes met mine for a second, and his lips half parted. I was sure he was going to speak. But the desire passed as suddenly as it came. I knew one thing though—the old butler was very fond of his master's son.

Breakfast over, I leaned back in the chair and lighted a cigarette. I felt at peace with the entire world, and only needed a morning paper to have my joy complete. But I knew the papers could not arrive on the island until after the noon boat. For a while I sat smoking, then rose and went out through the near-by door and down to the lawn.

The air was warm, the sun bright. Slowly I wandered across the grass, stopping now and then to glance at the flower gardens. They were well worth looking at, a mass of gay colours against the green leaves. The yard seemed filled with robins, big fat things which were very tame. Overhead in the direction of the sea, the gulls were slowly drifting through the air.

I had about made up my mind to go down on the shore, when Bartley came walking from the front of the house. He was wearing a grey suit, and at his heels was the Airedale. Seeing me they started across the grass, though it was the dog which reached my side first.

Where Bartley had been so early in the morning, I did not know and for that matter, did not find out. After a few general remarks, mostly about the beauty
of the day, he told me he had an errand to be done. Then at my black face, he laughed:

"I was thinking this morning, Pelt, that it might be a good thing for you to take a boat, and run over to Wynecliff Point. When you get there, you can go up and see Danny Clark; see if Harold has been playing in his resort."

"He has not come back? I ventured, although I felt sure I knew the answer to the question.

He shook his head.

"No, he did not return to the house. Where he has been is a problem. But his father wonders if the boy has been gambling. The only place near by where there could have been any of any amount is in Clark's—Elm Tree Cottage at the Point. It is only about fifteen or so miles, and there is a pretty fast motor boat down in the boathouse."

The suggestion that I sail over to the Point was a pleasing one. Motor boating was one of the things I knew a good deal about, and the prospect of a few hours upon the water did not displease me. I suggested to Bartley that he might come along, but he shook his head as he said he would not be able to get away. Telling me the boathouse was in a direct line from the rear of the house, he walked with me as far as the hedge. There he left me.

Passing through the opening in the hedge, I saw the beach which lay beyond—a sandy beach where little children were digging holes, or else running back and forth. A small wharf jutted out into the water. Near it was a boathouse—a boathouse with the door open.

When I passed into its shadow, I found there were
two boats tied in the slip. One was not of much interest, but the other was well worth looking at—a long, narrow mahogany affair which must have cost a small fortune. When I saw it, I knew at once which boat would take me over to the Point.

I spent a few moments in looking over the engine. There was no doubt the boat had great speed, and there was nothing about the machinery that was unfamiliar. The gas tank needed more gasoline, so I filled it from one of the ten-gallon cans which stood in a corner. Then stepping into the boat, I started the engine.

For a moment I listened to the sound. The first noisy barkings died down to a steady purr—a purr which promised untold power. Leaving the engine running, I opened the door which closed the slip, and climbing back untied the ropes. Then I allowed the boat to drift out of its shelter. Just as I came under the shadow of the wharf, a voice hailed me.

Surprised, I glanced above. The long narrow wharf extended for some distance into the sea. And there, seated with her legs dangling above the water, was the young woman who had come over to speak to Mr. Nash as we watched the dancers. Seated, swinging a silk-clad leg to and fro.

Truth makes me confess that her dress was very short. Above the roll of the silk stocking could be seen several inches of white skin. The yellow sweater was rather tight with the neck mostly missing. The silk clung to her shoulders, revealing the fine lines of her body. The close-cropped black hair was not covered by a hat.
As I looked, she threw back her head and smiled. Then came her husky voice:

"Hullo! Where are you going?"

I told the place of destination, and with easy grace she rose to her feet. Coming down the wharf until she was opposite the boat, she balanced herself on the big side beam for a second, then jumped into the back seat. Leaning against the two-colour cushion, she crossed her knees and drawled:

"I guess I'll go with you."

I turned from the wheel to look at her. With her head thrown back, the clear, dark eyes met mine. There was an amused look in them, as if she was conscious of my confusion. A half smile trembled around the fine lips. Then she laughed:

"After all, Mr. Pelt, it is perfectly all right. You see Mr. Nash and I are the best of friends, besides," she paused for a second as a twinkle came in her eyes, "besides it is a long sail to the Point alone. After all, I may be better company than no one at all."

The retort made me smile, and turning to the wheel, I advanced the spark. In a moment we had swung around the pier and were headed out to the entrance of the breakwater—a breakwater formed of great granite blocks built more for a sea wall than anything else. As the boat came out through the opening, I increased the speed.

We struck the first long swell of the open sea. The boat rolled a little, then steadied itself as the water began to curl around the bow. Water flung far aside in a dashing rain of sparkling spray. There was no breeze and the sea was very calm.
To reach the Point, I knew I would have to sail around the island. The entrance through the breakwater appeared to be almost in the centre, and there was simply a choice as to which way I should go. There were at least five miles before I would swing the boat around and head for the mainland.

For a few moments I did not turn around. Increasing the speed, the miles began to slip away. There was a delight in the steady roar of the engine, the promise of all the speed anyone would wish. And it rode the water perfectly, hardly rolling at all.

Far ahead the shore line ended. Sea gulls drifted above our heads. Far out at sea was a three-mast vessel, its sails all out but motionless in the calm air. As I straightened on our course to run in line parallel with the shore, I was thankful Bartley had thought of Danny Clark's resort.

"My name is Lorraine Mason," came the laughing voice behind me. "Perhaps you have heard of my father; he writes novels."

I turned in the seat to face the girl. Of course I had heard of her father. Everybody had. His books, filled with wit and written with a keen insight into life, had made him famous. Only the week before I had seen his first play, which was settling down for a long run as the hit of the year.

I tried to say this, but the loud roar of the engine drowned my voice. The girl tried to catch what I said but failed. With a little shake of her head, she rose and came to the seat by my side. When her position had been adjusted to suit her, she turned with a happy smile. I repeated that of course I knew her father.
"I suppose everyone does," she laughed. "It is very difficult to be the daughter of a well-known writer. Everyone expects you to be different from what you are. And the women all are sure that father has failed in the manner in which he brings me up."

For a few moments there was a rather sketchy conversation, then there came a silence. Little by little I had increased the speed. Just how fast the boat might be, I did not know. There was a good chance it might go forty, but when the hand before me trembled over thirty, I let it stay.

We turned the end of the island perhaps a half mile from shore. As the boat swung around in a wide half circle, I raised my head from the instrument board. Ahead lay the mainland looming high above the water. To my right the high shore line of the Point was a jumbled mass of roofs. To the left lay the town we had left the night before.

A large bay which formed the dividing line between the two states was my destination. Picking up a course in a direct line with the lighthouse in the centre of the Sound, I swung the boat over as I sighted it. At the speed we were going it would not take more than thirty minutes to reach the Point.

We did not speak. The only sound was the rushing spray as it was flung in a screen of mist by the onward sweep of the boat. Once in a while would come the shrill scream of a sea gull far overhead. And over it all was the steady roar of the engine.

I turned to give a glance at my companion. She was leaning back in the narrow seat, looking straight ahead. My eyes wandered over the dense black head
with its ridiculous hair cut. They noticed the soft smoothness of the cheek, the vivid red of her lips; saw the ye'l ow jersey as it followed the curves of her body. And mingled with the salt of the sea, there was a hint of some delicate perfume.

Suddenly she turned, and the dark eyes met mine. It was a keen, searching glance, and in a moment a little smile crossed her lips and a dimple appeared in the smooth cheek.

"Now you have looked me all over, Mr. Pelt, I hope you approve of me."

Confused, I stammered out some sort of reply and momentarily took my hand from the wheel. With a sudden lurch the boat swayed off the course. With an exclamation I grabbed the wheel and we must go.

"Mr. Pelt," came the girl's voice; there was a seriousness in the tone which had not been there before. "Last night I asked Professor White who the gentleman were who had come with Mr. Nash to watch us dance. He told me."

She laughed a little silvery laugh, throwing back her head as she did so.

"I told Dad this morning that Mr. Bartley looked as though he had brains. He laughed as he told me who he was; so when I saw you this morning and you told me where you were going, there was a good deal more than my wishing a sail which caused me to invite myself."

I turned in surprise. As our glances met, I realized this girl had inherited a good share of her father's intelligence. There was more than beauty in the
finely-shaped face; and the look deep down in the 
dark eyes was more than curiosity. Then came the 
question.

"Did Harold come home last night?"

I shook my head before I even gave a thought to the 
question. Then suddenly its purport struck me. There 
had been anxiety back of the careless tone—not 
only anxiety but knowledge. And it seemed to me there 
was also fear.

As if reading what was in my mind, she answered:

"Harold is nothing to me, Mr. Pelt. But you see we 
have played around together ever since we were kids — 
fought and scrapped, smoked our first cigarettes 
together down on the beach by the boathouse. And his father is a special friend of mine; the kindest-hearted 
man I know, next to Dad."

There was nothing to reply to this, and after a sec-
dond’s silence, she continued:

"When Harold came over to me and said the dance 
was off, he was awfully excited. Of course he is a boy who blows up over everything, but it seemed so odd he should leave his own dance. I think something he saw 
as he looked out of the windows set him off."

Her guess had been a shrewd one, for the thought 
was the same that Bartley had expressed. But her 
words called for no answer; she realized this, for she 
hesitated a second. When she spoke there was a slight 
tremble in her voice.

"You don’t think Harold’s leaving the house had 
anything to do with the murder of Mr. Van Dike?"

I was startled by the question; but in a second came the realization that by this time the island must be
seething with the news of the lawyer's death. How much the young police chief had given out, I did not know. It was my impression Bartley had suggested that many of the details be kept back, and I wondered how much this girl knew.

"I heard at breakfast," came her comment, "Mr. Van Dike was dead. That caused me to wonder if Harold's going out as he did, had anything to do with it—"

She paused, reaching into the pocket of the yellow jersey. From a crumpled package, she drew forth a sadly crushed cigarett. Finding a match in the other pocket, she lighted it, blowing out a thread of smoke. Then she turned, her face rather tense:

"I know Harold pretty well. He is always getting excited over things; one day he thinks the new girl he met the night before is just the finest thing on earth. The next week he has found another. It is the same with pictures and books."

She gave a vigorous puff on the cigarette, then with a sudden gesture threw it far outside the boat. Her hands came down with a blow upon the silk-covered knee.

"But I am sure of this. Harold never in his wildest moment could kill anyone. But he did hate Van Dike."

We had reached the entrance to the bay. In a moment we were swinging into water which lay as calm as the surface of a silver plate. Ahead, the Point rose from the water's edge. I could see the long roof of the hotel, its four towers standing high above everything else. The wharfs at the bay front were ap-
proaching closer every second. For a moment I fixed my course, then turned to the girl:

"Why did he hate him?" I ventured.

She made a little gesture with one hand—a gesture which expressed a great deal.

"I cannot tell. Like everyone on the island, I knew Van Dike—a horrible sort of a man, though I have heard he was a great lawyer. He pulled off some wild parties at his house this summer."

Again came the expressive gesture of her hand, and it was followed by a grimace of distaste.

"I am modern enough, takr a great deal to shock me. But I suppose, like a good many other girls of my sort, I hate anything cheap and common. Van Dike's parties were all that. Though he had plenty of money, he was about as coarse a man as I have ever seen."

"But," I retorted, "that does not explain why Harold Nash hated him."

"I know it doesn't. But he did—a violent hatred—and there must have been some reason; what it was, I do not know."

She was silent a second, then pounded her knee with a closed fist.

"But I am going to help you find out."

There was no chance to reply. We were very close to the boathouses. A number of small, unpainted wharfs jutted out in the still waters of the bay. A few hundred yards from the shore, the inlet was filled with small boats. Motor boats rose and fell in a lazy fashion with the tide. Several large catboats tugged at their anchors, their white sails out drying in the warna
sunshine. A few canoes, paddled by young boys, were creeping along the curving water front.

Seeing a vacant wharf, I slowed down the speed to allow the boat to drift alongside the weather-stained timbers. It was the work of a second to fasten the rope. When a decidedly old gentleman came drifting out of the little house at the end of the pier, it was easy to persuade him to keep an eye on the boat.

The girl had needed no assistance. With an easy spring she was by my side. For a second I wondered what to do with her. My wrist watch showed it was after twelve. I knew it was doubtful if I would find Clark in his place at that hour. But when lunch was over, the patrons would be starting play for the afternoon.

Beyond the wharf was the white concrete of the street. A narrow lane ran up over a little hill; at the top I could glimpse the outline of the large hotel. And the sight suggested lunch before questioning the gambler.

The girl accepted the invitation, though she laughed as she informed me that a lunch had not been the reason for her self-invited trip. But the idea was agreeable. So we strolled past the small stores, up the winding lane to come out on top of the hill. A moment later we were entering the dining room of the hotel.

The waiter placed us by a window. By turning my head I could see the wide expanse of the sea. Its surface was a rich blue, calm and motionless. For miles the shore ran in a slightly curving line, only to lose itself as it jutted away in the distance. A yacht only
a few hundred yards from shore lay motionless, its white sails unrippled by any breeze.

Across from me, the close-cropped head was bending over a menu. A proud head, its black hair cut close like a boy's. As I looked at her, I remembered a line from one of her father's plays: "When a woman has both beauty and intelligence, she is the greatest gift of the Gods." His daughter had both.

We lingered over the lunch. The orchestra was playing in the corner of the great dining room; playing a selection of semi-classical music. For the time being we put aside all thoughts of the oil man's son, and talked of many things.

It was almost two when I left the girl and went down the huge veranda. Curled up in a chair, she was to wait until my errand was over. There must have been curiosity as to where I was going; but if there was, she showed no signs of it.

Clark's resort, the Elm Tree Cottage, was about ten minutes' walk from the hotel. The road wove its way past expensive cottages set far back from the highway, many of them hidden by the high hedges which enclosed the lawns. At the intersecting streets I could look down to the sea, peaceful in the afternoon sun.

Why Clark called his place the Elm Tree Cottage, I did not know. There was not a single elm tree at the Point. The house stood upon a slight hill, the dark brown shingles covered with ivy. Rosebushes climbed over the stone wall which enclosed the grounds and a pebbled drive went winding up to the front door.

As I walked up the drive, I remembered that the
house had once been the home of an artist. At his death Clark had bought the place, and it was famous all over the country. How he managed to secure protection had always been a mystery. Perhaps it was due to the fact that the only patrons of his place were those who could well afford to lose. Whatever the reason, it was one of the famous gambling houses of the East.

Beyond the iron bars were four steps ending at a silent door. Finding the door, I pushed the button; then waited for someone to answer. Glancing at the large windows on each side of me, I noticed the curtains were closely drawn. But I could see a faint track of light at the nearest window.

The door at the head of the steps opened after a while and a solemn-looking coloured man came majestically down the stairway. He made not the slightest attempt to throw open the iron grill, but instead gave an inquiring look. Taking one of Bartley's cards from my pocket, I scribbled my name below and asked him to give it to Mr. Clark.

He took the card which I had pushed through the grill work, studied it a moment, then swung the grating aside. With a slight bow he motioned for me to follow. After the grill had again fallen into place, he went up the steps, and I followed him through the heavy door. Remarking that he would take the card to Mr. Clark, he left me standing in a wide hall.

It was a big hall, the furnishings luxurious yet simple. At the farther end, two glass doors allowed one to glance into another room—a room from which came the sound of conversation, and which I entered
as I followed the direction the door man had taken—a room in which perhaps twenty men were playing roulette.

Not even the dealer behind the big double roulette wheel, which stood by the wall, raised his head when I entered. It was the main gaming room. Beside the wheel then in play, there were two others, one in the centre, the other against the opposite wall. Several tables, evidently for card games, had covers over their surfaces. It was easy to see that the play was not heavy.

The man who had taken my card had disappeared through a door directly opposite me. I glanced around the room, studying for a moment the fine marine views upon the wall. I remembered that somewhere I had heard Clark enjoyed painting. And the room was still. Only the little click of the rolling ball, and once in a while a short word from some player, broke the silence. It seemed far more like a church than the public room of a gambling house.

The solemn-looking coloured man suddenly appeared by my side, motioning that I follow. Across the polished floor, over the beautiful rugs he went, I after him. We passed through the door I had observed, then up a little winding stairway. At the front of the house he paused, knocking on a closed door. When the knock was answered, he opened it for me to enter, closing the door when I stepped into the room.

It was a large room in the front of the house. Upon the walls were many photographs—pictures of well-known actors and others well known to the public.
Most of the photographs were signed, and several bore names that were world famous. The furniture, though costly, was plain. But I spent no time looking at the fittings. My eyes came at once to the man sitting behind the desk.

He arose when I looked at him—a tall man dressed in a grey suit of wonderful texture. The tie he wore might have suited a Bishop, but seemed out of place in the owner of the Elm Tree Cottage. His face was clean shaven, with a complexion as smooth and as pink as a child’s. Though he must have wondered why I wished to see him, yet the expression on his face did not change as his blue-grey eyes looked at me.

Our glances held for a moment, then his eyes dropped to the card I had sent in. Raising his head, he studied me, his face expressionless.

“You are not, of course, John Bartley,” came the low comment.

I assured him that I was not, then told him of my position with Bartley. As I spoke he motioned to a near-by chair and sank down in his. Then he waited for me to tell my errand, the blue-grey eyes upon my face.

After all, the only thing I wished to know was if Harold Nash had played in his house, and if he had lost much money. It was a wild goose chase I was on, no doubt, and the information, no matter what he replied, of little value: but I asked the question.

The smooth face of the gambler never changed. He listened carefully, made me describe the young man, then replied that to the best of his knowledge he had
never seen him 'n the place. As our eyes met he as-
sured me he kep a careful watch upon everyone who
came into the cottage. And he was certain the young
man had never been in his place.

What he said was enough. Clark had the reputa-
tion of being a man whose word could always be de-
pended upon. He had said Harold Nash had never
been in his place. And if he was sure, and I knew he
was, that settled it. Whatever the young man had
been doing with the money he received from his father,
one thing was clear—he had not dropped it in Danny
Clark's.

I had secured my information, but something caused
me to hesitate. In the silence which came, I saw him
shoot a quick glance in my direction. I noticed the fine
diamond in his tie, smiled at the snow-white hair which
made him look like a saint. But for some reason I
made no effort to leave.

Then came his low voice:

"I am sure, Mr. Pelt, he has not been here. Do
you care to tell me why you wished the informa-
tion?"

I did some quick thinking. After all the real reason
could not be told. But I thought of what his father
had said the night before—that he was afraid the
twenty-dollar bills, the five which were counterfeit,
might get the boy into trouble. It was good enough for
an excuse and I used it.

"His father gave him a rather large amount of
money a few days ago. He discovered later there were
five counterfeit bills in the pile. Harold is away and
we are trying to trace the money."
Clark studied his fingers carefully for a moment. He turned around in his chair to glance through the open window. Far in the distance, a steamer was going in the direction of New York. For a while he studied it as if it were a new sight. Then came his voice:

"What were the denominations of those bills?"

"Five twenty-dollar bills," was my reply.

Slowly he turned in his chair. Then rising to his feet, he went over to the big safe which stood against the wall. Fumbling with the lock, he got the combination and flung the door open. His white hand busied itself with something within the safe. Then as he straightened, I saw that he had a long envelope in his hand—an envelope which he took over to the desk.

The long fingers reached within the envelope and came out with something. For a second I did not see what it was. Then I observed some money—bills whose backs were yellow and which had a piece of paper pinned to them. For a moment Clark studied them; then he looked at me.

"I had five twenty-dollar bills handed in the other night. They were counterfeit—the entire five. As the man who played with me is well known, we put them in the safe. He will make them good. Don't suppose, however, the name on the paper will be worth anything."

"From whom did you get the bills?" was my question.

His grave face studied me for a second. Then came in low, even tones, the words:

"It won't mean anything, but you know the man."
"Who was it?" I retorted.
He studied a photograph on the wall for a second.
Then without turning said:
"Van Dike. Robert Van Dike, the lawyer."
CHAPTER VI

As the name of the lawyer fell from Clark's lips, I gave a start of surprise. It had been my opinion, when Bartley suggested the trip to the Point, that it was an absurd wild-goose chase. I did not expect I would hear Harold Nash had ever been in the famous gambling resort. He had not been. But I had not expected the remark which Danny Clark had just made.

Across the desk from me sat the white-haired man, turning the long yellow-backed money over and over in his hand. His calm face was without expression, his body motionless. In the silence which fell, he raised his eyes to glance at my face. Something he saw in it caused him to volunteer:

"You must know V:n Dike. It's a funny thing he got stuck with that money. When I see him again I will, of course, show him the five counterfeit bills and then destroy them."

I made a short vague retort.

"You will never see him again, Clark."

The blue-grey eyes pierced into mine. I saw one eyebrow lift a little.

"No?" was his comment.

I shook my head.

"He is dead."

For the first time an expression of interest crossed the calm face.
"I have not seen anything in the papers about his death."

I shook my head. For a second there was a vague wonder as to just how much I should tell the man across from me. But I knew that in a few hours the papers would be filled with the story of the murder. Besides, Clark was decidedly close mouthed—a man who had thousands of secrets locked within his brain. So I spoke:

"There is nothing in the papers yet. He was murdered last night."

His expression did not change, though the keen eyes studied me for a moment. Placing the money on the desk, he leaned back in his chair. I could tell he was waiting for details.

In a few words I told him of our discovery of the murdered lawyer. It was about all I did tell him, though I mentioned that there was no suspicion as to who had killed him. Of Harold Nash, I did not say a word.

He listened, and though he appeared unconcerned, yet I could see he was keenly interested. When I had ended, his long fingers reached for a box of cigars which he took from a drawer in the desk. Pushing it over to me, he waited for my choice, then slowly lighted a long panetela. For a second he watched the smoke as it drifted away, then spoke:

"I take it, Mr. Pelt, John Bartley is in on this thing. I have seen a good deal of Van Dike. He has played here many times. Between ourselves, though he was a famous lawyer, I never liked the man. There are scores of people who will be glad he is dead—per-
haps scores who might have killed him. But as for
giving you any information, it can't be done—cannot
be done because I have none to give you."

The keen eyes glanced at the money which was upon
the desk. With a gesture his hand swept the five bills
back into the long envelope. He rose to his feet.

"I had intended giving Van Dike a sight of this
hundred dollars. He would have made it good; then
I would have destroyed these five bills. But I guess
now they belong to you. There may be something
about them to be discovered later. Anyway, John
Bartley will want them, so they are yours."

I rose to take the envelope from his outstretched
hand. A minute later, I followed him down the wind-
ing stairs and out into the large gaming room. It
was filling up, and another roulette table had been
put in play. Besides the many men crowded around
the tables, a few women had come in. And it was the
women who gave me a curious glance as I followed
Clark through the room.

He even went down the steps as far as the iron grill.
We shook hands as we said good-bye and a few words
passed. Then I turned to go down the curving walk
and out to the street. In a sense the visit had only
added to my perplexity. If the counterfeit bills were
those which had been taken by Harold, then we had
another problem to face. How had they fallen into
Van Dike's hands?

Past the cottages I walked on my way back to the
hotel. The street was filled with cars, expensive cars
carrying the summer people to the near-by golf
courses. The resort had come to life, and now that
lunch was over, people were starting to go out for the afternoon.

I found the girl curled up in a big chair in a corner of the hotel veranda. Two old ladies engaged in a sketchy conversation stopped talking long enough to throw a gossipy glance over me as I passed by. From somewhere within the hotel, there came the sound of an orchestra playing in a half-spirited fashion.

As I stopped by the chair, I knew she had not sensed my approach. The black head was bent over a piece of paper and she was writing rather slowly with a stubby pencil—writing a line or so only to scratch it out the next second. Whatever the task she was engaged upon might mean, I did not know, but at least to her it was important. She would write a line, then study it with grave deliberation. Then would come the scratching out of what had been written.

Suddenly sensing my presence, she raised her head. With a little exclamation, the paper was thrust into the pocket of the yellow jersey. She rose to her feet. Though she must have wondered where I had been for the last hour, there was no curiosity in her greeting.

We left the hotel and wandered down the hill to the wharf. The old watchman came slowly out of his little house to greet us. Tipping him, we climbed into the boat and took our seats. The engine came to life the very second the power was turned on. A moment later we were headed out in the bay.

Dodging the many boats, I increased the speed until
the engine had settled down to a steady roar. Ahead there loomed the long line of the breakwaters which formed the entrance to the bay. Beyond them could be seen the white steeple of a church, and the long low line of the roofs of the town where we had waited for the boat to the island.

For some reason the girl did not wish to talk. There was a pensive look upon the beautiful face, and a little frown crept at times over her brow. What might she be thinking about, I wondered. There was no doubt she was puzzled over something.

We sped down the long narrow channel between two rows of granite blocks which formed the breakwater, to rise on the first swell of the open sea. Far ahead lay the long line of the island, its sand bluff standing high and clear in the bright sunshine. In the centre of the channel, the lighthouse stood, a silent, lonely tower of whiteness.

It was a wonderful afternoon. The sun was bright, the air soft and warm. The water was a vivid green, its surface unbroken by the slightest ripple. Overhead was a soft blue sky with a few snow-white clouds. Far away, motionless upon the calm surface of the water, lay a ship, its sails a dingy grey in the sunlight.

Slowly I threw on more power. Like a leaping greyhound, the boat gave a little shake, then steadied itself. From the prow a dashing torrent of spray was being flung aside, spray which scintillated and danced in the sunlight. The speed made the air a rushing breeze which swept across our faces.

I stole a glance at the silent girl by my side. Seeing she did not care to speak I began to wonder just what
might be in the story Clark had told me. In my pocket was a long envelope. It contained the five counterfeit bills which the gambler had received from Van Dike. But what did they mean?

There was little doubt in my mind that they would turn out to be the same five twenty-dollar bills which the bank had expected to destroy, the counterfeits which Harold Nash had taken from his father’s safe. But how had Van Dike secured them? That was the question.

For a time I tried to puzzle this out, only to give it up as a bad task after a while. If the five bills in my pocket were the same that the young man had taken, it would be easy to prove. The bank would have a description of them and, no doubt, the numbers. But it was an odd thing.

There came the voice of the girl, low and clear. In her tone was a convincing earnestness:

"Mr. Pelt, while you were away, I spent my time thinking. Trying to puzzle out if I knew any reason why Harold should have hated Mr. Van Dike so. And I came to one conclusion—"

She hesitated I glanced at the serious face. Catching my look, she smiled.

"So far as I know, Harold has spent all his time this summer on the island. I believe that someone, who it is I do not know, told him something about the lawyer—something which made him very angry. I am going to try and think out to-night everybody Harold had anything to do with in the past few weeks. It must be a person I know."

"You have no idea now?"
There came a shake of the close-cropped head.

"No. But I am pretty sure it is be a woman. If it were a man, Harold would figure out he could take care of himself. He would not be apt to become angry over a story some man told him. It must be some woman he knew; and by to-morrow morning, perhaps, I will have decided who it was. Anyway, I am going to help Mr. Bartley and yourself."

The reasoning was good. That the young man himself could have had any personal trouble with Van Dike appeared absurd to me. It might be another person's trouble. Yet what the girl had said seemed reasonable. A man—the average man—would have kept his troubles to himself, but a woman pouring out the story of a fancied wrong might stir the impressionable youth to a wild frenzy.

There came to my mind a picture. Again I could see the ghostly figure scurrying off the road to blend with the blackness of the fields. Both Bartley and myself had thought it was a woman, though we were not certain. A figure, no doubt, frightened by the thought that our bright headlights might reveal its face.

Though I thought of this, I said nothing to the girl. Her idea appeared to have value. There was a possibility she might remember someone in whom the oil man's son had shown unusual interest. If she did, the already mysterious affair might become even more of a problem.

The long, narrow point of the island lay just ahead of us. Under the bright sunlight, the sandy shore loomed very near. I swung the boat around in a half circle, skirted the point; then headed down to the
breakwater. Far ahead I could see the houses of the summer colony.

As the boat roared through the water, I watched the coast line. Until we reached the breakwater, there was not a house in sight. The land rose a little from a sandy shore—land that was a tangled surface of small trees and bushes. As I looked at it, I remembered that years ago this half of the island had been used for a game preserve. It was a lonesome sight. For at least three miles the land stretched away without a sign of a house. The trees and bushes were green, but the tall grass had been burnt brown by the sun.

The breakwater was looming up in front of us. Soon we turned to run toward the boathouse. The large white house of Nash could be seen back of the tall hedge. I saw a figure coming down to the wharf, a figure which even though far away, I recognized as Bartley. And running far ahead of him, a jumping streak of brown was the dog.

I slipped through the curving shelter of the breakwater, drifting slowly into the slip of the boathouse. Securing the motor boat, I helped the girl to the floor. Just as she stepped upon the boards, the dog came hurtling through the open door with a noisy bark. The next instant Bartley stepped into the shadow of the door.

He nodded as he saw me, smiling a little when he glimpsed my companion. I introduced them at once, and for several moments they talked. Then, saying that she would have to go, there came a wave of her hand, and she ran out of sight. As she disappeared
through the hedge, Bartley turned with an inquiring look in his eyes.

As we walked toward the house, I told of my visit to Clark's and what I had discovered. He took the envelope containing the five counterfeit bills, and placed it in the pocket of his grey suit. Whatever he thought about it, he did not say. Instead he asked if I had eaten lunch. When I nodded, he said, we were going out at once in the car.

The coupé was parked in front of the house. There was no one upon the wide veranda, and apparently the house was deserted. The dog insisted upon going with us. Pushing him up on the ledge behind the seats, we climbed in. Bartley took the wheel, saying it was time I had a rest.

As we drove out of the yard, he told me we were going to the spot where we had first seen Van Dike's car. The police chief, at his request, had kept back the information as to where Van Dike's body had been found. It would not be given out until the inquest, which was to be held in the morning. When I heard that this was Bartley's own request, I knew there was a reason for it.

He had seen the police chief for a few moments around noon, but the man had nothing new to tell. The fingerprint expert had arrived on the morning boat. The result of his investigations would not be known until late in the afternoon. And I was told that after dinner we were to drive to the village for a conference with the chief.

We had driven slowly down the wide road. On each side were the houses of the summer people, rather
elaborate houses set far back from the street. Houses of every shape and of many different styles of architecture. The wide green lawns, glimpses of which we could see through the wide driveways, were filled with flower gardens. The afternoon air was heavy with the scent of the roses which climbed over every veranda.

The car turned off the smooth main highway, to go bumping over the rough country road we had been on the night before. The last estate was left behind, and low fields spread away in the distance. In a few moments we topped a little hill, to see before us the clump of trees near which the coupé had been parked.

They stopped a little off the road. In front of us were the trees, more in number than I had remembered. A road ran off to our right, the narrow road we had slipped over the previous night. To our left was its continuance, though I judged it was not very much used. It was simply two narrow tracks which rambled away through the fields.

Walking over near the edge of the bluff, we had no trouble in finding where the car had stood. The ground was a sodden mass of mud, with tracks running away in all directions. For a moment I studied them, trying to picture what had happened. Then, seeing that Bartley had taken several large pieces of paper from his pocket and was studying them, I walked over to the edge of the bluff.

From the top one could look far out over the Sound. It lay, a calm blue surface, below my feet. In the distance could be seen the projection of the Point, the roofs of the houses and the three odd steeples of
the hotel. The lighthouse seemed very close at hand, a white tower in the midst of an expanse of water. Then I glanced downward.

A hundred feet below lay the shore—a sandy shore, deserted save for a few sea gulls close to the water's edge. The bluff sloped away in a descending curve, a sandy bluff which I judged one could scale without much difficulty. One thing was certain—it was a lonely place on a dark rainy night.

A word from Bartley brought me back to his side. He held in his hand a large piece of paper. As I looked at it, I saw it was covered with a design.

"This is the tread mark of the tyres which were upon Van Dike's car," he said. "They were new tyres with a diamond-shaped tread. You can faintly make them out at your feet."

I studied the drawing for a moment, then glanced where he pointed. Faintly, I could make out the same marking in the muddy ground. But when I turned, I could see the tracks, a clear design in the dirt, running away to the road.

There came Bartley's voice: "I cannot conceive of any person who went to the trouble to drive across the island for a rendezvous, having it in this particular spot. The road we took from the summer colony, is not the main road, of course. Yet I am told it is used by many people as a short cut to the boat landing. If so, there would be a fair chance of someone coming along and observing Van Dike's car."

"But if it were headed toward the bluff, no one in a passing machine could have told who was in it," was my retort.
“But they would have known the car. If Van Dike had an appointment with someone last evening, an appointment on this side of the island, he wanted secrecy. If so, it is doubtful that he would have parked his car here. That is why I wonder if he was killed on this spot.”

Bartley must have sensed my thought, for he began to carefully search the ground. Thirty minutes later, it was evident there was nothing to be found. I had discovered the place where I had fallen, but that was all. Footprints were many, but they were our own crossing and recrossing, and of no value.

When every inch of the ground had been examined, Bartley gave a slight shrug of his shoulders. Going over to our car he opened the door, allowing the eager dog to jump out. I watched him study the road which ran ahead in the distance, then saw him hurry a few feet up its length, hurry until he dropped on one knee.

The road at its best was a sad apology for a highway. Simply two deep tracks which ran through the fields. When I hastened to his side to glance where he was looking, I saw something—the same diamond-marked design which he had told me had been the tread on Van Dike’s tyres.

It is true they were blurred a little—blurred as if a lighter machine had passed over them—but at the bottom of the rut could be observed the diamond, repeated again and again. There was no doubt the car had passed over this road, and it must have been within the last few hours.

I said as much, to have Bartley agree. Then as he
straightened upright, he said we would try and follow the design. Follow it at least until it was lost. And because it might be difficult to do so with the car, we would walk.

We had no trouble in picking out the marks of the tyres. For over a mile we walked slowly along. The road became even worse, the rut deeper. It was easy to see a car could travel that way only by getting in each rut, and staying there. To turn out would have been impossible. And always at the bottom of each rut was the diamond-shaped design.

For a while the road had been very close to the edge of the bluff. But after we had walked perhaps half a mile, it began to strike inland to ramble in a crazy manner through the fields—fields covered with small bushes, where the high yellow grass swayed in the slight breeze. And the farther we went, the more I wondered where the road might end.

This I did not discover—at least not then. Suddenly the tracks whirled around on themselves, and started to go back toward the shore. There was even a little rise which, when we had gone over it, allowed a sight of the sea. And perhaps a quarter of a mile from us was a barn.

At least when I first saw it, I thought it was a barn. When we approached closer, I was not so sure. It was a much broken-down building; the roof had partly fallen away, and there were many gaps in the rough, weather-beaten sides. Just what the building might have once been used for, and why it was standing alone in the fields, was a problem. But when we came opposite it, we saw something
For the first time there was a place where a car might have climbed out of the ruts, and wandered off over the fields. The ground facing the broken-down building was rough, but it was fairly clear. The grass was by no means as high as in the fields, and a car could have driven to the very side of the building. The moment I decided this, I judged a car had been driven there.

Not only was the grass matted down as if a car had driven across it, but the tyre tracks in the two muddy ruts had ended. We walked on a few feet farther, but with no results. The marks of the tyres stopped at the place where a car must have been driven on to the grass; of that there was no doubt.

The building stood several hundred yards from the bluff. As we came in its shadow, it was clear to see that it needed but a strong wind to cause it to tumble to the ground. It leaned in an odd fashion toward the road. Once there had been a great door, but now its place was taken by a yawning gap of semi-darkness. The roof had disappeared in spots, and the black beams were revealed by the sunlight.

A careful examination showed signs that a car had driven close to the building. But that was about all we were able to decide. The ground was covered with rough grass, and tyre marks would not show. Only the matted condition of the grass, and a few black spots where oil had dripped, told us that a car had been there before. But that was all.

As we stood silently glancing at the weather-stained boards, I noticed a dark shadow within the building. What it was I could not tell; but I hurried to the place
where the door had been, and stepped within. There on the dirt floor stood a car. When I saw it, I called out to Bartley.

It was not an expensive car; in fact, one of cheap and well-known make. It stood in the centre of the floor, and I could see that my first impression had been correct. The building had been used for a barn at some time; a few vacant stalls showed that. It was not a large car; the small roadster standing in the centre of the dirt floor had not cost much money. But this was not what I was thinking. My only thought was that it appeared an odd place to find a car. True, it was an easy matter to drive through the place where the car had been; but why leave a car there?

I might have voiced this thought if Bartley had not gone over to the machine and looked over its side. Evidently he saw nothing of interest for in a second he went to the rear, and taking a memorandum book from his pocket, jotted down the number. The book replaced, he lighted a cigarette as he thoughtfully studied the machine.

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

"I think it belongs to Harold Nash. That is not what is bothering me, however. I am wondering how the car got here."

"Why, he drove it—hid it in this deserted building."

He made a gesture of impatience.

"Of course, Pelt, no doubt he did, but when? We have just followed the tracks made by the tyres of Van Dike's car. We know he was here. In fact, it is my opinion his rendezvous was here. It has all the things he would require. It is lonely and not apt to be a
place where he would be seen. But did Harold Nash get here after Van Dike was killed, or before?"

"Maybe he was the person Van Dike was going to meet?"

He shook his head in dissent.

"Hardly. We are told Harold was excited when he came away from the window in the dance room. Now if he had an appointment with Van Dike, he would not have been excited when he saw the man driving out of his yard."

The thought seemed reasonable. One would hardly expect an individual to become excited over seeing a man driving to an appointment about which he already knew. But as I gave a sober look at the car, I realized I wished the machine could speak. If it could, we might discover why it had been hidden in the broken-down barn. For there was no doubt in my mind—the machine was hidden.

There came Bartley’s voice.

"I did not tell you, Pelt, that one of the boats is missing from Mr. Nash’s boathouse. It is not much of a boat—a small flat-bottomed rowboat. The outside motor is missing also."

I gave him a quick look, and as if reading my thought, he continued:

"It is very doubtful if one would try to reach the mainland in the missing rowboat. It is very small, and they say, leaky. But it is gone, and it disappeared during the night."

"And the young man—" was my venture.

He shook his head.

"So far as I know, he has not been seen by anyone.
MURDER IN THE DARK

But I am pretty sure this is his car. What it is doing here, I cannot say. Only I have the idea—"

But whatever was the idea, I did not discover. Instead there came a thoughtful shake of his head as he walked over to the side of the building. It was only an apology for a side; half the boards were missing; some rotted by the wind and rain were lying outside on the grass. Only the strong beams prevented the whole building from tumbling down in ruins.

I watched him pause and look out at the grass, then saw his gaze turn to the dirt floor. As if searching for something, he walked along the side of the building, his eyes always upon the floor. Halfway down its length, he paused; suddenly raised his head to dart a swift glance outside. In front of him was the only place on that side of the building where more than one board was in place. And on each side of the three planks was a great open gap—a gap through which one could look out over the fields.

He called my name, motioning for me to come to his side. Before I reached where he was standing, there came his voice:

"Pelt, if one knew that Van Dike was to meet someone outside this building, there is a natural thing he might do. That is if interested. He could hide in the interior of this barn and wait. It would be dark, very dark; and someone has been here. Look!"

He pointed in front of him. The dirt floor was almost black—black with the rubbish of countless years—but the surface was almost solid. As he pointed, I could make out a faint impression; not footprints, for the ground was too hard for those, but a place
where it appeared someone had moved his feet—moved his feet back and forth as he waited in the darkness. I looked until I could almost picture in my mind the silent figure, and was just about to speak.

But Bartley gave me no opportunity to voice my thoughts.

"There is a flaw in my idea that Harold may have been waiting in the barn—waiting while he looked out through these gaps. Van Dike drove away first, Harold some time after he did; and the lawyer should have reached here first."

He paused, and just as I was about to say something, he gave a little laugh.

"Anyway, Pelt, I am not going to bother my head with it all now. We know that Van Dike was here. I am sure that is the car which young Nash had. As for the rest, I want to talk it over with you later."

He turned and I followed him out of the building. The sunlight was a welcome warmth after the gloom of the barn. The dog appeared from some secret place, to go leaping ahead of us. A meadowlark a short distance away burst into song—a song which trilled and trembled for a moment, then suddenly ended.

We reached the rutted road. Walking upon the firmer ground of the field, we followed the winding tracks. For a while neither spoke. Then remembering what the girl had said regarding her trying to think with whom Harold had been spending his time during the summer, I mentioned it to Bartley.

He listened, his face grave, his lips silent. The grass swept across our knees as we walked along. For
a while I told him of the conversation I had held with the girl.' But what he thought about it, I did not know; he made no comment. But that did not bother me. Bartley was more apt to listen when I talked than comment upon what I said.

I had lapsed into silence myself when we first glimpsed our machine. When we reached it, Bartley opened the door for the Airedale to climb within. I followed the dog. Silently Bartley took his seat. I saw his foot go out for the starter, then it paused a he turned to me. There was an odd expression upon his face.

"I am beginning to have a theory, Pelt. That is, a theory for the motive of the crime. But there is only one trouble with my theory."

A rueful expression swept across his face. He shook his head as if not liking what was in his mind. Impatient, I spoke:

"Only what, John?"

He turned in his seat to give me a very quizzical look. There was a doubtful tone in his voice as he replied:

"Only, if my theory should prove to be correct—the odds are it would make Harold Nash out to be the murderer."
CHAPTER VII

It was later than we expected when we reached the house, and discovered that dinner was being served. For some reason, Mr. Nash had decided we were dining elsewhere, and had not waited for our return. The butler seemed a little shocked at our appearance, assuring us several times that had he only known we were returning, they would have waited.

There were only three people seated at the square table. At one end sat Nash, eating very little. I could tell from his expression that he was worried and anxious. As Bartley took his chair, the oil man shot one questioning glance in his direction. The kindly face grew very glum when he saw Bartley had no news to impart.

I had not met the daughter, but as I dropped into my chair, I was introduced to the blond-haired girl across the table from me; a good-looking girl whose face had the same kindly expression which so distinguished her father. A girl of nineteen, perhaps, who smiled a rather pathetic smile as we were introduced.

But the third person at the table was a man, whom I was surprised to discover was a distant relative of our host—the Professor. There was little doubt the thin-faced man, whose grey goatee bristled with importance, felt very sure of himself. He shot quick birdlike
glances at us both, though his eyes rested with naive curiosity upon Bartley's face. And he wanted to talk.

It was not a very cheerful meal. Over it hung the question regarding the oil man's son. Though his name was not mentioned by anyone, yet he was there; not in person but in spirit. And there was a feeling of suspense which could be felt more in the father and daughter than anyone else—suspense mingled with fear.

Once the Professor did his best to try and dispel the gloom. For a few moments his high thin voice commented upon both the weather and the calmness of the sea. The remarks were directed to no one in particular, and not one of us made any reply. Nash was not interested in the weather. One could see there was but one question in his mind. What had happened to his son? In the end the Professor gave up any idea he might have had of making conversation.

It was a little after seven when we finished dinner. As the chairs were pushed back, our host inquired of Bartley if we had yet seen the chief of police. The information that we were going at once to the village interested him, though it was plain to see he dreaded what we might discover.

The car had been left at the front of the house in the driveway. When we went out in the open air, twilight was falling. A semi-darkness was beginning to creep in from the sea. The wide lawn was filled with robins hopping carelessly to and fro. A slight breeze had sprung up, and its coolness brushed our faces. And it was still—a peaceful silence unbroken by even the sound of the sea.
It took us about fifteen minutes to reach the village. I drove very slowly, leaning back against the cushion with a decided feeling of contentment. The wide road twisted its way between high green hedges. Far back from the sidewalks could be seen white houses peering out through leafy trees. Driveways gave us glimpses of flower gardens, gay spots of colour in the midst of green lawns. Always and everywhere were to be seen roses—bursts of flame in the night air.

We came at last to the village. It was not much of a village, though the most permanent settlement of the island. The houses were no longer the large, costly affairs which we had been passing. Instead they were small, old buildings most of them sadly in need of paint—houses which had the appearance of having been there always.

In the centre of the little village was a square. The usual stretch of grass, with two small churches and a rambling town hall. The common was the playground for the children, and the grass had been worn away in many places. A few stores were on one side, flanked by two gas stations—stores, each with a small porch before its entrance, where men were sitting smoking in the cool of the evening.

We stopped before the brown town hall, a long building that badly needed repainting. The many windows were sadly in need of washing, and the steps had been worn thin by countless feet. At the side, nailed against the building, was a sign; a black sign on which in gold letters was spelled out the words "Police Station."

We left the car, to go down a little walk which ran
along the side of the building. There was a door which bore one word, "Police," and we pushed it open. The room we entered was large though it contained little furniture. There was a desk, three chairs and a telephone. Upon the wall were many calendars, but they were mostly old; several, in fact, went back for three years. But there was not a soul in the room.

For a moment we stood looking around. Bartley had taken a large square envelope with him when he left the car. I saw him glance around the room, then place the envelope under his arm. There was a quizzical smile upon his lips as he turned to me. Just as he was on the point of speaking, a door opposite us opened, and the tall figure of the police official came into the room.

He was indeed a tall young man. His thin figure was rather angular, and he had extra long arms. The vivid red hair was not only unbrushed but looked as if he had been running his hands through it. It stood a tangle mass, unkempt, uncombed.

The face which turned eagerly in our direction was a pleasant one. Burnt red by a life in the open air, it was a mass of freckles. It was a keen face, and though there was a decided rural air about the man, yet there was also something very likeable in his appearance. As I looked at him, I knew there was intelligence behind the mild blue eyes which looked at us.

At his invitation, we followed him through the door which closed after we had entered the other room. It was a much smaller room, with a small desk standing near the wall—a desk flanked by three chairs. The
air was blue with the smoke of cheap tobacco—tobacco having a heavy pungent smell. Seated in the chair near the window was the heavy, thick-set doctor we had met the night before.

He rose slowly to his feet as we entered, saying some sort of a greeting. He was decidedly a fat man; only a little over five feet in height, yet he must have weighed more than two hundred pounds. The blue suit he wore was a mass of wrinkles; and it is doubtful if it had ever really fitted. One needed but a glance at the awful green tie to know that clothes played no part in this physician’s life.

But I liked the man’s face; fat as it was, it was a kindly face with lines, showing that he was always smiling. And the dark eyes were keen and sharp—the keen eyes of an intelligent, professional man; a man who knew his work, and had become philosopher enough not to take life any too seriously.

We took the chairs the police chief pulled close to the table, and lighted our cigars. The young man dropped into his seat, and fumbled with a drawer of the desk. In the end, his hand came forth with a number of prints. I could see they were photographs, and from the whirling lines decided they were the developed pictures of fingerprints.

For a moment the chief’s eyes studied the prints up on the desk. There was a perplexed look upon his face, and the corner of his mouth was screwed up in a curious manner. Then he turned to Bartley; there came a little gesture of his hands.

“Here are the pictures made by the fingerprint expert. I don’t know if they will do us any good. He
went all over that car, found a few fingerprints, but whose do you think they turned out to be?"

"Van Dike's?"

"Yes. There were two on the gun, several on the steering wheel, one on the glass of the right door. But after he had taken the impression of Van Dike's fingers, he found the ones in the car were the same. That seems odd to me."

No one spoke for a minute. The chief half reached for the photographs to give them to Bartley. But with a little shake of his head, Bartley showed he did not wish to see them. I saw his eyes turn to the face of the coroner, and the doctor gave a little shrug of his fat shoulders as if saying it was beyond him. There came the voice of the chief.

"Seems queer to me, Mr. Bartley. If Van Dike did not commit suicide, one might expect that somewhere in the car would be some fingerprints not made by him. But there are none. It's one grand bust bringing that expert down from New York."

"I would not say that, Miner," was Bartley's comment. "At least you have discovered one thing worth knowing."

"What's that?"

"That whoever committed this crime was shrewd enough to leave no fingerprints. Either every place the murderer's hand touched was wiped clean, or else he was wearing gloves. And it is my idea it proves something else."

"What?" grunted the doctor.

"Almost all murders are crimes of the moment. I mean they are not premeditated. A sudden quarrel, a
fit of anger and the person discovers he has become a murderer. In all those cases, the motive is easily discovered—discovered because of the clues which are left behind. And so far in this crime there are no clues at all."

He paused for a moment. In the silence I saw a keen look flash across the doctor’s round face. For a moment he looked at the tip of his cigar; then came his rough voice:

"No clues? You think this was premeditated?"

Bartley nodded.

"The fact that you found no fingerprints in the car drives us to the conclusion that the murderer was shrewd enough not to leave any. And if so, then the odds are he or she, had planned the crime—planned it carefully with skill and wisdom."

The chief gave a half groan; then informed us that Bartley was right when he said there were no clues. There had been nothing discovered within the car which did not belong there. The pockets of the clothes had revealed nothing of value. So far as he knew there was not the slightest hint of a clue of any sort. And he voiced the sincere belief that until a clue was discovered, we would be all at sea.

Bartley listened to his complaint with a half smile upon his lips. Then when Miner finished speaking, he commented:

"We all have the opinion, Miner, that in every murder we must have some clue, as you put it, before we can solve the crime. That is correct, but not in the way you think. Scotland Yard, for instance, does not build up a theory about a crime from a clue alone.
They investigate hundreds of small things, throw out what they do not need, keep what is of value. It is like a puzzle. You fit together hundreds of little bits of wood before the design becomes clear. So with a crime of this type. It means the gathering together of many things before we can say who is the guilty party, or why it happened."

"But we do not have even a theory," was the retort.

"At present a theory is the last thing we wish," was Bartley's answer. "In too many cases the police start with a theory, and then try to fit every fact to it. We will have our theory of the crime after we have been able to arrange and discard certain facts which will come out. Just now we have no theory at all, that is one which we must make every fact fit into."

The doctor gave a little laugh, then assured us we knew one fact—that Van Dike was dead, and that he had been murdered. His autopsy that morning had convinced him it would have been impossible for the bullet to have taken the course it did if the man had committed suicide. He had been killed by the bullet from the gun clasped in his hand. It was murder, that he was sure of. But what the motive of the crime might be was the thing he would like to know.

Bartley was silent after the doctor had ceased speaking. But seeing we all expected him to say something, he spoke. He reminded us that Van Dike might have many enemies. A lawyer whose fingers had taken as much money as his had out of the underworld would have many people who might wish him dead. He told us of the man's reputation—that he was a great lawyer without a conscience, or any scruples as to how he made
his money. Then he added, he might have quarrelled with someone.

"He had a scrap about a week ago with a fisherman here," was the eager comment of the chief.

We turned to him.

"Ran over Jud Hart's dog. Hart said he could have avoided the accident, and that when he spoke about it, Van Dike laughed at him. Hart thought a mighty lot of his pup, and told the boys around the store he was going to beat Van Dike up."

"I have an idea he would have done it," was the drawling remark of the doctor. "But I don't think Hart would have ever committed a murder."

The young man ran his fingers through the tangled hair, regarding with his coroner. One of his constables was to bring Hart into his office, and he would discover what the man had been doing the night of the murder. But he had little idea the fisherman would know anything about the crime.

There came a silence again. I glanced around the dingy little room. The doctor had settled back in his chair, his lips a tense line. The chief, with a much perplexed expression on his face, was glancing at the photographs upon the desk. As I looked at him, I thought how hopeless it seemed. So far we knew nothing, not the slightest thing of value. And I wondered if we ever would know anything.

The chief moved uneasily in his chair. He lighted a long thin stogie; a stogie which gave out a villainous smell. For a moment he watched the smoke drift away to the open window. Then he turned to Bartley.

"I found out one thing which seems odd. Had a
man in here this afternoon who told me he saw Van Dike driving his machine just a few moments before nine."

"Where did you see him?"

He turned in his chair until he sat facing us.

"There is a road not much used, which runs away from the place we found the car. It's really a continuance of the one you came up from the ferry on. One of the fishermen says he was going up the road when Van Dike's car went past him. It was pretty dark and he did not see very much. But he says there were two people in the machine."

I saw Bartley's body tense as he leaned forward in the chair. His voice was eager:

"Which direction was the machine going?"

"Olds says he was about a quarter of a mile from an old barn which stands in the fields. The car passed him, going toward the place where we found it—was going fairly fast. Olds was up on the bank about fifteen feet from the road. Could not see very clearly, but recognized the car, and glimpsed two people. Said it was his impression Van Dike was not doing the driving, though he is not sure of that. It struck me as odd, for he says there were no headlights being used."

"He could not make out who was doing the driving?"

was Bartley's question.

The chief shook his head.

"No. Told me he was sure that two people were in the car. Whoever was at the wheel, he could not say. I asked him if it was a man or a woman, and he did not know. They were slumped down in the seat, and wife just a dark, indistinct mass. But he feels sure
Van Dike had someone in the car with him, and it's his idea the other person was doing the driving. And what under heavens that means, I don't know."

There came Bartley's quick voice:
"Miner, it means that Van Dike was already dead when your fisherman saw the car."

There burst an exclamation of startled surprise from both the doctor and the chief; surprise mingled with doubt. But Bartley gave them no time to speak. In few words he told of our visit to the broken-down building, of the tyre tracks in the rutted road, the marks where someone had stood within the barn. Then he reminded them that the point, the place where we had found the car, was the last place a shrewd person would have picked out for a rendezvous.

They listened eagerly enough, though I saw a doubtful look upon the face of the chief. The doctor's small keen eyes twinkled as if he were delighted. I knew he agreed with Bartley. As he half opened his lips to speak, Bartley bent forward in his chair to add:
"I have wondered ever since seeing that barn, why it was we discovered the body at the place we did. It was my idea Van Dike was killed outside that broken-down building. And if your fisherman is correct, then I am sure of one thing."

"What?" came the rapid voice of the chief.

"That when Olds, as you called him, saw the car, he was correct in his impression—there were two persons in it, and Van Dike was not driving. He was not driving—because he was dead."

The chief made a gesture of protest. There was a disbelieving tone in his voice.
"You ask me to believe that the murderer drove the car, with the body of his victim sitting upon the seat beside him?"

"That is just what I ask you to believe. It is what I have thought took place. My impression is that Van Dike had an appointment with someone—someone to whom secrecy was the desired thing. That being so, the meeting place was not where the body was found. I know that Van Dike's car had been by the side of that broken-down barn. I think he was killed there. The murderer then drove the car with the body upright on the seat, to the place where we found it."

"But why, why?" burst from the chief's lips.

"I do not know why, but we might picture what took place. The murderer took a risk in doing what he did. But he drove to the point, there he placed Van Dike back of the wheel, and moulded the still fingers around the revolver. It was intended, perhaps, that the body would be found the next morning, and of course that everyone would think it was suicide."

In the silence which came, I gave a start. Not a word had been said about the cheap car which was standing upon the dirt floor of the barn—Harold Nash's car. It connected him with the place where Bartley felt sure the murder had been committed. More than that to my mind; it connected him with the murder. As I gave an uneasy twist of my body, there came a little exclamation from the coroner. He flung his cigar to the floor.

"Mr. Bartley," he burst out, "the murderer made one funny mistake."

The eyes of the two men met for a second, Bartley's
keen and eager, the doctor's with a half-amused twinkle in them.

"He put that revolver in Van Dike's left hand—and the lawyer was right-handed."

There came a low whistle from Bartley's lips, and a sudden half smile crossed his face. He leaned forward to ask:

"Are you sure? That is a rather important fact."

The physician was sure, very sure. He remembered while he was making the autopsy that he had seen Van Dike playing golf, and that the man used his right hand. In itself this did not convince him, for there were many cases where men did one thing with one hand, and everything else with the other. But he had made several inquiries. The result had been the same in every case. Van Dike was right-handed; no one had ever seen him with his left hand. Then he commented:

"The murderer did not know that fact; he put the revolver in the wrong hand."

Bartley nodded his agreement, but he made no reply. There was a serious expression upon his face, as if he were trying to place this bit of information in its proper place. I could tell he thought it was of importance. Just why it was important I was not sure, but I could see Bartley thought it was.

No one had mentioned the name of Harold Nash, and I had wondered a little. Did the chief know the young man had disappeared? Did he know he had left his house after he had seen the lawyer's car drive away. And I wondered also why Bartley had not mentioned these facts. The very next moment he did.

When everything connected with the young man had
been told, we were sure of one thing. The chief, though he had heard a rumour that the boy had vanished, had not connected him with the crime. He knew the youth—knew and liked him. That could be told by the tone in his voice when he mentioned his name. But I could see he was shaken when we told of finding the car under the broken roof of the barn.

But in the end, I felt sure we were of one accord. None of us wanted to believe the oil man’s son knew anything about the murder. Yet there was an uncertainty even about our feeling. There was much he would have to explain—many things upon which a clear explanation would be demanded. But the doctor summed it up when he commented dryly that we would have to find him before any questions could be asked. And we let it end with that.

For a while we talked in a rather listless manner, aimlessly and without direction. The inquest would take place in the morning. None of us expected it would bring out anything we did not know already. True, the chief had several of Van Dike’s servants to place on the stand. It was an effort to discover whether they had any idea whom their master had driven forth to meet. But he did not expect they would know.

In fact, the inquest appeared to be simply a formality which must be gone through. We knew the man was dead, and felt rather sure we knew where he had been killed. Why he had been murdered, and by whom, we had not the slightest idea. What was more, there seemed little chance the inquest would add much to our knowledge.
As we decided this, Bartley reminded the chief that it was always well to keep an ear to the ground. The island was, after all, a small place. People were apt to talk; gossip would hang like a mist over every house. It might be something could be picked up by listening to what people were saying, by knowing what they were thinking.

And this idea caused the doctor to chuckle. In an earnest tone, he assured us the island could hold its place with any other spot in the world, when it came to gossip. Already people were talking, rumours and wild stories were on every lip. But he was surprised Bartley thought they might be worth taking seriously.

He was assured of one thing. In a small place like the island, some person might know a fact that would be of great importance. Van Dike's habits no doubt had caused talk. People must have observed him closely. It might even be they had an idea whom he was to see, the evening of his death. All stories were worth listening to.

He glanced at his watch and rose to his feet; I followed his example. For a moment he stood by the side of the desk, eyes upon the photographed fingerprints below him. For a while he studied them, then turned to the chief:

"You have the gun, of course?" was the question.

For a reply, the red-headed young man reached into a drawer of the desk. His hand fumbled for something, then came forth with an object, which he tossed upon the desk—a black automatic revolver.

"Do you mind my taking this to-night?" Bartley asked.
MURDER IN THE DARK

The chief had no objection, though he reminded us the gun would have to be used for evidence in the morning. Bartley slipped the sinister object into his pocket, and after a few words we went out of the room and to the open air. Both the chief and the coroner went out with us, and stood by the car as we took our seats.

It was a silent ride to the house. The wind had risen a little, the air was cooler. I could hear the faint murmur of the surf, and once there came floating in from the sea the deep whistle of a steamer. The cottages were cheerful objects in the darkness, their windows squares of light as we drove by. But even when we drove the car into Nash's garage, we did not speak.

When we entered the house, the sad-faced butler told us his master was in the library. We found our host behind his large desk, a book in his hand. It was clear it had been a difficult task to remain calm, and I doubted if the book had been read. As we entered, he raised his head as a questioning smile crossed his lips.

Bartley informed him we had no news, and I saw him reach into his coat pocket. When his hand came out, the revolver was in it. For several minutes he glanced at the gun, turning it over and over. Then he placed it on the edge of the desk, and started to walk over to the nearest chair.

Nash had given a start when he saw the revolver, and his eyes followed every movement of Bartley's hands. When the gun was placed on the desk, I saw the oil man study it for a moment. Then suddenly he gave a start, his hand reached out to grab the gun. For a
second he stared at it as if he could not believe his eyes. He cried out, his voice a broken, anxious thing:

"Where did you get this gun?"

The tone was so frightened that Bartley whirled around before he replied.

"From the chief of police," he said after a pause. "Why?"

For a moment Nash struggled to speak. His lips formed words—words which he seemed unable to utter. Then he cried:

"Why, it's Harold's. I know it, because when I bought it for him, there was a little piece chipped off the handle. It's Harold's—but what was the chief doing with it?"
CHAPTER VIII

The despairing anguish in the man's voice would have held our attention even if we had not been startled by what he said. Not only was the tone one of suppressed horror, but there was also fear—a hopeless dread which caused his voice to tremble into silence, as with both hands gripping the desk, he stood staring down at the black revolver which lay upon its rosewood surface.

Fascinated, unable to turn my eyes away, the black revolver on the desk held my gaze. There was but one thought in my mind. We had endeavoured to think it would have been impossible for Harold Nash to commit the murder. Friendship for his father no doubt had blinded our eyes to the evidence which had accumulated. But now—now with the discovery that the revolver with which the lawyer had been shot belonged to the young man, it was useless to blind ourselves to the truth.

Bartley's face did not change in expression, though for several minutes he studied the gun upon the rosewood desk. His eyes turned to his friend—to the elderly man who had dropped down in his chair, and whose world had been swept from under his feet. For a moment he studied the white head, the head bent down upon the trembling hands. His voice was tender as he spoke:

"Are you sure, Willard, that this gun belonged to Harold?"
Nash raised his head from his hands to give a hopeless glance at his friend. His voice shook a little as he replied:

"There is no doubt of it, John. Harold wanted a revolver, wished to do some target shooting on the shore. So I bought him the gun that is on the desk. At the time I got it, the salesman told me of the small piece which had been clipped out of the slide. You can see where it is if you look. I know it is his gun—"

The voice trailed away into silence. Then suddenly he burst out:

"Where did you find it?"

Bartley hesitated. I knew he did not care to say what must be told. In the second of silence, I saw Nash give one quick glance at his friend's face. What he saw caused him to slump back in his chair; caused his face to grow very white.

It was not a pleasant task Bartley had before him, but in a few brief words, he told that the gun had been found in the cold, still hands of the murdered lawyer; a statement which brought back the look of horror to our host's face, which caused his trembling hands to make a violent gesture of protest. Then before Bartley had finished speaking, the man burst out, as he rose to his feet with a leap:

"I don't care what you say or where you found that gun, I won't believe Harold killed him. I won't believe it!"

He was working himself into a frenzy. Up the length of the long library he would rush, only to hurry back again; his face worked convulsively. He tried to light a cigarette, but the trembling hands could not
carry the flame of the match to his lips. He might say he did not believe his son knew anything about the crime, but one thing was sure—he was afraid the boy did.

It was some time before Bartley could calm him down. Then it was only the assurance that when we knew everything about the death of Van Dike, it would become plain that Harold was not concerned. Not till then would our host sit again in his chair. He asked a hundred questions, but they were all of the same purport. He could not believe his son had done wrong.

Though Bartley managed to persuade him that he had no idea that Harold had done anything wrong, yet for myself I was very doubtful. There was no doubt Van Dike had been killed by the revolver which lay on the desk. It had been found in his left hand—and it belonged to Harold Nash. Not enough in itself, of course, to prove the young man guilty; but added to other things which we knew, it was a damaging bit of evidence.

And I wondered. Why had the youth disappeared? If he knew nothing about the murder, what explanation could he ever make for his absence? Why had he rushed out of the house when he saw Van Dike driving away? Why had he not returned? Above all, what had caused him to say that the lawyer ought to be killed? One thing I knew, Harold Nash would have a great many things to explain when he did return.

In the end, Nash recovered his composure, but he was a pitiful sight. The events of the last twenty-four hours had left him a broken old man. His big frame seemed to have become smaller, his hair whiter. And
he was nervous. Every little sound would cause him to start and throw an anxious glance at the closed door which led from the library.

'It was eleven when we went to our rooms. Though Bartley had done his best to persuade his friend to retire, Nash had insisted he could not sleep. He told us he would stay in the library and read. But I knew why he was staying up. He was hoping his son would return, and that everything would be explained.

Bartley was tired, and as soon as we entered our rooms, said he was going to bed. But sleep was the last thing I felt like doing. For some unknown reason, I was very much awake—awake with every nerve tense. To sleep, even if I had gone to bed, would have been impossible.

Going to my room, I put on a lounging robe, and then went over to the reading stand by the bed. It held ten books of several species of literature. It was an adventure story which I took over to the easy chair by the window—a story of a brave hero whose adventures, though impossible, yet contained a slight thrill. When I flung the book aside after almost two hours had passed, I decided it was time to retire.

I arose to my feet, and obeying an impulse went over to the bay window. Slipping inside the long silk curtains, I pressed my face against the copper screening and looked out into the night. Below me was the wide lawn, a place of mingled shadows and gloom. In the distance, the fields of the island stretched away into darkness.

It was a beautiful night. The air was not too warm, and there was a slight breeze. A faint moon rode high
in the sky, its light drifting over the sea. The ocean was a mass of shadows, silver interplaying with darkness. Far out on the water, almost where the sky and sea blended, was a light—a light slowly drifting away in the distance; some ships bound, perhaps, across the sea.

For a while I did not move. The night air swept my face. Only the almost unheard murmur of the surf broke the silence. Not only was it still, but there was a restfulness about it all which was pleasing. One might fancy one’s self alone in the world—alone with the sea and the stars for company.

After a while my glance dropped down to the lawn which stretched away from the house. It was a place of shadows mingled with deep splotches of darkness. Small shrubs cast eerie outlines of gloom, trees made pits of blackness. Playing between the shadows was the faint moonlight; moonlight soft and trembling.

As I gazed at the lawn, it seemed to lose its identity. Instead of being just a few hundred yards of grass broken by trees and small gardens, it became a mysterious vastness. As the trees moved in the slight breeze, the shadows swayed and trembled. The lawn appeared to have become suddenly a vast expanse of ground—ground which had become part of infinity.

For a while I gazed through the window. In reality I saw very little. Light and darkness had blended into weird moving shadows; shadows never the same in outline, and which took on odd and fantastic shapes. And then all at once, I drew back with a start from the window; drew back only for a second, then pressed my face closer against the screen.
At the end of the lawn was the hedge. In the darkness, it was a high black line without form or substance. But as I looked, I saw something moving along the side of the hedge—something which no doubt, was trying to keep in the shadow. A figure which slipped out of the shadows and moved for a second across a moonlit expanse of lawn—the hurrying, slinking figure of a man.

My first thought was that my eyes had deceived me. It was late, almost one o'clock—far too late for anyone to be out on the lawn. As I pressed my face against the screen, I saw the figure again; far down at the end of the lawn just where it reached the bank leading down to the shore, I caught a glimpse of a moving outline. A black outline figure of a man; a man hurrying down to the shore.

It was almost a miracle I had seen the figure at all. Trees and shrubs covered the lawn, but from my room I was able to look through a space where no trees broke the view, look down to the hedge which divided the lawn from the beginning of the shore. And across the faintly lighted line of vision the hurrying figure had passed—a moving outline hastening to reach the shore.

For several moments I stayed, my face glued against the screen. My eyes searched the night as if, by the intensity of the gaze, I could pick out what I wished to see. Beyond the hedge the sea lay a broken mass of trembling silver and darkness. The low roof of the boathouse was a dark shadow above the hedge. But though I gazed, hardly daring to breathe, I saw nothing.

Turning away from the window, I walked over by
the bed and stood silent. There was no doubt I had seen someone hastening across the lawn. I was sure the person was doing his best to avoid being seen. What it might mean, I could not tell. And then, as I wondered, I reached out for my coat which was on the bed and put it on.

In a second I had slipped out into the hall. Its length was a tunnel of semi-darkness, broken only by the faint light of a lamp on the floor below. Not a sound could be heard, and silence was over all. For a second I stood listening, then went softly to the head of the stairs and glanced down their length. Hearing nothing, I went down to the other floor.

At the foot of the stairs, I turned to give a look in the direction of the library. The door was partly open but the room was dark. Evidently Mr. Nash had retired. A hanging lamp overhead was turned on, and its faint light dispelled some of the gloom. Hesitating, I glanced around, then hurried to the door at the end of the passage.

It was locked—not only locked but the chain was in its place. Slipping the chain, I turned the key and softly opened the door. Holding it a few inches ajar, I pressed my ear to the opening and listened. Only the sound of the surf, a low, steady murmur, could be heard.

Slipping out on the wide piazza, I softly closed the door behind me. The lawn swept down to meet the hedge, and beyond it lay the shadow of the small boathouse. A pebbled walk led to an opening in the hedge—an opening which was simply a light shadow against the blackness. To my right and left lay the lawn,
broken by small gardens and many trees. But I saw nothing.

Going off the piazza, I purposely avoided the pebble walk. I was not very keen to be seen. I realized that after all, no matter who the person might be that I had seen from the window, I had little excuse in trying to follow him. Slipping into the dark grove of three white birch trees, I stood silent, then darted to the darker shadow cast by the hedge.

Following the hedge, I reached the place where the path ran down to the boathouse. In a second I was crouching against the small building. Almost ahead of me lay the breakwater, its dark length running out in the water. The waves slapped against the stone sides, the boats within the slip were creaking at their ropes.

Just why I had left the house was not clear in my mind. What I expected to discover, would have been hard to say. But as I stood stretched against the side of the boathouse, I realized that it would be very difficult to observe anything. By looking around the side of the building one could make out the sea. Its surface was fairly light, but there was nothing to be seen there. The beach itself was a mass of shadows—silent, unmoving shadows which revealed nothing.

But I was sure of one thing. From my window I had seen a figure slinking along the hedge—of that I was sure. It had gone in the direction of the shore. But when I thought of this, there came a problem which could not be solved. After reaching the shore, in what direction had the man gone?

To my right not more than ten feet away lay the
stone breakwater. It was a massive thing of granite blocks. As I glanced at its dark outline, it was to decide the man must have gone up the beach. The sandy shore curved away to my left; there was almost a quarter of a mile before it reached the other breakwater which with the one on my right formed the little harbour. No doubt the man had gone in that direction.

Straining my eyes, I could faintly make out the long line of the other breakwater. It was a dark, thin mass upon the surface of the water. I could follow the curve of the shore, but as the beach ran upward to a high bank, it became lost in the darkness. But though my glance was of piercing intensity, I saw nothing moving on the shore.

Hesitating as to what to do, at length I made up my mind. I left the shelter of the boathouse, scrambling up the bank to the shadow of the hedge. Following its length, I reached the place where it turned to run out to the road. Before me was a rough, unkempt field; a field of high grass and small shrubbery. Beyond it lay other fields.

I was on a bank. Five or six feet below was the shore. I could see the white sand, the foamy edge of the water. Along the side of the bank, the sea weed swayed in the slight breeze. Before me the field lost itself in the distance—a field dark and lonesome. I seemed to be alone in a silent world.

I half made up my mind to return to the house, only to decide to follow the edge of the bank for a little way. There was small chance anything would be discovered, but something drove me forward. At least I
would go as far as the other breakwater. Then I would give it up as a bad job and seek my bed.

The bank was not the easiest place upon which to walk. The soil was a mixture of coarse dirt and sand. The high wiry grass plucked at my feet, and several times I tripped and fell. Once a foot slipped over the edge of the bank and a trickle of sand were rumbling down to the shore.

As I went along, I realized that it would only be a very few moments before it would be very dark. The faint moon had almost vanished. It was already much darker than when I had left the house a few moments before. The night seemed to have become colder. Though the breeze was not increasing, for some reason the waves sounded louder.

I had almost reached the breakwater, when the ground suddenly began to sink away beneath my feet. I had come to a place where the sand extended inland for many yards; where the field had been carved away to form a cut. I had started to skirt this, when suddenly there came the protesting voice—of a woman.

So startling was the suddenness of the voice, that for a second I was too dazed to move. It had been a shrill raised protest. Though I could not make out the words, yet the tone spoke volumes. Ahead of me somewhere in the notch carved into the field was a woman—a woman frightened and protesting.

At the sound of the voice, I dropped on my knees. Straining my ears, I heard the murmur of voices ahead on the sand below. Slowly I crept forward, brushing the grass aside—grass whose sharp edges lashed my face. The voices grew louder as I edged nearer, until
in the end, pressed full length against the ground, I lay looking down at the sand. Looking down to where a man and a woman were engaged in a violent argument.

I was not able to distinguish them. The cut in the field was at least five feet below the level of the banks. It did not appear to be very wide, perhaps not more than ten feet across. The shadows were deep; the gloom intense. But after a moment, I was sure of one thing; I had made out the light dress of a woman—a woman standing close to a man; a man who was telling her in no uncertain tones, something she must do.

Just what was being said was impossible to hear. The man was doing most of the talking. Once in a while the woman's voice would break in—a protesting, frightened voice with a hopeless appeal in its tone. Then all at once I caught a full sentence, spoken by the rough voice of the man:

"You can take your choice. If they are ever discovered you are lost. No one will believe you. And if you do speak you will have to explain what you were doing the other night."

In the darkness I saw the fleeting shadow of a gesture which the woman made. How old she might be I did not know; but from her voice, it was my impression she was young. To the words I heard, she made a short complaint.

"But how do I know you have them?"

The man laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh, and I longed to hit him. I saw the motion as his hand went into a pocket; saw something white gleam as he shook
it before the woman. There came floating up to me
the words:
"There they are; when you come across, you can
have them."

As if startled, the woman did not move. Then I
saw her give a leap as she tried to snatch the white
thing from the man's hand. Saw him leap forward and
her hand clutch out. Then the man stepped back and
his arm swept around. I heard the sound of his hand
clapping against the woman's face as she gave a cry of
pain.

It was too much. I leaped to my feet to go half
scrambling, half falling down the bank. So sudden
was my appearance that both the man and the woman
did not understand what had happened, until with a
leap I came rushing over the sand. As I jumped for
the man, the woman gave one sudden, startled cry and
started to run toward the shore.

Even as my arms fell upon the man's coat, I realized
that he was young and strong. With a twist of his
body, he shook away my grasp and jumped forward.
I felt a solid fist go slashing against the side of my
shoulder; felt it, as with all my strength I struck back,
to feel my clenched hand go smashing against his jaw.

It was a solid blow, well aimed, well hit. It sent him
whirling backward, and should have sent him to the
ground. But he recovered, to leap in and enfold me in
his arms. I felt one hand reaching for my throat, felt
the other gripping into my shoulder as he tried to trip
me with his feet; but I struggled free.

Again he came rushing in. For several minutes we
spared at each other. Then again my right landed,
to be followed by a left. Once more his arms encircled me. For a space, we swayed back and forth, he reaching for my throat, I trying to throw him to the ground.

If anyone had seen us, it would have been an odd sight. There in the bottom of a narrow cut, our two dark figures struggled back and forth. Not a word was spoken, the only sound being our hurried breathing. Back and forth, up against one side of the bank and over to the other, we went, with neither one of us having the advantage.

We were equally matched in strength and height. My only desire was to get the man to the ground, then hold him fast until I had struck a match. Above everything else I wished to see his face, and I had determined I would see it.

For the seventh or eighth time I shook his grip aside and sprang backward. As he leaped at me, I jumped aside to let my fist go crashing against his jaw. It was the best blow I had struck, landing clean and full. For a second he tried to keep his balance, then went stumbling on the sand. As he fell I leaped forward.

Leaped forward, only to have my foot slip on the sliding sand, and cause me to lose my balance. Vainly I tried to catch myself, only to paw wildly at the air and go sprawling to the ground a few feet away from my opponent. As I fell, he struggled to his feet and ran out of the cut.

By the time I had scrambled upright, he had vanished. I knew it would be foolish to follow, though I did go to the edge of the field and look down the beach.
There came to my ears the sound of running footsteps—footsteps growing fainter in the distance. It would be no use to try and follow.

The woman had started to run when they had first glimpsed me coming over the sand; by now she must be far away. With a shrug of my shoulders, I walked back into the cut and struck a match. The sand was thrown into relief for a second; sand scuffed and disturbed by our struggling feet—and touching my shoe, grass clotted!

I had it in my hand almost at the second the match went out. It must have been dropped by either the man or the woman. No doubt it was part of the white thing I had seen in his hand, the thing the woman had tried to snatch from him. I decided not to try to read it until I had reached my room.

I went out of the cut and along the beach. My body ached a little, and my shoulder was sore where the man had dug his fingers into the flesh. What it had all been about I did not know. But I realized that if he had not struck the woman, there might have been a chance I would have discovered what they were talking about.

I slipped through the door into the hall, locking it after me. Softly I went up the steps, then down the passage to my room. Inside, I turned on the light; then going to the door mirror, I glanced at the reflection.

I was a sorry sight. My hair was filled with dirt and sand. The suit was a wrinkled nightmare; the collar had been torn half off, and the necktie was missing. There was a slight bruise over the right eye, but it was
rather faint. For a moment I thought what a sorry-looking object I was, then reached my hand into the pocket for the paper I had found.

It was a half page of a letter. The paper was of a heavy, expensive grade, the few lines written in a bold hand. Eagerly I read one side, then turned it over. And when the two pages had been read, I knew one thing.

It was half of a letter written by a woman to a man. A rather indiscreet letter, filled with endearing terms. There was a reference to some meeting place, a hint of other letters to come. It ended with a half expression that the writer "might love you," and was signed "Lura."

Dropping into a chair, I re-read the two pages several times. There was no doubt in my mind that there had been other letters in the white package I had seen in the man's hand. It was my opinion that this sheet had been snatched from his hand when the woman leaped forward; that it had fallen to the ground unseen.

Again I read the letter. There was nothing out of the way in it. But I could see that a woman might desire to get it back. There was a hint of little indiscretions. Nothing wrong, perhaps, but at least unwise. No doubt there were other letters in the package.

I realized that the desire to regain them must have been the thing which had caused the unseen woman to meet the man on the lonely beach. Her voice had been a cultured one, with a pleasing quality in its seriousness and dread. There was not a doubt in the world
that when the man had said, "There they are," he had referred to this letter and perhaps others.

For a while I puzzled my brain trying to picture what had taken place—of some cultured woman, driven to despair by the knowledge that indiscreet letters had come to light. Then I gave a start. Back of it all was a hint of blackmail. The woman had been tearful, pleading and frightened. There had been little sympathy in the man's voice.

I turned the sheet of paper over in my hand, and looked again at the signature. It was a bold hand, the ink black, the letters large and firm. But who "Lura" might be I did not know. I was still wondering when I climbed into bed a few moments later.
CHAPTER IX

It was the wind which roused me the next morning. It was howling in fury around the house. The long silk curtains at the windows, a bellowing, whipping mass of fabric, were being blown into the room. Rain was dashing in sheets upon the rug. The sea was a steady, pounding roar, an unceasing rumble of heavy waves breaking upon the beach below the house.

For a second I lay silent, then jumping from the bed, rushed over to close the window. The lawn looked very green, the grass glistening with rain. The trees and shrubbery were bending before the wind, swaying wildly back and forth. For a moment I looked out past the hedge, over to the wide expanse of fields; fields sodden with moisture. Then I turned to the sea.

Yesterday it had been a motionless expanse of glittering silver. Now it was a broken mass of white foam. Under the gusty wind, it lay a tumbling surface of white-topped waves, which rose as they neared the shore, to break in a far-flung shudder of spray. Over the water hung a dark low sky filled with black clouds—a sky which promised even more wind and rain as the day went on.

It was a dreary prospect; as I slowly dressed, I felt a little depressed. Before leaving the room, I placed in my pocket the letter I had found the night before. I was very keen to show it to Bartley, and have his
opinion as to what my adventure of the night could mean.

But when I reached the dining room, there was not a sign of Bartley. Again I had breakfast alone, a rather gloomy meal not made any more cheerful by the butler's face. If possible, it appeared to have grown longer in the last twenty-four hours. His voice had a low, sad inflection which would have driven me crazy if I had been forced to hear it often.

The meal over, I wandered through the large living room; then went down to the library. There was no one there. The library, for some reason, did not appeal to my mood, so I closed the door and went out to the glass-enclosed conservatory. It was filled with plants, with many large ferns against the main wall. And it had an occupant—the Professor, who was sitting in a chair by the windows, smoking a cigarette.

He jumped to his feet when I came through the door, making the usual remark about the weather. Anything he might have said about it would have suited me. I murmured some inane reply, dropping into a chair near his own. For a while I sat silent, listening to the wind as it swept the rain in great winding sheets against the glass. The storm had increased, and I knew it was going to be a horrible day.

I had no inclination to talk, but speech after all was unnecessary. The Professor did all the talking; a steady monologue having no real point, and which jumped from one thing to another. Once in a while I would make a short reply, and he would listen a second. Then once more a steady stream of conversation would flow from his lips.
And while he talked, slumped far back in my chair with a cigar between my lips, I studied the man. If it were not for the fact that he was such a talker, there seemed little doubt one might like the little, thin individual. But the high-pitched voice would surely get on one's nerves after a while.

He was one of those men who have a decided opinion upon every thing. His was an intellectual face, keen-cut nervous and a bit worried. The absurd cropped goatee gave him rather affected appearance. His eyes were keen, his English perfect. Only the old tie seemed out of place—a tie of extreme colour; so very red that you had to wonder where he had ever secured it.

I had wondered what he was doing in Nash's house. His attitude was that of a man very much at home. Long before he finished talking, I had secured a good deal of information. To start with, he was a distant relative of our host; a professor in a small, obscure college. For the last three summers, he had been ostensibly cataloguing the extensive collection of prints and books upon Napoleon. I decided that perhaps his work was simply a scheme for Nash to give him a little financial support.

It was the butler who ended the steady flow of words. His melancholy face appeared at the doorway, and the solemn voice informed me Bartley was waiting outside in the car. It was time to go to the inquest. As I jumped to my feet, the Professor rose also, saying that there might be room in the machine for him.

It was a silent ride to the village. I had intended to tell Bartley of my adventure of the night before;
to show him the single sheet of paper I had found, but
the presence of the Professor sealed mv·lips. Though
I was eager to have Bartley's cominiunt, I remained
silent. My story would have to wait for a more suit-
able time.

The concrete was slipoery from the rain, so we drove
slowly. The wind hurled itself against the car, and
though the machine was heavy, there were times when
it trembled when an extra heavy gust whirled around
it. The hedges shielding the extensive yards were
moaning with moisture. The trees were swaying
violently in the wind.

We found the common which faced the town hall
encircled with cars—expensive cars for the most part,
washed clean by the rain. People were hurrying up
the four worn steps of the building as we found a space
into which we slipped the machine. There was no
doubt the inquest had drawn almost everyone on the
island.

We went up the narrow winding stairway to the
second floor. Around the door a group of men were
talking in an excited undertone. With Bartley in the
lead, we pushed our way through the crowd, to step
within the room—a large room evidently used as a
place for public meetings. At one end was a small
platform; it contained a desk and several chairs.

The room was filled. Every chair was occupied, and
people were standing along the wall. It was a far
better dressed crowd than I had ever seen before at an
inquest. There were as many women as men—women
whose dresses gave a sense of colour to the drab room.
The summer colony had come out in volume, no doubt
welcoming the inquest as a diversion in an uneventful summer.

But as I hastily looked the room over, I could see there was an undercurrent of nervousness hanging over it. The women were whispering to each other, but they were just a bit too tense to be really at ease. All were remembering that one of their number had met a violent death; and the memory was not a pleasant one.

The police chief was at the front of the room near the platform. His tall figure towered above everyone else, and he was engaged in an earnest conversation with the coroner. Several times the round head of the doctor shook a vigorous protest. After a moment the chief nodded some agreement, turning to study the room. As his eye fell upon us, he beckoned for us to come to the platform.

There had been a space opened off from the rest of the room. The rope was strung across the room at least twenty-five feet from the platform. Behind it were the chairs filled with people. Stretching to the platform was a clear space—a space containing a few chairs and a table. Along the side of the wall, twelve chairs placed in a row ran to the platform's edge.

We slipped under the thick rope and approached the chief. He smiled a greeting in my direction, then entered into a low conversation with Bartley. Dropping into a chair by the table, I turned to flash a glance around the room—turned to find every eye fastened upon Bartley and the chief.

There was no doubt the summer colony was well represented. Almost half of the two hundred people present were women—the well-dressed women whose
lives are filled with luxury and ease; women whose cool eyes rested upon me for a second, then turned a long calculating glance at the grey-dressed figure of Bartley.

For a moment I thought everyone in the room was a stranger, but suddenly my eyes fell upon Mr. Nash. In a chair placed close to the wall, I could see his white head—a head bent low as he kept his eyes to the floor. Then on the other side of the room, only two rows away from the rope, I saw the girl who had sailed with me to the Point. As our eyes met a smile crossed her lips.

What they were waiting for I did not know. But thirty minutes passed before the coroner went up to the platform, and waddled over to take his place in the chair behind the table. For a moment a rustle of conversation swept around the room. Then as the doctor pounded on the desk for silence, the room became still.

I had wondered just what the procedure might be. For three months the island was filled with summer people. The remainder of the year it was deserted, save for a few hundred natives. It was the wealthy summer people who had given the place a more up-to-date police system than small places generally have. I wondered if there was such a thing as a town solicitor, and who would represent the legal system of the state.

I soon found out. A shrewd-appearing young man slipped under the rope and approached the edge of the platform, where he talked with the doctor for a moment. He proved to be the only lawyer upon the island. Naturally enough, he held the position of town
solicitor. The inquest was in his hands and that of the coroner.

The coroner’s jury was quickly chosen. The men, as their names were called, took their places in the row of chairs against the wall. It was an unusual jury. Nine of them were summer visitors to the island, men of wealth and position. The foreman was a noted New York lawyer whose fine face, crowned with showy hair, was known the country over. Three were natives, evidently fishermen.

As the chairs were filled, there came a little moment of hesitancy. Chairs moved nervously, and as they waited for the coroner to open the inquest, many persons coughed. The doctor swept the room with his glance, then looked down to a sheet of paper on the desk and called a name: “Robert Barr.”

It was a very sleek-apparing young man who took the witness chair. His suit fitted him a little too well, and the black hair brushed back from his forehead was almost too black. The face which turned to glance over the room was clean shaven. But it was a crafty face, the eyes narrow. I wondered who he could be.

As if reading my thought, Bartley bent over in his chair to whisper that it was Van Dike’s private secretary. Almost as his words ended, the first question had been asked. It was answered in a low insinuating voice—a voice which I did not like.

If the coroner had expected Van Dike’s secretary to have any knowledge of where his employer had gone the night of the murder, he was doomed to disappointment. With a rather important air, the secretary said again and again that it was not his duty to know any-
thing about the lawyer’s private appointments. He knew he had left the house that evening and fixed the time as around eight o’clock. Van Dike had been in a rather impatient mood, why, the witness did not know. But where he was going and whom he was expecting to see, he did not have the slightest idea. At least that was what he said.

But I was not so sure that he was telling everything he knew. His answers, on the face of them, were sincere—tough; given quickly without a second taken to think; but there was something, what it was I could not tell, which made me think the young well-dressed man was a little too smooth—in both appearance and his replies.

It was my opinion Bartley felt the same. Our eyes met for a second, and as our glances shot a question, I saw his left lid waver. But his face was inscrutable, without expression, though I was sure Bartley felt that the secretary must know more about his employer’s doings than he said.

When he left the stand after thirty minutes, it appeared the time had been thrown away. So far as I could see, nothing had been brought forth which had any bearing upon the murder. The secretary insisted that he did not know of any person with whom Van Dike had quarrelled. There had been many parties given at the house—rather wild parties, I judged—but he assured us nothing unpleasant had ever taken place.

In fact, before he stepped down to take a seat behind the rope, I had become convinced of one thing. It hardly seemed possible that any secretary could
know less about the man he worked for than this man did. Only one statement appeared to be of any interest. He volunteered the information that Van Dike had intended to leave for New York the day after his body was found. But as to who had killed him and why, he did not know.

Bartley was the next witness. As his name was called and he took his seat, there went a whisper around the crowded room. There were many of the summer people who knew of his career, and from the whispers going around, I decided that those who did not know were being told.

The coroner did not bother to ask him any questions. Instead came the request to tell his story in his own way. In short vivid sentences, the modulated voice told of our coming up the slippery road. There came the reason for our stopping—our inability to tell which of the three roads we must take. Then came the description of the parked car, of our finding the silent figure of the lawyer—dead—with the revolver in his left hand.

His story ended there; nothing was said of our visit to the broken-down building in the fields; not a hint was given that Bartley did not think the lawyer had been murdered at the place where the body was discovered. But I knew there was no doubt that his testimony had been agreed upon with the coroner before he went to the stand.

I had wondered what the coroner would do when it came time to tell about the autopsy. But to my surprise, it was a young physician, a fresh-faced young doctor just out of his medical school, who gave the
testimony. He had assisted the coroner; in a few short sentences he told what had been discovered.

Before he finished, I discovered one startling fact. Bartley had told of finding the revolver clasped in the cold hand. The testimony had created no excitement. It dawned upon me that the majority of the people present did not know we were sure Van Dike had been murdered. The fact that his hand was holding the gun had been evidence to most of them that he had committed suicide. That is, although they knew there was a suspicion of murder, most of the spectators appeared to think it far fetched.

The young doctor told of finding the bullet. In technical language bristling with long medical terms, he said that death had been instantaneous. Then, as the coroner asked him to explain in simple language, he told of the course of the bullet. Then came a short question. As it was asked the room stirred into an uneasy silence.

"Doctor, from the autopsy we conducted—from the course the bullet took—would you say the wound was self-inflicted?"

"If we assume the gun was fired from the hand which clasped it after death—the left one—I would doubt very much if Mr. Van Dike fired the fatal shot. If he fired the gun, it would have been held so close to the head that the hair would have been badly burned. We find little evidence of that. I think he was murdered."

As the realization of the doctor's words simmered into the consciousness of the spectators, there came a gasp. A woman gave a sudden hysterical laugh, and
there came the sound of feet moving nervously on the floor. Though most of the people knew there was a suspicion of murder, yet the fact the gun had been found in his hand had led them astray.

There came the voice of the coroner:

"You say the gun was clasped in the fingers of the left hand. That was the gun with which he was killed?"

"Yes, Doctor," was the reply. "There was one bullet fired from the revolver. Our autopsy discovered the bullet by which he was killed. It came from the revolver which was held in his hand."

"But you say he did not fire the shot himself?"

The witness shook his head.

"It is my opinion he could not have fired it! It would have been almost impossible to hold the gun in the left hand, fire it and have the bullet take the course it did. Add to that the fact that the gun must have been held three or four feet from his head, and I would say he did not commit suicide."

He hesitated, then added quickly:

"Of course there is a very faint chance it could have been done. But it is very doubtful. The gun, I think, was placed in his hand after death."

It had come; that dramatic moment which sometimes arrives at an inquest, and often comes in a murder trial—the moment when some odd and unexpected bit of testimony causes a room full of people to thrill with excitement and horror; when there comes a quick flash of the depths of evil which lie within the human mind.

I turned to flash a glance around the room. The
faces of the women were strained with excitement. Men were bending forward in their chairs, turning questioning looks to their nearest neighbour. A few faces were white with horror, while others were flushed red by nervousness.

"Then you would say Mr. Van Dike did not commit suicide?" insinuated the coroner.

Quick as a flash was the reply:

"I think it was murder."

When he was dismissed, he went over to a chair a few feet from Bartley and sat down. His testimony had brought a new note into the inquest—the realization that the island was facing a mysterious crime. A crime which had been, perhaps, partly suspected by the summer people who were now convinced by the sincere testimony of the young physician.

The fourth witness was a far different type from the others. When his name was called, a heavy thickset fisherman rose and ambled to the chair. He walked with a swinging gait you find in men who follow the sea. He dropped into the chair in an embarrassed manner; his face tanned red by the wind and salt air, flushed a deeper hue as he realized that the eyes of several hundred people were upon him.

As he gave his evidence, I could see that he was a stolid, unemotional man. Words came slowly from his lips, as if he found it difficult to say what was on his mind. It was such an effort for him to talk that one wanted to aid him. But there was no doubt of his honesty or his seriousness.

Olds was his name. On the night of the murder he had been on his way to a washing shack, which was
several miles up the shore from the place the body had been found. To make better time, he had not gone along the beach as was his custom, but, had followed the lonely road. He had seen Van Dike’s car pass him, and it was his impression there were two people in the car.

Persistent questioning by the coroner could not shake him in his belief there were two people in the car. Though a slow thinker and not an over-intelligent man, he was sure of what his eyes had seen. Again and again he insisted that the car contained two persons; and one, he felt sure, was Van Dike.

"You say, Olds," demanded the coroner, "that Van Dike was sitting on the right side of the car, that he was not driving. Now you admit you were some feet away—up on the bank. It was dark, you have said the headlights were not on. What makes you so positive that Mr. Van Dike was not driving?"

The brow of the tall fisherman wrinkled. For several minutes he was silent thinking. Then he turned to the coroner.

"Well, Doctor, I have seen that lawyer a good many times; took him fishing twice. There were no headlights on. But there was some sort of a little light turned on in the car. On—" he hesitated, searching for an unfamiliar word.

"The dashboard," assisted the coroner.

The man nodded.

"Yes. It was not very bright, but it was bright enough for me to get a sight of Mr. Van Dike. Someone else was driving the car. They hustled past pretty fast; I could not tell what it was. I’m not sure if it was
a man or woman, but think it was a man. But Mr. Van Dike was not driving."

The coroner rustled some papers on the table. Then without lifting his head, asked:

"What time was it when you saw the car?"

"A little piece before nine. That's how I would figure out the time, considering how far I had walked since I left the house. The car was going down the road toward that point with the trees."

The man had nothing else to tell, and was dismissed. The audience had not thought his testimony was of much importance. But I wondered how they would feel if they knew Bartley's idea, that at the time the fisherman had seen the car, Van Dike was already dead. And I knew that if this was true, it meant one thing. The murderer was someone with great nerve and self-assurance. Perhaps more than that—someone with great knowledge.

As the fisherman left the stand, I glanced at my watch; it was almost twelve. I wondered if the coroner would end the inquest at this point; wondered if he had other witnesses. It happened there was one more. Before the man took the chair, the doctor had informed us he would be the last witness.

In appearance, the last witness was similar to Olds. Also a fisherman, he walked with the same heavy tread across the floor. His smooth face was burnt red by the sun, his body rippled as he moved his large arms. His story turned out to be the most startling one of the morning.

At nine o'clock he had left the ferry to walk to his home. As he lived outside the village, he had not
taken the main road. Instead he had followed the same route we had taken that night, walked over the slippery road which turned to the right and had taken the cross road over the island. As he approached the fork in the road, he had seen the parked car near the trees. And he said the time must have been close to half-past ten.

I made a rapid calculation. If he was right, he had passed the machine almost at the moment I had seated myself on the fallen tree in the little clump of woods. But I had heard no one passing. I decided I must have been too far from the road to have heard any noise. But the answer he made to the question of the coroner startled me.

"You say you saw the car standing near the trees. Did you see anything else?"

"Yes. I saw the car and thought nothing of it. But after I had turned and gone a few yards on the road which goes across the island, I turned around. And I saw something—"

He paused, as if enjoying the importance he commanded. The impatient voice of the coroner shot a question at him. He answered:

"I saw a woman going over to the car."

I gave a start. There flashed into my mind the picture of the hand—the clutching hand reaching through the open window—the hand, which had playing over it the flame from a flashlight held in the other hand. I had not known whether it was a man or a woman. But if this man was right, it had been a woman I had seen reaching into the car.

"You are sure it was a woman?"

"Certain. Saw the dress. Just where she came from
I did not know. Thought maybe from the side of the road."

"Did you stand and watch what she did?"
He shook his head.

"No. It was none of my business. You see lots of women in cars parked on the back roads now. Thought simply some woman was having a date with a man."

All through the inquest, my attention had been held by a woman who was seated two rows behind the rope. Her chair was near the wall, and again and again my eyes had been drawn to her face. Partly because she was beautiful, I had glanced at her many times. But something else had caused me to take an interest in her. There had been so much keen interest in her expression, a decidedly frightened curiosity in her eyes which had never left the witness chair.

She was well dressed. I knew the gown was not as simple as it appeared—that it had cost a good deal of money. Her age was hard to define. Somewhere between twenty and thirty, and perhaps closer to the latter figure. A woman with a finely-shaped body, and yet about as nervous a woman as I had seen in many days.

She had watched every witness with a keen scrutiny. At times a look of horror would flash across her face. There would be moments when she would move restlessly in her chair. At times the red would flush over her face, then it would fade away and she would become very pale. But no person in the room was more intent on what was going on than this woman in the yellow gown.

At the moment the witness mentioned he had seen a
woman approaching the car, my eyes had been upon her face. The testimony of the witness seemed to startle her. She leaned forward in the seat, her eyes staring at the fisherman upon the stand. Then with a tense body she listened to his words. When he had finished, after saying he did not recognize the woman and had not looked back, I saw her lips move. Then as if suddenly very tired, she leaned back in her chair with a weary slump to her body.

Who she was, I did not know, but it was certain she was showing a rather uncommon interest in the inquest. From where I was sitting, though at times I had found her hidden by the man in the next seat, I felt convinced of one thing—her interest was a personal one.

The voice of the coroner, saying the inquest was over and that the jury could retire to find a verdict, caused me to take my glance away from the woman. I knew there was but one verdict the jury could find. There had been but five witnesses. We knew Van Dike was dead, but we knew nothing else.

The jury did not even bother to leave the room. The grey-haired lawyer who was foreman whispered something to the man next to him. The whisper was passed down the length of the chairs. I saw all heads nod. A second later, the verdict had been given: “Murder at the hands of a person or persons unknown.”

There came the noisy pushing back of chairs, the sound of many voices. Everybody had risen, everyone seemed to be talking to someone else. As I pushed my way through little groups of gesticulating people, I realized there would be enough to talk about for many days. The island had received its greatest sensation.
Out in the open air, I waited at the car for Bartley's appearance. Men and women were coming down the steps, hands were gesticulating, voices speaking. Everyone seemed to be excited, and almost every couple that went out was engaged in a heated argument. And then all at once I saw Lorraine Mason, and as I glimpsed her she left the woman with whom she had been talking and came over to my side.

If possible she appeared prettier than before. No hat covered the close-cropped, jet-black hair. Little rouge was upon her cheeks—they needed little. With a cheery smile she made some comment about the inquest. Then she added she was going to see me that afternoon, and tell me what she thought about Harold's non-appearance.

But I paid no attention to the last remark. The woman I had noticed in the court room was coming down the steps. Her yellow dress showed the beautiful lines of her shapely body, but she walked slowly, as if weary—weary and perhaps heart-sick. Though many spoke to her, she made no reply to their greetings. As she came almost opposite to me, my hand grasped the arm of the girl by my side.

In my thoughtlessness, I gripped harder than I intended. I turned to find the girl looking at me in astonishment. As she shook my clasped away, I made a half apology, then asked, pointing to the woman at that moment entering an expensive sedan:

"Who is that woman?"

The girl turned to follow my gesture. The sedan door had been closed, but the woman leaned forward to speak to the chauffeur. For a moment the girl turned
and her clear, frank eyes looked at me in amusement. Then she spoke.

"I don't blame him, Mr. Pelt. Everybody likes Lura Cambell."
CHAPTER X

THINKING I had not heard correctly, I gazed in astonishment at the girl standing beside me. Her head was thrown back, the dark eyes dancing. Seeing my perplexed face, she laughed.

"Lucy Cambell is the best-looking woman on the island. She seems to have made a great impression upon you."

I tried to tell her that the woman’s beauty did not interest me. The real reason for my astonishment, I could not tell. During the inquest, I had observed the tense, excited face of the woman. She had shown an overpowering interest in the testimony. And back of her interest was fear. But why should such a woman be frightened?

I thought of the sheet of paper in my pocket—half of an indiscreet letter written by some foolish woman. I remembered the impassioned voice I had heard in the darkness. Saw again the shadowy figure vanishing down toward the beach. And the name signed to the letter in my pocket was the same as that of the woman who had just driven away in the expensive red car.

As I rapidly ran these facts over in my mind, the girl stood silently at my side. It was still raining, and the water trickled down the upturned face. Her eyes searched my face with a knowing glance. Then as I
saw the Professor come down the steps and start to hurry to where we were standing, she spoke, her voice a little hurried:

"I want you and Mr. Bartley to come over to the house this afternoon. Come around four o'clock. I may have something to tell you."

I nodded, not having time to speak. The Professor was upon us. Already his high-pitched voice was sounding in our ears. The eyes of the girl met mine for a moment, then she darted over to her car. Though the Professor was talking eagerly by my side, I did not hear him. I was wondering what the girl's last remark might mean.

After a moment I climbed into the shelter of the car, followed by the Professor. One by one the machines had driven away, and it was my impression that almost everyone had left the building. But for some reason, Bartley lingered; it was almost thirty minutes before he hurried down the steps and took the seat beside us.

The storm had died down, and the wind was not blowing as fiercely as it had early in the morning. But it was still raining, a gentle drizzle which gave no promise of ending. Because the road was slippery, glistening from the rain, I drove slowly. Dark clouds filled the sky.

Only the Professor talked, a steady stream of comment came from his lips. In reality, I doubt if either Bartley or myself heard a word he said. I was busy with my thoughts. One question was in my mind. Could the woman I had seen in the court house be the "Lura" whose name was signed to the letter in my
pocket? I was still trying to decide this when I stopped the car before the house.

The butler met us at the door to say that lunch would be served in forty-five minutes. The second we closed the door of Bartley’s room, the story of the adventure of the previous night started to pour from my lips. He listened without saying a word, taking his pipe from the stand and packing it with a long stringy tobacco.

When I had finished my story, his hand reached out for the letter. I watched him read one side of the sheet, saw him turn to the other. His eyes rested for a second on the signature. Then with a half smile, he raised his head. Impatiently I told him of the woman in the court room and of her first name. Again his eyes dropped to the sheet of paper and a slight frown wrinkled his brow. Rising to his feet, he placed the letter in a brief case.

"You think the woman you heard last night and the one you saw in the court room are the same person?"

I protested I did not know. How could I know? The darkness had shielded the woman’s face. If I should hear her voice again, I felt sure I could recognize it. But it seemed odd their names should be the same, and I said as much. I insisted that the woman had shown an abnormal interest in the inquest. He listened until I had finished. Then going to the window, he stood gazing out at the rain-swept lawn. After a while he turned.

"You may be right, Pelt. The name is not a common one. Yet after all, in a sense your adventure of last night is not our concern. Unless—"
He paused. For a second I thought he intended to complete the sentence: But instead he said something else.

"What did you think of the inquest?"

There was little to think regarding the inquest. Only one new fact had been brought out. The testimony of the fisherman that he had seen the parked car, and that a woman was approaching it. I reminded him that the time checked up with my sight of the hand reaching into the car. The man's story no doubt was true. And if it was, it only deepened the mystery. What was the woman after?

Bartley's grave face did not change while I was speaking. He listened carefully, nodding his head when I remarked that the witness had no doubt told the truth; he had seen a woman approaching the car. When I ended he smoked for several minutes; then placing the pipe on the stand, he reseated himself in his chair.

"It is my idea," he mused, "the inquest did one thing. Gave us a hint of what was behind this crime."

I looked at him in astonishment. Why he should say that, I could not see. Violently, I made audible my objection.

"I think in the end you will discover, Pelt, that the opinion held by the chief and the coroner is wrong. They have the idea that if you only find Harold Nash, you find the murderer. They insist all the evidence points to his being guilty. The discovery that the revolver was his, to their mind clinches the case. But I think that when you get the whole truth of the matter, you will find he is not guilty."
"If he is not guilty, why did he disappear?" I growled out.

He shook his head. "That is the mystery! He knows something, I feel sure of that. It is my idea he might even know the one who committed the murder. He may, in a sense, have had a part in it—an obscure part. But that is as far as I will go."

He paused, then continued:

"There is one thing about which I have wondered. Van Dike was the first to drive away. Harold saw him go, rushed out of the house and went away in his car. Now the boy must have been at that barn first. He drove his car through the door, because no one could see it there, and it would give him a hiding place. Van Dike, however, if he had gone directly to the place, should have been there first. Shall we say he picked up someone—someone with whom he had the appointment? I cannot conceive of Harold driving into the barn, if Van Dike was there ahead of him."

"The boy knew whom the lawyer would have with him," was my comment.

"Of course he did. Some woman without a doubt. But why the man should be murdered is the great mystery."

"It might have been the woman you think was with Van Dike," I retorted.

He made an impatient gesture. "I have thought of that, of course. Then again it might not have been a woman who was in that car. After all, one must have a psychological basis when one tries to picture who could have committed a crime like this. The fact that the murderer, for it must have been the murderer,
drove that car over a mile with the victim cold in death on the seat beside him, is startling enough. The fact that he knew you could place a gun in a dead man’s hand is another startling thing. They both point to one conclusion.”

“What?” I asked.

He rose to his feet and went over to the bureau. Opening a drawer he fumbled in its interior until he found what he was seeking. His hand came forth with a gun—the black revolver which had been found in Van Dike’s hand. For a second he studied it, then turned and answered my question.

“It proves that whoever committed this crime was an individual gifted with two things—unbounded coolness, and I would say a rather intelligent brain.”

He might have said more, but at this second there came a knock at the door. The butler’s voice informed us that lunch was ready adding there was a man in the hall who wished to see Bartley. As we left the room, I was surprised to see he took the revolver with him.

There was a man sitting in the hall who rose as we came down the stairs. For several minutes he and Bartley engaged in conversation. Evidently he was being instructed in something he was to do. He nodded his head several times as if assuring Bartley he understood. Then I saw the gun change hands and an envelope with it. Then the man went out of the door.

As we seated ourselves at the table, I wondered a little who the man could be, and why he had been given the revolver. I dismissed the thought to pay
attention to the well-cooked meal which was being placed on the table. Across from me sat Mr. Nash, silent and gloomy. At the end of the table was the Professor. Only our host's daughter was absent.

It was a silent meal. Once when it was half over Nash turned to the Professor to ask him if it were true that Van Dike had graduated from the college where he taught. Not only was the question confirmed, but there followed a wealth of details. Before the lunch was ended, we had heard all there was to know about the college career of the dead lawyer.

No one interrupted the Professor. Between mouthfuls of food his voice rambled on. We were just about to leave the table when Nash made his second remark. It came some time after his first question, but he had not found an opportunity to speak again. As the chairs were pushed back, he looked over at the Professor:

"I heard to-day that a good part of Van Dike's estate will go to your college."

The man nodded, to my surprise saying nothing in return. As we went out of the room, Nash excused himself, saying he had a great many letters to dictate. Bartley vanishing up the winding stairway, left me to myself. I went into the conservatory and picking up a magazine lost myself in its contents.

The afternoon slipped away. There came the time when the magazine dropped to the floor. I leaned back in the chair and closed my eyes. There came to my ears the noise of the surf, pounding on the shore a few hundred yards away. The rain sprayed against the windows. For a while I listened; then I must have
dozed off, for when I suddenly sat upright to look at my watch, I saw it was almost four o'clock.

Four o'clock was the hour set for our visit to Miss Mason. Jumping to my feet, I hastened out in the hall. Bartley was descending the stairs, and I saw he had my hat in his hand. He smiled at my haste; then together we walked outside.

We did not have very far to drive, not more than a mile. We had been given good directions and had no trouble in finding the house. It was a grey slungled cottage, standing only a few feet from the shore. Roses were climbing over every side—roses a vivid flame in the rain. The yard was small, yet there were many flower gardens—flower gardens filled with old-fashioned flowers.

A little coloured maid smiled a broad grin when she answered the door, and took us into a living room. It was a quaint room, unusual in appearance. The side facing the sea was simply three great windows. Through them one saw the water, its surface lashed into tumbling foam by the storm.

Everything in the room told that the owner was a literary person. Bookcases were on every side—cases jammed to overflowing with books. The walls were covered with etchings, and I saw Bartley's eyes light up as they rested upon them. A large desk was in the centre, flanked by a typewriting stand. Comfortable chairs invited one to rest, and the great fireplace had a settle on each side.

Leaving us alone, the maid vanished. When the door closed, Bartley began to examine the etchings, smiling a happy smile as he went from one to the
other. When he discovered two Rembrandts nothing would do but I must come and have their fine points explained. We were engaged in this pleasant task when the door opened, and the pleasant voice of the girl greeted us.

Her first words were an apology for her father’s absence. He was at work on a new book, lost, she laughed, to the world. Then with a little smile we were told we would have tea before there would be any serious conversation.

Three big chairs were pulled close to the tea table which the coloured maid wheeled into the room. The china was old, the blue design odd and quaint. The teapot on the alcohol lamp was bubbling merrily. The bread half covered by a white napkin, was delicately thin; the little round cakes glistened with pink frosting.

It was a delightful ending of a gloomy day. Outside the sea roared against the shore. Lifting my head, I could see the waves as they threw a shower of spray into the air. Outside it was raining and gloomy, but within the room was peace and quietness, made charming by the beautiful girl who served us.

The conversation was not serious for a while. The girl mentioned something about her father’s writing. Bartley told of several odd experiences in various parts of the world. But there came the time when we could eat no more of the little cakes, delicious as they were. As the tea things were placed on the table, there came a pause in the conversation.

It was becoming darker. Shadows had crept into the corners of the room, the etchings upon the wall
were very dim. Out over the water, dark, heavy clouds were drifting in to land. Night was rapidly approaching. In the silence which came over us, the sound of the surf became a steady rumble. And then the girl spoke—her voice low and hesitating.

"I told Mr. Pelt I was going to try and think over with whom Harold was playing around this summer. Try and see if I knew of anything which could have caused him to become as excited as he has been for the last month. I have not been very successful. But—"

The cultured, husky voice trailed away. We did not speak. In the chair before us, she sat curled in its deep embrace. Her face was thoughtful. For several moments she appeared to be thinking. Then she raised her head and looked at Bartley.

"You see, Mr. Partley, though father tells me Mr. Nash is worried for fear Harold knows something about the murder, yet I don’t believe he had anything to do with it. It is not the sort of thing he would do. If he had not run away, I doubt if anyone would ever have thought he knew anything about it. Do the police suspect him?"

Bartley rather evaded the question, in the answer which he made. He admitted the police were very keen to find the boy. Told her that it might be possible he knew who did commit the murder. Though he insisted he was sure in his own mind, there was no personal guilt. With her head resting on her hand, she listened. When he had finished, she smiled a little crooked smile.

"I told Mr. Pelt that I thought somebody had told Harold something which excited him. It is, my im-
pression that it would be a woman and not a man. A man would be able to take care of his own affairs. So I have been crying for the last twenty-four hours to think over the women and girls that Harold knew."

She laughed. "The trouble is he knows everybody on the island. But there is one thing that may be of value. He has been a great friend of Mrs. Cambell—has seen a good deal of her this summer. She has a place just above us. I used to see him over there often. Three weeks ago I went into the garden—her garden—and found them talking. Lura had been crying and Harold was much excited. I never discovered what it was all about."

It was too dark to see Bartley's face, but his voice told his interest.

"Tell us about Mrs. Cambell."

"There is not much to tell. Her husband is perhaps ten years older than she is, a broker in Cleveland. He has been in the city most of the summer. Lura is twenty-seven. Everyone likes her; and of course she is a beauty. They have been married only three years, and this summer I have thought she was unhappy."

"Why did you think that?"

"You can tell when people are unhappy, even if your reasons are hard to explain. I know she has been unhappy. We are pretty good friends and I see her a good deal. I thought she was afraid of something. It may be foolish, but I know of no other woman that Harold has seen this summer who would be apt to make him as excited as he has been. And I would not have thought of her if it had not been for that time I saw them in the garden."
She was silent for a long while. I could tell from her voice that she did not like to tell tales upon her friend. But there was one question in my mind. Was Mrs. Cambell the Lura whose name was on the half sheet of letter paper I had picked up the previous night? And the girl’s next remark caused me to think she might be.

"I hate gossip," she apologized, "but our coloured maid was telling me something she heard from Mrs. Cambell’s maid to-day. They are great friends. The maid said her mistress came in this morning, after one o’clock. Said she was wet and frightened—in fact, fainted. It was the second time this week she has fainted after coming into the house late."

"When was the other time?" Bartley questioned.

"The night Mr. Van Dike was killed. Rose, our coloured girl, says Mrs. Cambell’s maid told her she came in the house late that night. She had gone out about seven-thirty without the car. At ten-thirty the maid heard her come in; when she went to her room a few minutes later, found her lying across the bed—she had fainted. I have wondered what it meant."

If she expected an answer to the question, she must have been disappointed. Instead Bartley thanked her, said he wanted to think over what she had told us, and rose to his feet. The girl scrambled from the chair, and pushed a button. The room flamed into light. As we looked at the girl standing by the desk, her eyes searched ours as a questioning smile trembled across her lips.

We said good-bye and went silently out to the car. After I had started, I eagerly asked Bartley what he
thought of what we had been told. He shook his head, replying that he wanted to think it over. And until we had placed the car in the garage and had opened the door, he did not say a word. When he did speak it was not to me.

We opened the door of the house to find Nash saying good-bye to someone. One glance showed that his visitor was the one man whose appearance I had not liked when he testified at the inquest, the well-dressed, sleek-appearing young man who had been the first witness—Van Dike's secretary.

Nash introduced us and we exchanged a few words. There was an unpleasant note in the tone of the man's voice. He was a little too sleek, a bit overdressed. When he went out, I wondered what he was doing in the house. He did not seem the sort of man Willard Nash would know. But as we walked down the hall, I received a shock.

Sensing that we wondered what the young man was doing in the house, he informed us that he had acted as his secretary for the last five weeks. His own man had been ill; one day when he was complaining that he would have to have a secretary sent down from the city, Van Dike had offered the services of Robert Barr. He had spent about four hours a day taking care of his correspondence.

I saw that Bartley thought his choice was an odd one. Nash sensed the feeling, for he gave a laugh and told us he did not like the man. He had used him because Van Dike did not need him in the city; also because every day he expected his own secretary to come back to work.
We wanted to change for dinner and went to our rooms. No sooner had we entered the door than the telephone rang. Bartley stepped over to the stand to answer it. The conversation was a long one, though I did not hear what it was about. While he was talking; I had closed the thick door of the bathroom and was allowing the water to run in the tub. I was just ready for the bath when Bartley called my name.

I was undressed, but there was such an urgent request in his voice that I hastened to step into the other room. A queer smile was on Bartley’s lips as I hurried through the door. There came his drawling voice.

"Have some news for you, Pelt. I told the chief to keep his ears open and listen. Reminded him that this is a small place and in the end, somebody must know something. He has heard where Harold Nash is."

"Where?" I urged.

"Some small boys for some unknown reason went after berries in the rain this afternoon; went out over the field to the lonely, deserted part of the island. There is a small shack at the other end, and they say they saw Harold there. I would not be at all surprised if they did. They knew him—and I never thought he had left the island."

"I suppose we will go and get him?" was my comment.

To my surprise he shook his head.

"I told the chief to let him stay where he is until to-morrow afternoon. If he is there, if the boys are right—why he won’t run away. To get him now would spoil everything I have in view."
It was an astonishing remark to me. The sooner Harold was produced the better, was my thought. I said this, asking why he did not wish the chief to go for the boy at once. But the reply I received did not enlighten me. With a smile, he simply shook his head, as he said:

"I am not so sure myself, Pelt. But I want that boy produced at the psychological moment—and it is not that now."
CHAPTER XI

We did not leave our rooms for some time. Bartley had slumped far down in the easy chair by the window. His eyes were half closed, and one might have thought he was almost asleep. But I knew this was not so. He was running over in his mind details of which I had no understanding.

For a while I tried to read, but the magazine could not interest me. Placing it aside, I arose; going over to the window, I stood looking out into the night. It was still raining—a little, slight drizzle which was more of a hazy mist than anything else. A fog was creeping slowly in from the sea, promising to envelop the land in a short while.

It was a dreary scene and I felt depressed. With a slight shudder of disgust, I went over to my chair. Leaning back in its soft embrace, I began to think over the events of the day. The inquest had resulted in nothing new. That is, unless the testimony of the last fisherman regarding the woman he had seen was of value. Just how valuable it might be, I could not decide. Yet it must have been her hand I had seen reaching into the car.

The face of the woman I had noticed is the court room floated before me. There was no doubt she was a rather beautiful woman. And I knew she had shown more than a decided interest in the inquest. I began to wonder—wonder if the similarity in the first name
could mean anything. It might, for it was an unusual one. Bartley's calm voice broke in on my thoughts.

"You might call her on the phone, Pelt. You know you remarked that you thought you would know the voice if you heard it again."

I gave a start as I turned to glance at him. He was sitting upright in his chair, a little smile playing around his lips. As I looked at him, I wondered how he had read my thoughts. But I did not ask. There had been too many occasions when he had shown an uncanny knowledge as to what I was thinking. But the suggestion was a good one.

There was no telephone book in our room. Rising, I walked out in the hall and down to the library. Nash gave me a rather worried smile when I came in, pointing out the phone book. Finding the number, I memorized it and went back upstairs. Going over to the telephone, I called central.

There was a slight wait before the bored girl asked what number I wished. Then after a moment, a shrill voice said, "Hullo." Asking for Mrs. Cambell, I waited anxiously. Several minutes passed by before a woman's voice came floating over the wire. The second I heard it, even before she had said, "This is Lura Cambell," I knew it was the same voice I had heard the night before. There was the identical inflection, the same rising tone. Stammering out some reply, I placed the receiver on the hook, and turned to Bartley.

"Well?" was his question.

"It is the very same voice. There is no doubt in my mind she is the woman I heard last night. What do you think about it?"
He shook his head as he slowly rose to his feet. There was an amused expression upon his face, a slight twinkle in his eyes. As he started for the door, he spoke:

"I think you are perhaps right. You ought to know. This thing is beginning to become interesting. Let us go down to the library."

I would have given a good deal to know what he really did think. For a moment I hesitated, then followed him down to the next floor. Nash was busy with some papers when we entered the library, but laid them aside. We took the cigars he produced from a box in the desk, and for a while sat silent. My eyes wandered over the room.

Prints covered almost every inch of the walls. I had not examined them except from a distance, so, rising, I began to walk around the room. There was enough there to interest anyone. Prints of all sizes and shapes. Many of them were coloured, the bright raw colours of the past. Almost every one had the same figure for a hero. Everywhere I glanced, it was to find the face of Napoleon looking out at me. No matter what the print might be, its size or shape, somewhere in the figures would be seen the stcut little Frenchman.

I knew that the collection upon the walls was famous, the best perhaps in our country. The bookcases were overflowing with volumes. Books, all bound in the same black morocco binding. The books were just as valuable as the prints. I wondered a little as I thought of this, why the famous general should have so strong an appeal for our host.

Nash had greeted us when we entered the library.
Evidently he had a few letters to write, for after we had chosen our cigars, he went back to his writing. There were a number of letters to sign and the splutter of his pen broke the silence. But there came the time when the last signature had been written, and with a sigh of relief he pushed back his chair from the desk.

Turning, he looked at his friend. Bartley was leaning back in his chair, his legs extended. He seemed at peace with the world as his eyes followed the drifting smoke from his cigar. Catching the look which Nash was giving him, he straightened, throwing the cigar in the ash tray.

"Willard," came his calm voice, "I suppose you think I have forgotten your reason for asking me to come here. Of course, Van Dike’s death, in a sense, drove every other thought from our minds. But I want to ask you a few questions regarding the loss of the jewellery from your wall safe."

Nash whirled around in his chair until he was directly facing Bartley. Though his expression was one of keen interest, he did not speak.

"I have wondered a little, Willard, just what caused you to have a fingerprint expert come down from New York and photograph the impressions upon the wall. That is not a natural thing for a man in your place to do—unless he is suspicious. Who put the idea in your head?"

The white head turned to glance at a print upon the wall. His brow knitted. When he replied, his voice was thoughtful.

"Come to think of it, Barr was the one who suggested it might be a good thing to have the impres-"
sion of the fingers photographed. They were rather plain."

"From the photographs, they were about as plain impressions as I have ever seen," was Bartley's retort. There was such a curious tone in his voice that Nash looked at him in surprise. As he made no further comment, the older man continued:

"Yes, they were clear enough. Black perfect finger marks. Mrs. Nash discovered the safe had been opened. It was the day before she sailed for Europe. I thought, though I hated to do it, that Harold might be the guilty party. He denied knowing anything about it, said he would not have known how to open the safe."

"So it was Barr who suggested you'd better have the fingerprint expert down," Bartley mused.

"Yes. And after the man made the prints, he suggested that we had better have everyone in the house give him an impression of their finger tips."

"Did Harold object to this?" was my question.

"Far from it," came the quick retort. "In fact, he was the first to make one. When it came out that the fingerprints upon the wall by the safe were similar to his own, he said it made no difference, he knew nothing about it."

The subject must have been a painful one, for the red flushed over the face of our host. His voice died away as if he did not care to comment any further upon the matter. In the silence which fell, it was Bartley who inquired:

"The boy has never left the island this summer?"

Nash shook his head. Bartley gave him a quick
glance, then rose to his feet. Going over to his desk, he stood by the chair of his friend. His hand rested for a second upon the shoulder of the older man—a gesture of assurance and confidence.

"Willard, just what is back of the loss of your jewellery is not clear now. But have you stopped to think that if Harold took them, he did it for one purpose? He needed money. And if he never left the island after the robbery, the taking of the jewellery would be of no benefit to him. Unless he could dispose of them, it was an absurd thing to take them. And he could not have disposed of them on the island. I want to show you something. Where are the prints the expert made?"

Nash bent down and pulled open a drawer. His hand fumbled within it for a while, coming out with some photographs. He placed them on the desk as we crowded around. They were similar to many other photographs I had seen—the small, dark impression of finger tips. But they were unusually clear. We studied them for a moment, then Bartley spoke, his voice was crisp and eager.

"When I first saw those photographs, Willard, one thing struck me. It was my belief that they were the clearest and least blurred of any set I had ever seen, and I have seen hundreds. Every line stands out in those prints, there is not the slightest suspicion of blurring. And there is one thing I want to show you. Have you got a powerful reading glass?"

Nash nodded as he rose and went over to a little stand. Back at our side, he handed a large reading glass to Bartley, who, holding it over the photographs,
beckoned for us to look. As I glanced down, the impression leaped into relief—a magnified curling mass of curving lines.

"You notice the whirls if the finger tips are unusually clear. But I want you to notice something else. Look where I put the tip of this pencil.

The pencil tip was placed on the photograph. It stopped at what was the top of a thumb impression, then moved out toward the edge of the paper. There was a faint line, which under the glass, seemed a little narrow streak. It ran from the end of the finger tip.

We studied it a moment, though I doubt if Nash understood any more than myself what it meant. But there was a faint line on the photograph, more like a scratch than anything else. Silently we looked at it, then Nash spoke:

"Well, what is it, John?"

"I am not sure myself." was the slow reply. "But I have a suspicion. When you told me of the fingerprints by the wall safe and I saw these pictures, I began to wonder. They appeared far too perfect. I never saw clearer ones than the pictures before us. But that little line has no business being on the print. It ought not to be there at all. I may be wrong but I am beginning to wonder—"

"Wonder what?" I broke in.

"If the fingerprints could be forgeries."

"But," came the astonished voice of Nash, "you cannot forge fingerprints."

"Yes, you can," was Bartley's quick retort. "There have been two criminal cases in the French courts the past year, in which it was proved that the fingerprint
evidence was forged. There is some attack upon the theory in this country—naturally there would be—but it is pretty well agreed among experts, now, that although it is a delicate piece of work, you can forge fingerprints."

Seeing our interest, he told us how it was done. First a photograph was made of the fingerprint one wished to copy. The negative was reduced until it was the size of the original print. From this negative a copy was etched upon copper. It was, of course, a very delicate bit of work requiring fine, skilled craftsmanship. The copper etching served as a matrix, and the whirling lines of the finger were etched into it.

After this was done the rest was simple. You took a thin piece of paper, moistened it and forced it into the die which had been engraved. All you had to do then was to place the paper against any substance you wished, and there was a copy of the fingerprint. And it was a forged copy.

There had been a doubting look upon our friend’s face when Bartley started his explanation. But the expression quickly passed away. He gave a half-surprised glance down at the photograph, making some remark that if what had been said was true, fingerprint evidence was not of as great value as the police thought.

But Bartley did not agree with this. He reminded Nash that it took an expert etcher to do the work. It was actually skilled, artistic craftsmanship of the highest type. Few could do it. Not only did it take skill, but also time. Not once in a million times would the fact that, under some circumstances, fingerprints could be forged be of any value.
Nash nodded; then with a curious tone in his voice asked why Bartley had the suspicion that the prints before us were forgeries. Before he replied, the glass was picked up and held over the photographs while we were asked to again look at the little line which ran away from the thumb print—the little, faint, thin line almost like a scratch.

"That line," was the retort, "ought not to be there. It is very faint, you need the glass to bring it out. But it looks very much as if the instrument slipped and scratched the copper. I may be wrong, of course, but those prints are far too perfect, much too clear, and that line makes me suspicious."

We debated for some time what the faint line could be. In the end, I could see that though Nash had been convinced that fingerprints could be forged, yet he was a little doubtful about those before us. He suggested that there was no one about the house who would have wished to throw suspicion upon his son.

Bartley made no reply to the half-suggested question. Instead he dropped back in his chair to light a fresh cigar. Then he asked his friend to tell him two things. How friendly had he been with Van Dike, and how did he like Barr as a secretary?

We were told that our host had known the lawyer fairly well. He had never had any business dealings with him, would not have thought of ever employing him as an attorney. He half smiled as he remarked that Van Dike's practice was not corporation law; but the man was a summer neighbour with his house next to his own.

He pictured the dead lawyer as a friendly sort of
an individual; a sociable being who came down to the island on Fridays and returned to the city on Sunday evenings. Unmarried, Van Dike always had his house filled with people. As he shrugged his shoulders, I could see that Nash thought his next-door neighbour might have improved upon the character of his guests.

It was Van Dike himself who had suggested that Barr might fill in, while Nash’s secretary was ill. He had been a little surprised that the lawyer’s secretary was spending all of his time on the island. But he needed someone for the few hours each week he was at home, so had accepted the offer. As for the man himself, he did not like him. There was something, what it was he did not know, that caused him not to trust him.

I had expected Bartley would carry the subject further. But when Nash stopped after expressing his opinion of Van Dike’s secretary, Bartley changed the topic. He made some comment upon a new book he had read, a newly-found copy of a rare work which had been published just before the French Revolution. Like a trout rising to a fly, Nash leaned back in his chair, and the two men began to talk about their hobby.

I listened for a while; but there came a time when the conversation became simply a series of book prices. This man, I heard, had paid too much for the book he had bought at the last sale; this one had secured a bargain. An interesting topic of conversation to the two men, but a dreary one to me.

Knowing they would talk for several hours upon their mutual hobby, I rose and walked out of the room.
So interested were they that neither one saw me depart. Noticing the lights in the conservatory, I ambled into the glass-enclosed room. There I found the Professor sitting close to a window, reading.

He appeared glad to see me, allowing the paper to fall to the floor. I was not surprised when he started at once to talk, for he was almost the most talkative individual I had ever met. And one did not have to make any reply to what he said. All that was needed was to listen.

He spoke about many things. Most of them had little connection with one another. His mind seemed to jump from one thing to another; but he said nothing about the inquest. In fact, as I looked at him, it dawned upon me there were two things he had never mentioned—the murder and the disappearance of Harold.

Long before I finally rose and left the room, I had discovered many things about the nervous little figure that talked and gesticulated across from me. I decided that the man had led a very lonesome life—the life of an unknown, obscure teacher in a small country college. He never could have made much money, and it was my opinion that the line in his life between poverty and a slight comfort was very narrow.

As I leaned back in the chair, listening to his rambling voice, it dawned upon me that the man was not well. He was very thin, and though his nervous voice flowed along without ceasing, I decided he was weary. Something about his face told me that good health had departed from his life—a life which could not have been easy.
But when I rose to say good-night, I liked the little man far more than when I entered the room. Despite his absurd gift of speech, there was a pathetic friendliness about him which was appealing. I went up the stairs wondering if he had been a popular teacher—and doubted it.

Though I had not expected to see him, I found Bartley in his room. He had put on a thin silk lounging robe and was reading. The long, slim book in his hand had a tight grey cover. It was one of the period he so loved—which told of those years of France when disaster in the shape of revolution was sweeping down upon the nation.

As I sank down in a chair, he placed the book on the stand, to ask what I had been doing. I smiled.

"The Professor has been telling me the long story of his life," was my complaint. "From the time he spent a year in a medical school, to the next year in a theological school, down to the present moment. I judge I heard it all."

He chuckled at my tone, then his face became serious.

"Have you thought that the man you had your battle with last night might have been Barr?"

I had thought of it, but the idea had passed away in a second. There was nothing to base it upon. True, the men were of the same size and weight, but that could mean little. They were of the average weight, which is found in most men. I shook my head.

"It is just a suggestion, Pelt," was the comment. "Somewhere I have heard something about Van Dike's secretary, but what it is I cannot recall. It is rather
MURDER IN THE DARK

odd he has been at the island all the summer. One would expect him to be at work in the office in New York. I do not like his face, and I doubt very much if he told all he knew at the inquest."

It was the same impression I had received as I listened to the man's testimony. It had been given with apparent frankness, but there had been something in his manner which had made me wonder a little. The man had been just a little too frank, a bit too smooth.

I voiced my opinion to have Bartley agree. I could see that his impression of Van Dike's secretary coincided with mine. He did not like the man. Did not trust him, and it was not often that Bartley was wrong in his impression of people. There was something disagreeable about the tall young man who had been the first witness at the inquest.

I was tired, with no inclination to read. Going into my room I undressed, then took a shower. Then in my pyjamas, I wandered back into Bartley's room; there was a question I wished to ask him.

"You have never said anything about what we were told by Miss Mason," I ventured.

He looked at me over his book. There was a quizzical smile upon his lips.

"I would say she is a very beautiful young woman; and a rather intelligent one—"

I made a gesture of impatience. Seeing it he laughed.

"You mean what do I think of her maid's story. You said when you called Mrs. Cambell on the phone three hours ago, that her voice was similar to that of the woman you heard last night. I judge it is the
same woman. I would not be surprised if she were the person Van Dike had his appointment with the night he was killed."

"If you think that, why have you not questioned her?" was my remonstrance.

He let the book slide to the floor as he looked gravely across the room.

"What is there to question her about—yet? You have only the story told by a coloured maid. No doubt it is true, but if we ask the woman to explain where she had been the two nights she fainted we would get nowhere. It is not time to question her—just yet."

"I am sure she was the woman I heard," was my comment.

"You know better than I do if she was," he replied. "No doubt you are right. It proves what I have thought all along. It is my idea she was being blackmailed by Van Dike. That she actually knows who killed him is another matter."

He paused. "You know, of course, Pelt—well, maybe you do not know. She was married three years ago. Her husband is a wealthy broker almost forty. But they tell me he is rather a bigot; a narrow-minded individual. He heads one of the strict reform societies of his state, a society which is trying to stop some simple and harmless pleasure. You can picture, say, that some letters she wrote before marriage fell into the wrong hands. Picturing that, you can understand her fear. She would know that all was lost if her husband knew about them. Easy prey for a blackmailer."

I agreed, for a few moments thinking the matter over in silence. She was an attractive woman. Th
had been a look of appealing fear on her face as she stared wildly at each witness. There had been dread when the fisherman had mentioned that he had seen a woman going over to the dark car.

Perhaps we were getting somewhere after all. The crime had appeared a hopeless mystery at the first—but I was not sure. Van Dike had a bad reputation as a lawyer. His clients were mostly from the underworld. But would he blackmail a woman of Lura Campbell’s type? I had heard many stories regarding him, but none of that kind.

I stopped thinking after a while and rose to go into my room. Just as I was pulling down the covers on the bed, the telephone rang—a long, piercing ring. I heard Bartley’s voice, then he called my name.

I hurried through the door and over to the stand. As I picked up the receiver I wondered who could be calling me at this time of the night. I said “Hullo.” There came back a low, husky voice.

“Mr. Pelt, this is Lorraine Mason. I just heard something from my maid a few moments ago—I thought you ought to know about it.”

The voice died away for a second, in which I made some comment. Then it came again:

“My maid told me that Mrs. Campbell’s maid is going to leave the island to-morrow morning on the first boat. It goes at six. She has been with Lura for over three years.”

Again the voice hesitated. Then came the words:

“She told my maid she was going south. Why she is going, I do not know. But I thought you ought to know.”
CHAPTER XII

It was Bartley who roused me at five o'clock the next morning. I woke to feel the heavy pressure of his hand upon my shoulder—shaking me. For a moment, half asleep, I wondered what it could mean. Then remembering we were to be at the ferry slip by six, I leaped from the bed and started to dress.

As we slowly drove past the silent cottages, I realized that there was after all a compensation in early rising. After the rain the lawns were cool blankets of vivid resh green in the morning sun. The trees, with the roses which were in every yard, were refreshingly clean. Robins were to be seen everywhere, hopping gaily over the grass.

It was one of those calm clear mornings which often come after a storm. The sun was bright, giving promise of a rather warm day. Not a breath of air was stirring, and several times I had glimpsed the sea—a sea as calm and motionless as a pond. The street was deserted, with not a car to be seen anywhere.

Past the silent houses, we drove. Soon the village came in sight. Skirting the deserted commons, we ran past the few small stores flanked by the two white churches. The village dropped behind us as we turned to run across to the farther side of the island.

At peace with the world, I leaned back in the seat and lighted a cigarette. At the ferry we would pick
up the chief with one of his constables. What the maid might say after she had been taken to the police station was a problem. But it was my idea she might talk—and perhaps talk a great deal.

Topping a slight hill, we had our first view of the Sound. It lay a wide expanse of motionless water: In the centre of the channel the white lighthouse, with its red top, loomed as a lonely sentinel. A few miles away was the mainland, the coast line standing high and clear. A boat was slowly steaming in the direction of New York, its black sides apparently motionless in the distance.

At the edge of the ferry slip, we parked the car; then climbed out. The old-fashioned ferryboat was in the slip and several men were moving listlessly down the wharf. The little house which served as a ticket office was deserted. There would be few passengers on the first trip to the mainland.

Walking down the rather dilapidated wharf, we went past the gangplank which ran to the steamer, to stand beside a pile of freight. It lacked almost twenty minutes of the time scheduled for the boat to start. There was no sign of the chief, and it was my impression he had not arrived. There had been no signs of another car.

Only one individual was in sight—a porter, half asleep, leaned against a packing case on the lower deck of the boat. A black cat appeared from some mysterious hiding place to walk slowly over to the edge of the wharf. Sea gulls drifted in and out from the shore, engaged in what appeared to be a hopeless task of finding a breakfast.
For a while I studied the water. When I turned it was to see a small coupe drive to the edge of the wharf, then stop. It needed but a glance to recognize the tall figure which hurried out of the car—the tall figure of the chief with a man behind him. As he caught a glimpse of Bartley, his pace quickened.

Reaching out side, he barked out a question. He was assured that, so far as we knew, no one had come down to the boat. Turning to his constable, he sent him to look over the ferry. For a while we talked, the conversation being of no particular importance. The chief appeared to be a little nervous. He kept sending an anxious glance back over the road, a look in which there was a hint of uneasiness.

There came the first warning whistle from the boat. The long shrill notes went reverberating across the water. I began to wonder if we had not come on a wild-goose chase. Only one passenger had put in an appearance—an old man who had feebly walked down the gangplank. And it was almost time for the boat to start.

Turning, I glanced down the length of the wharf. The road ran for a few hundred yards, then curved to be lost from sight. But as I looked, I saw a car coming around the bend—a large sedan which made a wide circle before the wharf, then stopped. The next second, loaded down with hatboxes and bags, there emerged a coloured woman.

The chauffeur made no effort to assist the woman with her luggage. As soon as she had left the machine, it started to crawl forward, and a moment later had vanished around the turn. We watched the woman go
into the ticket office, saw her come out and hurry toward the boat. Just as she was about to go down the gangplank, the chief stepped to her side.

She was a young woman, also a very black one. As the chief touched her shoulder she whirled around in alarm. I could have sworn that the dusky face grew pale when she sighted the uniform. Her eyes became large, her mouth opened. There came a trembling note in her voice as she stammered:

“What do you want, man?”

“You are not going on that boat,” was the short reply. “I am going to take you back to the station.”

For a second the woman stared in astonishment. Her glance wandered from the chief, to rest for a second upon the boat. It was an appealing, frightened look which told that she would have given a great deal if she could only have been in the shelter of its deck. Then her eyes came back to the chief. They grew larger and larger as if the full significance of the chief’s uniform had come over her for the first time. Then she gasped:

“You can’t take me to no old station, boss. I ain’t done nothing.”

The chief grinned as he studied the frightened coloured girl. There was a kindly note in his voice.

“Don’t worry. Nobody is going to harm you. But there is a good bit of information we expect to get out of you in the next few hours.”

There shrieked from the steamer the last loud blast of the whistle. A young man came running down the wharf to slide down to the deck. The gangplank was pulled in. The constable came hurrying along the
lower deck and jumped to the safety of the wharf. The ropes were drawn aboard, and the ferry began to edge its way out toward the channel.

The coloured maid watched the boat drift away as if she could not comprehend that she was not, on its deck. It was my belief she did not understand why she had been detained. Her expression was not only one of fright, but also one of great perplexity. As the boat drifted away from the dock, she turned to the chief.

He gave her no time to speak. With a motion, he caused the woman to walk ahead of him as they started for the small coupe. Behind them, struggling with the hatboxes and bags, was the constable. What it was all about, the man did not know. One look at his face told that.

We allowed the chief to drive ahead of us, following a few hundred yards in the rear. His old car might be nothing in appearance, but it had plenty of spe... It rattled up the slight hill, then sped down the other side as if he were in a hurry.

As we followed behind him, I began to wonder what information we might secure from the maid. In a sense, she had not been placed under arrest. The chief, expecting her mistress might come to the boat, had secured a warrant. But it had not been necessary to use it. Her ignorance, the fear which the average person has of the police, had been all that had been needed. She had allowed the boat to depart without her, and had made no protest.

It was my idea the maid had no idea why she had been, as she thought, arrested. She was a simple
coloured girl, not much over twenty. Not the intelligent, pert type one often sees, but a slovenly, and, I would say, unemotional woman. The surprise and bewilderment in her face had been real. I did not believe she had the slightest idea why she had been detained.

The commons was still deserted when we arrived in front of the town hall. Parking our car behind the chief's coupé, we followed him down the boardwalk and into the front room which was used as a police station. Though the door had been unlocked, there was no one there. Without stopping, the chief went to the smaller room in the rear.

The constable dumped all the bags upon the floor, turning to linger by the door. I knew he was curious to discover what it was all about. But the chief with a wave of his hand dismissed him. Then, noticing the door had been left open, he walked across the floor and slammed it shut. As the bang of the door rang through the room, the woman gave a start.

"I ain't done nothing at all, mister," came her frightened voice.

The chief turned to Bartley, his face appealing. It was clear he hardly knew what was to be done next. After all, the telephone conversation, in which he had been asked to be at the dock in time to see that Mrs. Cambell's maid was prevented from leaving the island, had been short; a brief conversation of the previous night. The chief himself was not certain what it was all about.

There came Bartley's voice as he turned to the frightened coloured girl. His tone was gentle:

"Let us see, your name is Mary?"
The woman nodded, stammering out some sort of a reply. Her gaze fastened upon Bartley’s face, and something she saw caused her to become less nervous.

“Well, Mary,” he said, “we are not going to do anything with you. But we wanted to ask you a few questions. That is why we could not let you take the early boat. Why was Mrs. Cambell sending you south?”

The maid started to shake her head. Then came her voice, the words fairly tumbling over each other.

“I don’t know, mister. She done ask’d me last night if I would not want to go home and see my mother. Said she would pay my fare and the expenses. I don’t know why she said that. But she then says I better go this morning. Better go on the early boat.”

“You don’t know why she offered to send you south?”

“No, mister, I don’t. It just come out of her mouth last night. I was to go back to Cleveland after she leaves here.”

She was telling the truth. There was sincerity behind the frightened voice, honesty in the rapid speech. Her eyes were rolling in a bewildered manner. I felt sure the woman had no idea why her mistress had suddenly offered to send her south.

“Now, Mary, did you find your mistress unconscious the night before last?”

Startled by his knowledge, her eyes rolled wildly as she slowly nodded her head. Then came her voice:

“Yes, sir. ’Bout one o’clock, may be a bit later; she comes in the house and hurries up the stairs. When I went in the room, she was on the bed—fainted.”
"What did she say when she came to?"

"Nothing much. Something about being frightened. Her clothes were all wet, just covered with sand. Guess she was frightened—she sure acted scared."

"That is the second time this week you found your mistress unconscious?"

She answered at once; though there was no doubt she wondered how the information had been secured, yet she was too frightened to try and keep anything back. Admitting that on the night of the murder her mistress had entered the house close to eleven, she insisted she had no idea where she had been.

Under Bartley's questioning, it was brought out that her mistress's shoes were covered with mud, her dress stained and wet. When asked if Mrs. Cambell had acted frightened, she said, as she put it, "She was some scared." What had frightened her or where she had been, she did not have the slightest idea.

After all I could see the maid knew very little. She had a certain loyalty and did not wish to injure the woman who had been kind to her. She had no idea what the questions meant, and had answered promptly enough, but she knew nothing.

To my mind what she had told was damaging. I was convinced the woman whose pleading voice had floated up to me in the dark was the mistress of this coloured maid. The time she returned to her house, the lateness of the hour, coupled with the fact that I had recognized the voice over the wire, was enough for me. And she might know something at least about Van Dike's sudden death.

As if satisfied the maid could tell us no more, Bart-
ley motioned for the chief and myself to come into the larger room. As we started for the door, the woman wailed a question. Could she please go? The disclosure that she would have to remain where she was for a while at least was far from pleasing.

Closing the door behind us, Bartley turned to the desk, which was near the door. The chief was curious, his face a mingled mass of emotions. I realized he must be wondering the purport of the questions which Bartley had been asking. Wondering, after all, why he had been requested to prevent the maid from leaving on the early boat.

Briefly he was told what we had discovered. Of the information given us by Lorraine Mason, of my adventures of the night. The last startled him more than anything else, and he half shook his head when I told of calling up the Cambell house and asking for the maid's mistress. My certainty that Mrs. Cambell's voice was the same as that of the woman I had heard in the darkness rather bothered him.

"You are asking me to think she was mixed up in the murder?" he questioned.

"I think she was," Bartley replied. "She tried to get her maid off the island so no one would ever hear of the times she came into the house, frightened and fainting. What she knows is a problem—one, I think, we will solve before the day is ended."

He paused for a while, then asked the chief how long it would take him to produce Harold Nash. We were told that with any luck he ought to have him at the town hall around noon. It would be a trip of several hours at least to reach the small shack in which the
youth was presumed to be hiding. If they found
him around the place when they reached it, the chief
thought they could get back at twelve.

It was decided the police official was to set out at
once and go for him. He was to say nothing, answer
no questions the boy might ask. Simply bring him to
the station. There we would be waiting, and he was
told Mrs. Cambell would be with us. The last remark
surprised the chief, and though he asked what it might
mean, was told to wait until noon.

What to do with the maid was a problem. In a
sense, we did not need her any longer. The chief was
of the opinion he might let her go; but Bartley did not
agree with this idea. Informing the officer that we
would know better after twelve if she could be set free,
he made a suggestion: Let a constable keep his eyes
upon her until we all returned at noon.

We walked out of the building together. The sun
was higher in the sky, the air a little warmer. The
chief found his constable lounging by the door, and
spoke a few words with him. Then we walked down to
the cars. To my surprise we did not climb into ours.
Standing on the semi-sidewalk, we watched the chief
drive away.

I had thought we were going with him, but Bartley
allowed him to depart without making the slightest
suggestion that we should follow. When the car had
vanished, he turned, remarking that we might have
breakfast in the one restaurant the island boasted. It
was, he informed me, only a few doors away.

Wondering a little why we had not gone with the
chief, I followed him down the sidewalk. In front of a
small building, he paused for me to catch up with him, then went through the door. As we came into the room, the odour of hot coffee came to our senses—coffee mingled with the smell of bacon.

It was an extremely small eating place, one of the smallest I have ever seen. A little counter with four stools in front filled one side of the room, and two small tables filled the other. Behind the partition at the rear we could glimpse the moving figure of a woman—a motherly-appearing woman who was at our side almost before the door slammed shut.

It was a simple meal, eggs and bacon; but everything was fresh, while the coffee was delicious. For some reason Bartley was in no hurry, so we lingered over the meal. When the last cup of coffee had been drained, he took his cigar case and offered me a smoke. Then for a few moments we sat back, content to watch the smoke drift away to an open window.

It was almost nine when we left the tiny room. As we climbed into the car with Bartley at the wheel, there was a faint suspicion in my mind that I knew where we were going. Back toward the summer colony headed the machine. Past the first large estate we went, continuing until we turned from the road to go up a winding drive.

The house before which we stopped was not extra large, but it was plain to see it was a new house. The red bricks of which it was built had ivy starting up the sides, but the ivy had not had time to grow very high, and barely went above the level of the windows of the first floor.

It stood far back from the road, with the rear of
the building facing the sea. The lawn was the largest I had seen at the point—a vast green lawn, broken by a deep-sunken garden to our right; a garden shielded from view by a hedge, through which an opening gave a glimpse of a little fountain throwing its sparkling spray in the air.

We had to wait several minutes before the door was opened. In fact, Bartley rang three times, and was on the verge of ringing again, but just a his hand went forth for the bell, we heard someone fumbling with the latch. The door opened, and a maid gave us a decidedly questioning glance. It was easy to see she did not approve of callers so early in the morning.

At Bartley’s question, though it sounded more like a command, that we might see Mrs. Cambell, the maid hesitated. I knew she was on the point of saying, either that the woman was not in or was not up, when something caused her to change her mind. Grudgingly she admitted her mistress was in, and allowed us to enter. Then as Bartley took a card and scribbled a sentence on it, she agreed to take it to the woman of the house.

Taking us into a small conservatory, she vanished. From the brief glimpse of the rooms we had passed, I realized the house was richly furnished. The draperies at the windows were imported, the pictures, of which we had but a glance, were by famous artists. Even the flowers and ferns in the conservatory told of wealth—not only wealth but exquisite taste.

We had a long wait. As the minutes slipped away, I pushed aside the long drooping leaves of a tall fern to look through the window. The lawn stretched away to a small grey shingled cottage—a cottage sur-
rounded with flower gardens. Roses were climbing up
to the roof of the grey cottage, roses flaming red in
the morning sun.

There came the sound of someone coming down the
hall, and I turned toward the door. A woman paused
before entering the conservatory, then after one quick
look which took us both in, entered the room. A
woman who was indeed very beautiful, with a shapely
figure and golden hair, but a woman whose face worked
nervously and whose eyes fell with a frightened ex-
pression to the card in her hand.

"You wished to see me?" came the questioning voice.
Though she did her best to keep the tone calm, it
trembled a little.

For a moment Bartley's eyes rested upon the anxious
face.

"I am afraid the time has come, Mrs. Cambell, when
you must explain several things."

The red faded from the smooth cheeks, to return a
deeper crimson. The golden head was thrown back
as she spoke. The voice was cold, but despite herself,
it wavered a little.

"I am afraid I do not understand you."

A half smile crossed Bartley's lips. Pulling a chair
to the woman's side, he bowed as with a gesture he
motioned for her to be seated. Hardly knowing what
she did, she dropped into the chair. I could see that
the hand which held Bartley's card was trembling, and
a slight shudder swept over her body.

"I think perhaps you will understand me," he said.
The tone was courteous, though something caused the
woman to cast one swift glance at his face. She half
started to speak, but checked the words which threatened to pass her lips. For a moment Dartley waited, then suggested:

"We want you to tell us what you know of the murder of Mr. Van Dike."

With a leap the woman was on her feet. As she faced the door, I had the half idea for a second that she would rush away. But though her body made an instinctive motion to leave the room, she checked it. Whirling around she faced us. Her face was pale, the blue eyes frightened. The glance was one of surprise filled with horror—horror mingled with doubt.

"Are you trying to insult me?" was her stammering question. "If my husband were only at home—"

The words trailed away as she half fell into the nearest chair. In the silence which came, I saw her tremble as she bit her lips. There came Bartley's voice, soft and gentle.

"Mrs. Cambell, we know you would not wish your husband to know anything. We are trying to make it possible for you to avoid any publicity. But unless you are willing to answer my questions, I am afraid we will have to use other methods—methods that will make it impossible to keep your name out of the papers."

The hands played with the blue silk negligée. It started to slide away from one of the white shoulders—a shoulder beautifully moulded. Nervously she pushed it back in place. Without raising her eyes, she tried to speak. The words did not come very easily. The voice was so low that we found it difficult to hear.

"What do you know?"

"We know you were up on the beach night before
last. Knowledge were trying to recover letters which were in a man's possession."

The eyes were raised from the floor. There came a searching glance. One which rested upon Bartley's face as if she was endeavouring to decide if he could be trusted. Assured by what she saw, there came a faint sigh.

"I will tell you all I know." She paused; then burst out, "But if my husband knows, I am lost. You will keep it a secret, won't you? Please, please promise you will. After all, I have done nothing wrong."

There was no doubt of the sincerity in the pleading voice. Whatever she had to tell, it could be seen that her experience of the last few days had left her a nervous, trembling woman. There were lines under the fine eyes, and even when she was silent her face twitched. Something had left a mark upon her.

Bartley's promise that he might be able to keep everything a secret gave her courage. A flush came over the pale face as she straightened in her chair. Her hands played with the blue silk for a while, then in a low voice she started to speak. As she swept into her story, the voice grew louder, as if she had recovered confidence.

It was not an unusual story which poured from her lips. It went back to the time she was eighteen, when as an inexperienced girl she spent a summer at Narragansett Pier. The story of a summer's infatuation. In a sense, it had simply been the first love affair of a young girl—a love affair which had resulted in her writing a number of more or less indiscreet letters.

When she had returned to the city after the summer
was over, there had come a discovery which left her a
shamed, heartbroken girl. The man had told her he
was the son of a well-known Philadelphia doctor. She
had discovered he was simply the manager of one of the
half-dozen gambling houses which the Pier of that time
contained. As she put it, instead of being a gentle-
man, he was a gambler.

Though all this had happened at least nine years
before, the memory still caused her to flush red with
embarrassment. Over the years, the thought of how
she had placed her trust in one who had proved un-
worthy still shocked her. Then, as she put it, she had
been an inexperienced young girl in the rosy glamour of
her first love affair. The awakening had been a sad
one.

"I presume you never heard about your letter's until
a short time ago?"

She nodded. "I had placed the affair in the back
of my memory. Then one day shortly, after we had
come here for the summer, Mr. Van Dike called to see
me. My husband was in Cleveland at the time—"

The recollection caused her to flush red. Throwing
back her head, she bravely met Bartley's sympathetic
glance. Then she continued:

"I was rather surprised to see him. He was not the
type of man one placed on one's list of acquaintances.
Of course, the summer colony is small; naturally we all
meet more or less informally. But I was surprised
when the maid brought me up his card."

Again she paused. Then she told of her horror and
surprise when the lawyer told her that a client of his
had placed a very delicate matter in his hands. At
first she had no idea what the man was speaking about. He told her there was a package of twenty letters—letters written nine years ago. For a consideration his client would turn them over to her; but unless she made an offer for them, they would either be sent to her husband or given to a sensational newspaper.

Both three's would mean the ruin of all she loved. I gathered that though she loved her husband, she was a little afraid of him. She told us it would be useless to confess to him her youthful foolishness. He was a stern man, priding himself upon his justice; but I could see that his idea of justice had nothing to do with mercy or forgiveness.

The sum of money demanded—twenty thousand dollars—was more than she could raise. Having an income of her own, she had a few thousand dollars on hand. Van Dike offered to take five thousand as a first payment, and she promised to raise the rest before the summer was over.

The lawyer had apologized for his part in the affair. He had said that when he discovered the letters, he had persuaded the man to allow him to handle the affair. He assured her his only interest was to see that no harm came upon her. Told her it was a disagreeable task, but if the letters had fallen into someone else's hands, there would have been no way to avoid exposure.

He had seemed so sympathetic that for a few days she had believed him. Then came the discovery that she would have to raise more money at once. Harold Nash had always been a friend of hers. One day the young man found her crying in the garden, and before
she knew it the story had come out. His first impulse was to go and, as the youth said, "beat up Van Dike." She managed to persuade him that this was a thing that must not be done. The money must be paid the letters recovered.

She had money coming at the end of the summer, enough to pay the remaining fifteen thousand, but at the moment she was a few thousand dollars short of the amount needed. From somewhere Harold secured a few thousand dollars which he gave her. She paid this with the rest of the amount to Van Dike, and asked for the letters. To her surprise, he told her that they were in New York, and that he would bring them down the next time he went to the city.

The day he was killed he had telephoned that if she would meet him shortly after eight, he would give her the letters. By this time she had sensed something in his attitude which alarmed her—a personal interest which caused her to be afraid. For secrecy, the meeting place had been fixed for the other side of the island, by the side of the broken-down barn.

All that day she had wondered what she had better do... Afraid to go alone, there was but one person she could take into her confidence—Harold. It was agreed that he would drive her to the place, endeavour to reach it ahead of Van Dike, and would hide in the dark shed of the building. There was only one difficulty. His sister was giving a dance that evening, and his absence might cause comment. But he promised he would go with her.

But early in the afternoon, Van Dike had telephoned he would be unable to meet her that evening. She
had called Harold and given him the information. Then shortly after seven the lawyer had phoned again, saying the appointment would take place. She had tried to put it off until the next night without success. At seven-thirty she had again called young Nasón, told him she would have to see Van Dike that evening.

We had listened without saying a word. The woman's voice had grown stronger as she went along. But it was a weary voice, with an undercurrent of hopelessness in it. She leaned restlessly back in the chair, finding it impossible to keep the same position longer than a moment or two. Once or twice her face grew very red, as if some very unpleasant recollection was crossing her mind.

"You got to the barn before Van Dike arrived?" Bartley asked.

"Yes. Harold told me he had watched the lawyer drive out of the yard, and then came here directly afterwards. But we were at the barn at least fifteen minutes before he arrived. Harold drove his car inside, shut off the engine and turned out the lights. Then we waited. Soon we heard a car approach and drive up on the grass. It was perhaps twenty feet from the barn."

"And you went out to Van Dike's machine?"

"Yes. Harold agreed to remain in the barn."

"Did he have a gun?"

She gave a shudder, remaining silent until the question was repeated. Then came a slight nod of the golden head.

"When you got in Van Dike's machine, where was he sitting?"
"To my left behind the wheel."

"What happened after you got in the car? I presume you discovered he did not have the letters with him?"

"Yes, that was what I found out. He made some excuse. I think he had been drinking a little. Then he tried to put his arm around me, and I shook it loose."

The memory was not a happy one, and a look of disgust swept across her face. Then, as we waited, she continued:

"He began to talk wildly. Said I could have the letters returned that evening and the money, if I would agree to divorce my husband and marry him. I was so startled that I could not say a word. Then, then he tried to kiss me—and—"

The voice trailed away to silence. Her blue eyes flashed in anger. Her disgust caused her to forget for a moment that the lawyer was no longer living. But as, she glanced at Bartley's kindly face, she remembered. Her face became white, the voice frightened.

"And then, as I was trying to throw his arm from off my shoulders—then—"

"Yes—?" came the low question.

She raised her head, slowly shaking it.

"I don't know just what happened. There came the sound of a loud report of a gun. It seemed to be almost in my ears. I saw Van Dike commence to slide down in the car. For a second I was unable to move. Then I wrenched open the door at my side and jumped to the ground. Just what I did I could not say. I started to run—run in a maddened frenzy down through the
fields. I must have run a mile or so before I stopped. Then I simply sank to the ground and did not move for some time."

"You heard nothing before the shot was fired?"

"Not a thing. And I saw nothing when I ran out of the machine. In fact, the first thing I saw was the lights of a car coming up the road. I had risen to my feet and walked along some distance in the road. When I saw the lights approaching, I darted off the road and hid in the tall grass."

That must have been the moment we had seen the dim figure which had melted into the shadows of the fields. But this fact was of little importance. The woman’s story of the shooting of Van Dike was the real thing. There was no doubt in my mind she was telling the truth. Anyone who had listened to her sincere, frightened voice, or who had watched her face would have known she had told the truth. But who had killed the man?

"You thought Harold had killed him?" came Bartley’s question.

She raised her head and looked at us. There was fear in her eyes, but not for herself.

"I did not know he was killed then. But I did think Harold had left the barn, crept to the side of the car and had listened. I thought he shot him. Who else could have done it?"

Bartley made no reply to the implication; instead his eyes rested thoughtfully upon the woman; then he half smiled. A smile she did not observe.

"What did you do after you darted into the fields?"

"I wanted to get home. In my excitement I had
gone past the road which went across the island. To follow the one I was on meant going down to very near the ferry and then home—almost seven miles. So keeping in the fields, I started back to the cross roads. When I reached it, an automobile was driving away from the trees. So I waited a little while and then came out on the road. To my surprise I saw a car parked near the trees, and recognized it as Mr. Van Dike’s machine.

"I was stunned for a moment. My first thought was that he had not been injured by the shot, and had driven the car down from the barn. But something made me afraid. I crossed the road and went to the shelter of the field. For a while I just looked at the machine."

Her story was linking up with what we knew. She had been the woman we had seen leaving the road. She must have approached the cross roads at the moment Bartley was driving back for help. The woman was telling the truth—of that I had no doubt.

"Then you crossed over to the machine?"

"I started to; but there was something about the silence and darkness which frightened me. A feeling of horror as if something cruel, something sinister was in the night."

"What were you looking for when you reached your hand through the window in the car?" Bartley asked.

The woman looked at him in astonishment. Her eyes grew very large with wonder. There came her startled voice:

"Why, I never went near the car, Mr. Bartley. I took a few steps toward it; but I was afraid—afraid
of what I might find. I certainly never reached my hand through the window of the car. I never went near it; instead, I turned and started down the cross road."
CHAPTER XIII

We were both startled. I knew then had been no doubt in our minds, after hearing from her own lips that she had approached the car, that it was her hand I had seen clutching at Van Dike’s shoulder. She had just declared she had not gone near the car. Instead, frightened by the darkness, she had turned to rush down the cross road. But whose hand had I seen?

Puzzled, I turned to Bartley. He smiled at my perplexity, though I knew from his own expression that he had also been taken aback. Seeing our astonishment, the woman gave us an uneasy, worried glance. Then came her voice, insisting she had not gone near the car.

Bartley did not carry the matter any further. Instead, he asked if she had seen Harold Nash after hearing the shot. She shook her head. From the moment she had tumbled in frightened frenzy from the car, she had not set her eyes on the young man.

I knew, however, that in her heart she believed he was the murderer. Believed it, although she tried hard to show us she had no such idea. Putting myself in her place, realizing she knew the young man had a gun, I could not see how she could have thought anything else. The case against Willard Nash’s son looked blacker than ever.

“Now suppose you tell us of your experience of the night before last.”
She nodded her agreement. Though there must have been wonder as to how Bartley knew she had been on the beach, yet her face expressed no astonishment at the question. She had become calmer, the nervous look of fear had left. Bartley’s manner had given her confidence.

It was Van Dike’s secretary, Barr, whom she had been talking with. I failed to understand why I had not recognized his voice at the inquest. He had called her on the phone, saying he knew she had been with the lawyer the night of the murder. There had been a half threat that unless she met him, there would be trouble. He suggested coming to her house. But she was afraid of the servants, fearful they might be overheard. She had mentioned the little inlet where the sand curved into the shore.

There was not much else to tell after this. I must have arrived above them almost at the moment they met. What the man wanted, of course, was money, though he was willing to wait until the summer was over, and he had the letters.

After all, it had been a simple story. I could picture the horrible summer she had gone through, understand her fear and dread. The last few days must have been a terrible experience for the high-strung woman—constant fear of exposure, then the discovery that Van Dike’s secretary knew her secret.

She made a little hopeless gesture of her hand as her voice trembled. The face which sent an appealing look at Bartley had become calm, as if she had taken a sudden resolution.

"It has done me good to confess, Mr. Bartley" she
said with a pathetic attempt to smile. "I know there is no way I can keep this story hidden. I see I have been foolish. I should have told my husband of the first visit I received from Mr. Van Dike. He never would have forgiven me, of course, but it would have been better than what happened. After all, I was a young girl when I wrote those letters. They are silly, indiscreet, but that is all."

"What was the name of the man who received the letters?"

"His name was Pain, Frank Pain."

There was an exclamation of disgust from his lips. There was a look of pity as he turned to Mrs. Cambell.

"If it was Frankie Pain, the gambler—why he has been dead for the last six months." He turned to me. "You remember, Pelt, we read in the paper of his being shot."

I recalled reading of the death of the man. Some crazed husband, whose home he had destroyed, had killed him. Then I gave a start. The story Van Dike had told her had been untrue. There had been no client pushing him on. He must have settled up the estate of the dead gambler, and something caused him to connect the letters with the woman whose summer home was near his own.

Bartley slowly rose to his feet, I following his example. Glancing at his watch, he turned to Mrs. Cambell.

"There may be a chance that your story can be kept secret. It will have to be told to the coroner and the police chief. But if all goes well, it may be possible
that others will never know what you have told us. But there is one thing you must do. Be at the police station a little before twelve."

She rose to her feet, frightened by his last request. Told the request did not mean what it might imply, she calmed down. But the next remark—that she would see Harold Nash—was even more of a torture.

"Will he be arrested?" she begged.

"I hope not," was the enigmatic reply.

She led us out of the house herself, promising to be at the town hall by twelve. When we climbed into the car, Bartley said we were going back to the house for a moment. I made some reply, adding we had to be at the police station by noon, only to be told there was plenty of time.

He was in no hurry, driving slowly. Sprawled back against the seat, I thought over the story we had just heard. There seemed no question that the woman had told the truth. But what she had said had only increased the feeling within my mind. I was sure Harold Nash was going to have a very uncomfortable time around noon.

When we reached the house, I was told that Bartley would be out in fifteen minutes. Climbing out of the car, I wandered around the side of the house. There in the middle of the lawn I saw our Airedale gravely watching a big black cat. And when I saw him I laughed.

Trouble was the only dog I had ever known who liked cats. More than once he had walked up to one in a friendly spirit only to receive a fiery reception. This always appeared to puzzle him. Why the cats
refused to accept him as a playmate must have been a thing he wondered about.

As he saw me, he gave a quick wag of his stumpy tail. Then his glance went back to the cat. It was a big animal, its body tense as t. eyed the dog a few feet away. I watched them for a few minutes, until the time the dog concluded to walk over to the cat. As he approached, the black animal sprang in the air, whirling round at him with a sudden spit, then scamp- pered away. As the cat vanished, the dog turned to me, and I knew the look in his eyes was one of aston- ishment.

I played with the Airedale for a while until Bartley called out from the car. Telling the dog he could not go with us, I went back to the machine. Bartley had left me the driver's position. As I took the wheel, I noticed a thin, square package upon his knees. And I also noticed that there was a very satisfied expression upon his face.

The clock on the dashboard stood at eleven-forty- five as we drove up in front of the town hall. No sooner had we stepped from the machine than a small coupé stopped beside our larger one. A second later Mrs. Cambell was by our side.

She was far less nervous than she had been earlier in the morning. The brown sport suit with the matching hat was of a very attractive design. A touch of rouge had been given to the smooth cheeks, and the slight colour had driven away her pallor. There was just a slight hint of dread in her manner as she followed us into the first room of the police station.

As usual, the room was empty, but from behind the
closed door came the rumble of voices. Crossing the floor, we threw the door ajar to discover the coroner sitting by the desk, and to my surprise talking with the chief. I had supposed that Miner had gone to the other end of the island to find Harold Nash.

The doctor gave a wide grin as we came in, his eyes travelling past us to rest upon Mrs. Cambell. In an instant he had leaped to his feet, saying something in an undertone to the red-headed police officer. The young man turned in his chair, gave one quick glance, then also came to his feet.

As he walked over to our side, he told us he had concluded to let the constable bring in the oil man’s son. He expected them to arrive at any moment now. Closing the door, we found a chair for the woman, and as she noticed the cigars being placed aside, she begged that we would smoke.

The small eyes of the doctor had a question in their depths. I knew he was wondering what the wife of one of the wealthy summer visitors was doing in the police station. Not often did the dingy room have a visitor of such beauty as it had at the present moment. Her presence made the space attractive.

With an assuring look in Mrs. Cambell’s direction, Bartley rather hurriedly retold the story we had listened to several hours before. It was a much condensed version, though all the important details were included: It proved very interesting to the doctor and the chief, also rather startling.

Leaning forward in their chairs, they listened without speaking. The round, fat face of the physician was without expression, though once in a while there
would come a gleam in his eyes. No doubt his profession had accustomed him to strange sights and odd stories. But the chief was younger, more emotional. His face grew long with astonishment as Bartley filled in the details of the shooting of the lawyer.

When the tale had ended, I could see the chief was not convinced. His eyes rested upon the woman. She was sitting upon the edge of the rough chair. She had removed her hat and her gleaming hair was a crown of gold. Not only her story but the mere fact of her presence bothered him.

When Bartley had finished, there was no response for a while. The doctor placed the stub of his cigar in a tray and slowly lighted another. His eyes fixed themselves upon the narrow rim of grey ash which began to form at the end of the cigar. After a while he turned to the woman.

"Mrs. Cambell, how was Mr. Van Dike sitting when you were startled by the sound of the shot?"

"Why," came the low voice, "I would say he was turned a little in my direction. Perhaps his back was at the window. Not really his back, but you know what I mean. He was turned around a little in the seat. The window was down. He was at my left."

The coroner nodded as if confirmed in some opinion which he held. The chief jumped to his feet. With a request to Mrs. Cambell that she excuse us, he motioned that we go into the other room. When he had closed the door, he whirled around to Bartley:

"Do you believe that story?" was his excited question.

"I think I do," was the calm reply.
But the chief was not so certain. He reminded us that if she had told the truth, there were two persons who could have killed Van Dike. What was more, now we had a motive for the crime. He grew almost eloquent as he pictured the woman killing the lawyer, in an effort to keep his mouth closed regarding her letters. His face grew red with excitement while he talked.

"Then you must believe the woman first killed him, then drove the car from the barn to the shelter of the trees, and also placed the gun in his hand," was Bartley’s dry comment.

The remark caused the chief to become thoughtful. He said nothing, but walked the length of the room to glance out of a dusty window. Then he hurried back to our side. Before he reached us, there came the sarcastic voice of the coroner.

"Miner, don’t lose your fool head. Don’t give that woman credit for more brains than she has—and I don’t think that’s so very many."

The sarcasm in the physician’s voice was reflected by the ironical smile around his lips. Bartley smiled. The doctor gave a shrug of his fat shoulders.

"Mr. Bartley, if that woman had any brains she never would have allowed Van Dike to blackmail her as he did—to make her life a hell all summer. The letters, from what you say, contained nothing that would have done her much harm."

"She was afraid of her husband."

"Hell!" was the disgusted retort. "What beautiful woman was ever afraid of her husband. Besides, that stick she has got is nothing to be scared of. She acted
like a damn fool over the letters—showed no brains at all. That’s why I say she did not have intelligence enough to put the revolver in Van Dike’s hand after he had been shot. Somebody with brains did that!”

Bartley nodded his agreement, half starting to speak. But the chief prevented him from saying what he intended.

“Doc, that gun belonged to young Nash.”

We all nodded. After several moments of excited comment upon the part of the chief, it was agreed that if the woman had killed the lawyer, Harold must have let her have his gun. I saw Bartley smile at this, and wondered why the idea was amusing. In the end there came some sort of agreement. All of us had decided the woman in the other room had told the truth.

It was almost half-past twelve. By the anxious glances which the chief kept casting out of the dusty window, I knew he was becoming a little nervous. His official had been expected to return at noon time; the fact that he was thirty minutes late was bothering the chief. He walked up and down the room, drawing nervously at the cigarette he was smoking. All at once he paused:

“Mr. Bartley, our town solicitor gave me a bit of information this morning. You know he is the only lawyer on the island. I don’t think what he told me is of any importance, but he said that Van Dike had given him a memorandum of a new will he wished drawn up. It was to have been signed the day after the man was killed.”

My first thought was that this was odd. A lawyer of Van Dike’s reputation did not often have a will
drawn up by an obscure country lawyer. Then I realized that, after all, there was no one else on the island who could have done it. Van Dike would not be apt to draw his own will. Lawyers did once in a while, but it was not presumed to be the proper thing.

For some reason the information appeared to interest Bartley. He asked many questions. Did the young lawyer know the contents of the will he was to draw up? We were told he did. There were gifts to charity, to several individuals whose names he had not heard; and five thousand dollars to Van Dike’s secretary.

But this was not what Bartley wished to know. The will would, of course, do away with a previous one. Why was it drawn? Why did not Van Dike wait until he returned to the city? But on these points the chief could give him no information. In fact, he seemed rather surprised when he saw that Bartley was at all interested in what the town solicitor had told him.

There came the sound of a car stopping in front of the door. The chief rushed over to the window, giving one quick look outside. I saw him bend forward as a pleased grin spread over his face. There came the sound of a hand upon the knob of the door; then it was opened and two people entered the room.

But I had eyes only for one—for the young man who was half thrust through the door; a young man whose blue suit was soiled and wrinkled, whose coat was partly torn; a young man whose tanned face badly needed shaving. He had no hat, and the black hair looked as if it had not been combed for many days.

As the door was closed by the constable, the youth
took two steps into the room to cast an angry look at the chief. The boy's face was flushed with rage, though I had the idea that much of the anger was assumed. There was an uneasy look in the dark eyes—eyes which passed over the chief, then turned to sweep the rest of us in a quick glance.

With his head thrown back, his face flushed, the young man allowed his glance to travel slowly back to the chief, then passed on to the fat figure of the doctor. His lips were closed in a tense, tight line. The soiled hands were clenched shut. Then, his eyes travelled to the centre of the room to rest in astonishment upon Bartley. When he saw him, he gave a start of surprise and the unshaven cheeks flushed crimson.

"Harold," came Bartley's low voice.

The boy turned to the chief. His eyes flashed, his voice was shaking as he yelled out:

"What in the devil do you mean by arresting me?"

"I had to arrest you," came the reply. "There was no other way to get you here. There are a few questions which we wish to ask you. What do you know about Van Dike's murder?"

The youth gave a nervous shudder as his face became white. But he threw back his head as he snapped out:

"What are you talking about? Who killed Van Dike?"

"That's what we want you to tell us," barked out the coroner in a sarcastic voice.

"I don't know anything about it," came the angry retort.

The chief shrugged his shoulders. Walking across
the floor, he stopped in front of the angry boy. His tall figure towered above the slight, dark-haired youth. For a second their glances met; then the chief spoke:

"We know you were by the barn when Van Dike was killed. We know you had a revolver with you. That revolver was found in the lawyer's machine after the murder. We know who was with Van Dike and why she was there. Oh, we know a good many things—want to learn them?"

When Harold Nash had entered the room, he had endeavored to play the part of a rather angry individual—an individual who did not have the slightest conception why the police should show any interest in him. But this had been a bluff, and a hard one to carry through. One could tell the boy was not only nervous, but also was in deadly fear. Just what he was afraid of I could not see at the moment.

The assumption of anger vanished when the chief told him he knew he had been at the barn at the time of the murder. His face had grown pale as the official mentioned that his revolver had been found in the car. But the suggestion that we knew who was in the car with Van Dike shook his composure.

"There was no one in the machine with Van Dike" came the falsehood, told in a low voice.

I saw Bartley motion to the chief, gesturing to the door leading into the other room. Catching the suggestion, the official walked over to the door and flung it open. Then he stood aside so Nash could look through into the small room—look and see the woman seated in a chair by the table.
The young man had anxiously followed the movements of the chief. He watched the door being opened, saw that the police official had stepped to one side. He bent forward to see what might be in the room. Then, as he noticed Mrs. Cambell, his body became tense. I saw his eyes grow larger, as with frightened intensity he stared at the beautiful woman sitting in the chair. He half groaned as he turned to the chief. His hands went out in a despairing gesture.

"All right," broke the trembling voice, "you’ve got me. I killed him."

There fell a silence. In it I heard a horrified gasp from the woman as she rose to stand, holding the table with trembling hands. The coroner’s face did not change in expression, though he slowly nodded. The chief shot a pleased look at Bartley, a look which told he was not surprised by the confession. But upon Bartley’s face was a smile—a curious smile as he turned to glance at the son of his friend.

The boy was standing by the wall. He leaned against it in weary fashion, his body drooping with hopelessness. His face was white, and it was my impression that the weary eyes were ready to weep. The woman stared through the open door, then came slowly across the floor to stand close beside us. From her face I knew that the one thing she had been fearing had just been said.

"You killed him?" Bartley asked gently.

The youth simply nodded. For the moment he was unable to speak. As the chief took a half step toward him, Bartley gave a gesture of command. Then he spoke
"What did ye' do?" he asked.

The young man raised his head. He seemed to be searching for words. At last he found speech.

"I heard Lura, Mrs. Cambell, give a faint cry. I went rushing out—out of the barn. Then shot him—I suppose I hardly knew what I was doing."

The voice trembled away. Again the curious smile played over Bartley's lips.

"What did you do with the revolver after you had killed him?"

"Why—why?" he stammered, "I must have left it in the car."

The doctor gave a sudden start, sending one look to Bartley's face. Then I saw the stubby hand go into his coat pocket and come out with a pipe. Finding the tobacco, he started to pack it slowly and deliberately into the bowl.

"And when you ran away, the machine was standing by the barn?"

The boy nodded, making no other reply. Going into the other room, Bartley started to open the package which had been under his arm when he left the house. As he broke the seals, he asked us to come to his side. He took a revolver from the package and placed it upon the table; then he turned to Harold Nash.

"This is your revolver, Harold—the one you shot Van Dike with?"

The young man bent forward and studied the gun. As he raised his head, he nodded. Suddenly Bartley laughed—a laugh which mystified the chief, who looked at him in astonishment.

"Harold," came the low voice, "your chivalry is
very commendable. But I am afraid I cannot say the same thing for your common sense."

Bartley picked up the revolver. Turning it over and over in his hand, he played with it for a moment. Then he turned to the chief:

"We have just heard Harold say that he shot Van Dike and that this is his revolver. We know it is the gun which was found in the lawyer's hand. Only there is one startling fact—"

As he paused there came the impatient voice of the chief:

"What are you getting at, Mr. Bartley?"

He tossed the gun back upon the desk. Then he smiled.

"Harold's story is a curious one. It happens that the bullet which killed Van Dike was not fired from this revolver."
CHAPTER XIV

It was the chief who spoke first; then only a short ex-
clamation fell from his lips. The doctor said nothing.
For a second I thought he intended to give a low
whistle. No one made any comment. We were all too
surprised to say anything, besides we were watching
Batley's hands.

They were fumbling with the brown covering of the
thin package. Slowly the paper was unfolded, then
swept aside. A number of prints met our eyes, prints
which he studied gravely for a second, after which he
turned to give us the information we were so eagerly
awaiting.

"In criminal cases it never pays to take anything for
granted. We had assumed that when the autopsy
showed that the bullet which killed Van Dike was fired
from a gun of the same calibre as the one he was hold-
ing in his hand, it was all settled. But I was not so
sure. Besides, it is my method to leave nothing to
chance—to check up every fact. So I sent the gun
with the bullet taken from the body to New York."

"Why? broke in the chief.

"One of the helpful discoveries of the last few years
is that science can now tell us if a bullet has been fired
from a suspected gun. Skilled photography and scien-
tific measurement by an expert can tell positively from
what gun a bullet came. It is similar to the way we tell if a typewriter was used to produce a suspected letter. In the typewriter, just as soon as the first letter is struck after the machine comes from the factory, minute, but actual changes start in the type. An expert can tell upon which machine a letter was written. So can a gun expert with a bullet—tell which gun fired the shot.

"Every bullet shows the characteristic markings of the barrel from which it was fired. In some guns, the barrel may be pitted, or it may be worn in certain ways. If so, the bullet will show it. There is also the firing pin; when it hits the rim of the shell it leaves a mark. You remember that the disputed testimony of the Sacco-Vanzetti case was over a bullet. I was told by the expert that it was testimony together with the photographs which were shown the Governor and his commission, which convinced them Sacco was guilty. But look at these prints."

We bent over the table as he spread out the prints. They were the great enlargements of a bullet—a bullet magnified many times. The first two prints contained pictures of what appeared to be the same bullet. There was a line cut into the lead—a dark line a little off centre. We found it in all pictures which were on the first two prints—perhaps ten in all.

But though there were three more prints, and they all contained pictures of magnified bullets, they were not the same as on the first two prints. These bullets were smooth, unmarked. There were no little dark lines off the centre. For several moments we gazed at the pictures, not speaking,
Bartley’s hand went forth to pick up one of the prints. He pointed with a pencil.

"The last pictures I had taken for your information. The bullets which are enlarged were not fired from the gun which was found in Van Dike’s hand. The expert used a gun of his own. You see the photographs reveal that every bullet fired from his gun shows a smooth, almost unbroken surface. Now look at these prints."

He picked up the prints we had first seen, and again the pencil pointed. We bent over the desk.

"The expert in New York to whom I sent the revolver, together with the bullet found in Van Dike’s body, is one of the best men in the world upon this sort of thing. Here are a number of pictures of bullets which he fired from Harold’s revolver. You notice they are different in appearance from those you just looked at. That is because every gun barrel is different than another. There is a little line off the centre, made perhaps because the barrel was pitted a little. Every bullet fired from Harold’s revolver will have that line. Now look at this—"

From a large envelope he produced one print. It was smaller than the others. The pictures were four, and markings told that they were photographs of every side of the same bullet.

"Of course we do not have the gun from which was fired the shot which killed Van Dike. But those four pictures are the magnified impression of the bullet which was taken from his body—the bullet which killed him. At the end of the bullet there is a scratched line, not a heavy line off the centre. It proves that the
bullet, the one taken from Van Dike’s body; was fired from the gun he held in his hand.”

I reached out and took the print which contained the photographs of the bullets the expert had fired from Harold’s gun, and compared these with the pictures made of the bullet taken from the dead man’s body. On one, the pictures of the bullets fired from Harold’s gun showed a dark line off the centre; the other had a little line near the end of the bullet and the sides were slightly ragged. There was no doubt the bullets had been fired from different guns.

The coroner gave a short grunt, saying the pictures were enough for him. Both he and the chief admitted they had heard of photographing bullets, and the chief asked if it had not been done in the Chapdelaine trial. Bartley nodded that this was true, as the officer glanced down again at the prints. Then he turned to young Nash:

“‘Well,’ he drawled, ‘so you never fired that shot after all. What made you tell such a damned lie?’”

The youth flushed. I noticed he did not look at Mrs. Cambell. In fact, it appeared he did not care to meet her eyes. He half started to speak, only to suddenly shut his lips. It was Bartley’s voice which broke the uneasy silence.

“I presume, Harold, you had the idea that Mrs. Cambell killed Van Dike?”

The woman gave a little exclamation; a surprised monosyllable. She acted as if she had never thought anyone would suspect her of the crime. The boy’s face flushed again, his eyes travelling nervously around the room. It was very clear he did not wish to reply.
In his uneasy manner it was apparent that Bartley had hit upon the reason for his confession of the crime.

"She did not do it either," barked out the coroner.

At his remark, Nash whirled around, his eyes searching the woman's face. There was a tender look on the fair face, and I saw her eyes were moist. Their glances held then she went to the boy's side and held out both hands.

"We were both wrong," was her simple statement.

"Harold," inquired Bartley, "there is no doubt you did not fire that shot. It is very lucky that the photographs prove the bullet could not have come from your gun. It might have gone hard with you if it had been otherwise. But we want to know what took place after Mrs. Campbell walked away from your side, and went over to Van Dike's machine."

We soon discovered he did not know what had taken place. The woman had left him as the lawyer's car drove upon the grass. He had endeavoured to look through the broken side of the barricade. There was no difficulty in looking outside, but it was very dark, and after she climbed into the machine the lights were put out.

It was his impression that the car was almost twenty feet from where he was standing. He was unable to catch what they were saying, though he heard the woman's protesting voice several times. Then suddenly there came a spit of flame, the loud echo of a shot, and he got a glimpse of her figure rushing wildly from the car.

He admitted that for a moment he did not move. So
startled was he that for a moment he did not think that someone might have been injured. Then, as he realized it was a revolver he had heard, he rushed out of the barn to the car. It was dark, so he struck a match. The lawyer was slumped down under the wheel, dead.

Under Bartley’s questioning he did not deny that he thought his friend had killed the lawyer. He tried to find her, even went far down the beach. But for some reason he missed her in the darkness. Perhaps an hour was used up in the search. When he returned to the barn, to his consternation the car had vanished.

This bothered him. He was sure the man was dead. In fact, had felt his heart. What had happened to the machine, he did not know. Some carelessness caused him to leave his machine where it was. He struck off over the fields, approaching the village. Just as he reached Mrs. Cambell’s lawn, he saw her going into her drive. The sight cheered him; he knew she had not been placed under arrest. He had the idea of following her into the house, and hearing from her own lips what had taken place.

But something prevented him from doing this. He knew Van Dike had been killed—of that he was sure. The revolver had been fired, so he thought, within the car. In his heart he did not blame her—the lawyer deserved what he got. But he knew he would not testify against her. There was a slight chance no suspicion would fall upon her. He decided to vanish, to spend a few days in the camp at the lonesome end of the island—a place where he had often passed the night when he was going fishing early in the morning.
When he ended his story, there came a question.
"You had your revolver when you went out to the car. I mean when you rushed out of the barn?"
"Yes, of course, it was in my hand."
"What became of it?"
"I am not sure," was the hesitating reply. "I think I placed it on the seat when I tried to pull Mr. Van Dike upright. Finding him dead drove every thought from my mind. I rushed out of the machine and went running down through the fields, trying to find Mrs. Cambell. The revolver was left on the seat of the machine."
"Was Van Dike left-handed or right-handed?" insinuated the chief.
"Why, I can't really say," came the answer. "It is my opinion he was right-handed. I never saw him use his left hand for anything."

I smiled at the answer. The chief's venture had brought the response one would have expected from a truthful person. And so far as I could see, he had told the truth. What he said corroborated the woman's story. But it was a startling story. And then it dawned upon me that if both had told the truth, as I believed they had—we were no nearer a solution of the crime than we were before.

"Are you sure, Harold," Bartley asked, "that no one heard you make the appointment to take Mrs. Cambell to the barn? You know she telephoned you twice."

The youth's face grew thoughtful. He shook his head: "I doubt if anyone heard me. It is true, though, I repeated the name of the place I was to take her to.
The phone I used was the one in the hall. But there was no one around at all. And though we often talked over the matter of the letters and the fact that Van Dike was blackmailing her, yet we were careful. I am sure no one ever heard what we said at any time."

The chief shook his head as if it all was beyond him. He studied the young man and the woman—a woman whose face had lighted up, whose nervousness and fear had vanished. As he turned to look at Bartley, he received one glance which the coroner seconded.

After a warning that they must not talk to anyone, Mrs. Cambell received the suggestion that she could take young Nash home. Bartley told him to explain to his father that he was not to tell where he had been. We would explain later. Just as they were about to step through the door, the warning was given again. Under no circumstances were they to repeat their story, or even parts of it, to anyone.

As the sound of her machine came floating to our ears, there started a violent argument. The chief insisted that the stories we had heard, on the face of them, sounded true. But he warned us that they might have agreed upon what they were going to say. To his mind, both had a motive—the woman to save her reputation, the young man killing, because of anger over the treatment accorded his friend.

"But they can't both be guilty," barked out the coroner as he lighted a cigar.

The chief admitted that. But he argued they might have both had a hand in the murder. At this the coroner put his cigar down on the desk and laughed.

"Miner, you amuse me. That woman could not have
committed the murder. The crime took brains, and that’s a thing she is short of. Don’t let her good looks fool you. If she had any brains she never would have allowed Van Dike to pull off what he did.”

It seemed a harsh judgment, but I could see Bartley agreed with it. Banging his hand on the table, the coroner continued his argument.

“Those pictures tell you, Miner that the bullet which killed the man was not fired from Harold Nash’s revolver. It’s a wild yarn they told, but it seems to stick. You better either choose which one you think did the killing, or else decide perhaps they both told the truth.”

He gave a scornful snort and picked up his cigar. The chief took no offence at what had been said. One could see the two men were good friends. More and more I was beginning to respect the doctor’s brains—brains which cut through every problem which confronted him. But the police official was not satisfied. He turned again to his coroner; there was complaint in his voice as he spoke.

“But, Doc, somebody killed him.”

The doctor replaced his cigar on the desk. His eyes went travelling over to the tall figure of his friend. There was a sarcastic smile playing around his lips.

“Miner, you are certainly becoming a wise man. Of course, someone killed him. But the big question is Who? And the next, Why?”

The chief shook his head. He growled out that, so far as he could see, we were just in the same position as we had been the night of the murder. We knew Van Dike was dead, and it was about all we did know. His
gesture spoke volumes when he said we knew nothing more.

We argued back and forth for a while without getting anywhere. But it was long after twelve, and when Bartley looked at his watch, he said it was time we hurried to the house for lunch. After we had reached the car, he hastened back into the building. There was something he wished to say to the chief.

The butler opened the door for us when we reached the house. For the last few days his face had been long and solemn. As he stood aside for us to enter, he was almost smiling. His voice was cheerful as he told us that Mr. Nash was in the library. As I hurried to my room to wash, Bartley went down the hall toward the library door.

What he said to his friend, I do not know. But it was a very happy meal. Close to his father's side sat the son, and our host found it difficult to pay attention to his food. His joy was overflowing, and I knew that Bartley had told him all he thought was necessary, of the youth's going away.

The Professor did not talk as much as usual. But the thin face beamed whenever he looked at the young man across from him. I could tell that Harold had a warm place in the old man's heart. Nothing disagreeable was mentioned. Not a word was spoken regarding the absence of our friend's son. Instead the conversation was light, jumping from one thing to another.

Dinner over, I strolled out of the house and wandered down upon the shore. The tide was out so the beach lay a long expanse of sand. The dog, discovering where I was, came leaping down to the shore, and
began to dig in the sand. Overhead a flock of sea
gulls was keeping a watchful eye upon the surface
of the sea. Far out over the water, an airplane was
winging its way toward New York.

It was a warm day and I felt lazy. For a while I
watched the gulls as they whirled and darted down to
the water. Then I found a few small stones which I
flung far out in the sea; stones which the dog tried
vainly to find, after swimming around in wide circles.
Then I flopped myself down on the warm sand, turned
on my side and dozed away.

I must have slept several hours. It was Bartley
who roused me. For a second I could not understand
where I was, then I sat upright. He had changed into
suit of white flannel, and was in a very rare humour.
The dog was leaping around him, and he had difficulty
in preventing the animal from climbing into his lap.
As our eyes met, I asked him what he had been
doing.

Apparently he had been doing nothing, though he
did say he had taken a walk after lunch. Making a
remark that it was far too warm to walk very far, I
found a stick and sent it flying into the sea. With a
bound the dog went splashing after it.

For a while we sat silent. Then more for the sake of
saying something than anything else, I asked Bart-
ley if he thought Van Dike’s death would ever be
solved. His remark startled me. With a half smile, he
said he had a pretty good idea already as to who had
killed the man.

I turned in astonishment, thinking he was fooling.
But his face was serious. Catching my astonished ex
pression, he smiled. Picking up a handful of sand, he allowed it to trickle through his fingers.

"I have an idea, Peet; it is my opinion I know who killed Van Dike, and I have a half opinion I know why." But to prove it will be perhaps impossible."

"It's not Mrs. Cambell or Harold?" I interogated.

He slowly shook his head. 'No," was the reply. "As I just said, I believe I know who the person is, but I doubt if we can ever prove it."

I was silent, running over in my mind several things. After all, there was very little we did know. I had never seen, in our career, a case in which there were fewer clues. As a rule there would always be a clue of some sort—something to work on. So far as I knew, in this case there were none at all. And how one could discover a murderer who had left no clues, was something I could not see. I said as much to Bartley.

In a sense he agreed, but he reminded me that, after all, there were two sorts of clues. One was the physical, material things which one could work upon. The other was psychological, a study of evasive facts. This was a case which must be solved psychologically.

Seeing I did not understand, he explained. There were few material clues in this case. The revolver found in the dead man's hand, in a sense, was a clue. But we had proved that he had not been killed by that gun. There had been no fingerprints, they had been wiped away. Footprints could not be distinguished in the muddy ground. Such being the case, it became necessary, to approach the solution of the crime from another angle.

There were several questions to be answered. Why
did the murderer place the gun in Van Dike's left hand when the lawyer was right-handed? Above everything else, why did the criminal drive the car away from the side of the barn? It was an unnecessary thing to do, and there was a chance of detection. Why had he not left the machine at the place where the murder was committed? What did the hand I had seen reaching into the car mean?

Answer those three questions; and you could come very close to discovering not only the type of a person who committed the murder, but the person himself. And Bartley smiled as he added that in his opinion he thought he knew why the car had been driven away from the barn. Thought, also, he had an idea what the clutching hand was searching for.

He might have said more but a voice hailed us from the side of the boathouse. The Professor was coming slowly in our direction. Reaching our side, he talked for several minutes, then started to throw stones into the sea for the dog to search after. I watched him for a while, as did Bartley. But there was nothing exciting about an elderly man throwing stones into the ocean, and in a few minutes I turned my eyes away.

Taking his watch from his pocket, after noticing the hour, Bartley hastened to his feet. With a word for me to follow, he went up the bank and through the hedge. When we reached the house, the coroner was sitting in a chair upon the piazza. He had the wide veranda to himself, and was rocking slowly back and forth in a large wicker chair.

Catching sight of us, he rose slowly to his feet and came down to the path. He turned to Bartley.
"The chief did what you asked him to do. I just passed Barr driving down to the station. Miner thinks he can keep him there for at least thirty or forty minutes."

Not knowing what it meant, I flashed a question to Bartley. At the doctor's remark, he had turned and was walking in the direction of the house next door—the large summer cottage which had been owned by Van Dike. The coroner had started to waddle after him, but I had not moved. Seeing my hesitancy, Bartley paused, turning around to speak.

"We are going to make a search of Van Dike's house. In a sense, it will be an illegal search, for we have no warrant. I had the chief telephone Barr to come down to the station under the pretext that he wished to ask him a few questions. But what we are really after is to try and find the letters which Barr must have."

He turned and struck off over the grass. For a moment I stood still, then hurried after them. But as I hastened over the lawn, I wondered if Bartley had told me the real reason for searching Van Dike's house. True, Barr must have the letters. He had them several nights before. But my pulse jumped a little as I thought of one thing. Would we discover in the end that the secretary had been the murderer?
CHAPTER XV

Though the lawyer's grounds were not as extensive as our host's estate, yet the house was large. It was a long, rambling frame building which seemed to be of no particular type of architecture. There was a fine view from the veranda, one which took in a wide sweep of the sea. One could see the long curve of the shore as it stretched away to a distant point.

The maid who came to the door did not wish to admit us. The coroner flashed some sort of a badge, what it was I did not know. Then in a cold voice he informed the bewildered woman that the chief had sent us to search the house. The news was alarming; the woman's face became frightened. In a scared manner she opened the door and allowed us to enter.

It was rather high-handed sort of procedure. We had no warrant, and I had my misgivings as to the badge the doctor had shown. But the woman knew no better than to allow us to enter. Once inside the house, we could proceed as we wished.

We stood in a wide hall. On one side was a finely-furnished living room. Ahead, a pair of stairs ran to the upper floor—stairs which curved in a sweeping line to run above. There was a glimpse of a dining room to our right, with a cabinet filled with fine china. The house showed that the dead lawyer had money, and perhaps a great deal of money.

With a frightened expression upon her face, the
maid stood twisting her pron with nervous fingers. The fact that we represented the law was all she wished to know. Like so many of her type, this frightened her. With questioning eyes she watched, waiting for someone to speak.

"Show us Barr's room," came Bartley's demand.

She gave a start, but without a word turned and started up the winding stairway. At her heels we followed, the doctor puffing behind me. Turning down a long hall, she paused before a closed door at the front of the house. With a gesture she told us this was the room we were seeking.

Dismissing the maid with a threat that she must go back to her work, we opened the door. It was really a small suite we entered—a huge living room, with a bedroom which could be seen through a half-open door. Large bay windows gave a splendid view of the water; the room was richly furnished.

There were many pictures upon the walls, but they were mostly a collection of rather suggestive nudes. The few books upon the table were pornographic in type, the under-cover literature which slips so easily into the country in our day. A half-opened closet gave a glimpse of a large number of suits, though the cloth was rather loud in design.

Closing the door with a brief word as to what he was after, Bartley started to search the room, we aiding. When at the end of twenty minutes we came together by the table, the search had been without avail. Every inch of space had been covered. The rugs had been lifted up, the pictures taken from the wall, but we had found nothing.
We walked into the bedroom. It was in disorder, with clothes upon the floor, the bed unmade. There seemed no place where anything could be hidden. The drawers of the stand were opened and their contents dumped upon the unmade bed. When we had searched through a tangled mass of neckties and collars, the result was the same as in the other room. We had found nothing.

Rising, Bartley stood looking around the room. I saw his eyes pass over an indecent nude, to rest on a closed door near the foot of the bed. Going across the floor, he pulled it open. The closet was small, crowded with clothes. For a second he studied the place, then bent forward. The next moment he had pulled a small trunk to the centre of the room.

The trunk, however, was locked. Taking a thin piece of steel from his pocket, he tumbled with the lock for some time. In the end we heard a click, as he flung the cover open. But at first glance there was nothing of value to be seen. The interior of the trunk seemed filled with crumpled clothing.

One by one the shirts and underwear were thrown on the floor. The heap of clothing by our feet grew larger as the contents within the trunk melted away. Then, just as he had almost reached the bottom, he fell upon his knees; his arm went exploring in the interior of the trunk. In a second he came forth with an object in his hand.

It was a small package of letters. The paper was faded a little, the package tied with a cheap piece of string. He broke the string to give a hasty glance at the first letter. Then he opened another, then another.
With a smile on his face, Le told us we had Mrs. Campbell's letters.

But he said nothing else. Again he bent down, again fumbled within the trunk. Again his hand came forth, this time with two small packages. They were wrapped in a cloth, which took much unwinding to get at the contents. And when the first package had been unwrapped, he gave a long, low whistle. We rushed close to see what he was holding in his hand.

It was a curious object he held in his extended palm. Two small bits of shining copper—core—a mass of whirling lines etched into its bright surface—a mass of whirling lines. Two small but perfectly executed dies. As the coroner started to bark an excited question, Bartley spoke.

"I judge we have the dies of the fingerprints which were found by Mrs. Nash's wall safe."

Seeing the doctor did not understand, in a few words he told him of his theory that the fingerprints had been forged. It was an astonishing bit of information, and the doctor reached out to take one of the dies in his hand. He studied it curiously, then without a word handed it back to Partley.

But the other package had not been opened, and we were curious to know what it contained. Unable to keep back our curiosity, we watched it being slowly undone. Wrapping after wrapping was untwisted. When the last one had been thrown aside, I gave a startled cry. There in Bartley's hand was jewellery. Not many pieces, but very valuable—several diamond brooches, three diamond rings, several ornaments containing pearls. One piece, the use of which I did not
knob, had a great black opal for a centre. There was no doubt we had found the missing jewellery.

It was the doctor who stared at the outstretched hand the longest. He had known nothing about the robbery until that moment. His face twitched a little with excitement as he watched the glittering pieces in Bartley's hand. Then with an exclamation, he turned to speak.

What he might have said was prevented by the sound of a door opening in the other room. Not a door being opened softly but one flung with a bang against the wall, as if whoever had entered the room was angry. The coroner raised one eyebrow as he looked at Bartley, and for a moment we stood silently listening. Someone had stepped into the room. We heard him come to a stop just inside the door.

Motioning that we follow, Bartley went out of the bedroom with the package of letters under his arm; we followed at his heels. There was someone in the room. Over by the door, his unpleasant face flushed red with anger, stood Barr. His eyes fairly snapped as they fell upon us.

"What the devil do you think you are doing here?" he roared out in a half yell.

Going over to the table, which was a few feet away, Bartley opened the package of letters on its surface. The two copper dies, the jewellery had been slipped in the pocket of his coat. So deliberate was he in placing the letters upon the table, that I decided he wanted Barr to notice what he was doing.

If that was his plan, it worked. The angry man followed what he was doing for a moment. Then as if
realizing what had been placed on the table, he took a half-step forward. His fists were clenched, his body shaking with rage. He opened his lips to speak, but before he could say a word, there came the cold cutting voice of Bartley.

"You asked a moment ago what we were doing in your room? Just looking—that was all. We found three things of interest—a package of letters, two small copper dies and a small amount of jewellery."

The man started back. For a second he was unable to speak. A little look of fright replaced the anger in his eyes; but only for a moment. With a shrug of his shoulders, he pulled a cigarette case from his pocket, took out a cigarette and slowly lighted it. Blowing a thread of smoke from his thin lips, he turned to Bartley. The expression around the corner of his mouth was decidedly unpleasant.

He had, plenty of self-assurance, I could see that. But there was something about his figure, the way he carried himself, which made me question his nationality. Just what it was that made the man repulsive, I could not tell; but repulsive he was as, with a sneer around his lips, he drawled out:

"And if you have found so many things, what are you going to do about it? Get a lot of other people in trouble?"

Bartley’s eyes grew small. His gaze pierced into the man in front of him, and it was Barr who turned away his eyes. There came his voice, cold and with an edge like steel.

"Well, Barr—or perhaps I better say—Lopez—"
At the last name the man gave a start; I saw his hand clench. He seemed a little taken aback.

"Well, Parr," Bartley said again, "after all, there are laws against blackmail. And a man who hits a woman, as you did the other night, is not worthy of much sympathy."

Barr's lips curled back; I could see the white teeth. He spat out a nasty oath, coupling the woman's name with a vile expression. The words had no sooner left his lips, when Bartley took two steps forward. The palm of his hand came stinging down across the man's lips. And as he stepped back, Barr leaped forward.

The enraged man was some years younger than Bartley. I saw the doctor's round figure gather itself to rush to assist the older man. My hand fell on his arm as I pulled him aside. Barr might be younger, but I knew he was facing trouble. Bartley had been the best amateur boxer his college had ever turned out. And he was always in condition.

With an angry oath the secretary leaped forward. Side-stepping, Bartley let him rush by, then whirled around to avoid another rush. Then like a flash, his right struck out, reached the point of the jaw as his left came smashing in. Another right, and the man went crashing to the floor.

There was fear on his face as he struggled to his feet. And the fright was well grounded. In the next three minutes, he received a terrific punishment. Again and again he went down under Bartley's well-placed blows. Until there came the moment when crouched in a corner, he begged for mercy.

He was a sorry-looking object. Both eyes were
black, and there were great bruises on his cheeks. In fact I looked at him in astonishment. It was not like Bartley to deliberately punish a man. But every blow had been placed with care—placed to give the greatest amount of punishment.

Brushing his hands as if the touch of the other man’s flesh had soiled them, he turned to the coroner. The doctor had watched the short fight, with amazement playing over his round face. Bartley’s voice was cold, with an apologetic tone, as he spoke:

"I am sorry, Doctor, you had to see this disgraceful scene, but I have a decided complex on the subject of men who live off women. And—"

The coroner broke in on him: "I would not have missed it for the world."

The eager tone broke the tension.

"And," continued Bartley, "this man here, who calls himself Barr, deserves more than he got. A few years ago he had a little game all of his own. He would marry a woman, steal her savings, then desert her. Van Dike got him out of prison, and he has done his dirty work for a long time. He has a police record. Mostly the sort of things which even the lowest crook looks down upon. He has run straight so far as I know since he has been with Van Dike—if a man could run straight in such a law office. But it is even doubted if Barr is his name."

The man was still crouching on the floor. One hand was holding his swollen jaw. Walking to his side, Bartley reached out a hand, and gripping his collar, yanked him to his feet. Dragging him over to the table, he flung him down in a chair. Then finding a
pen and some paper, he placed them before the shrinking figure.

"You are going to write a triple confession. If you ever open your mouth about Mrs. Cambell, what will happen to you will make you wish you had a thousand Van Dikes to get you out of trouble. Now snap out and tell us about that robbery at Nash's. You might tell us first what you were doing over there."

The man did not wish to speak. At the same time he did not dare refuse. All the fight had gone out of him. His red swollen face was mute testimony of the whipping he had received. With his head held in his hands, he started to talk. It needed many promptings by Bartley before he was allowed to become silent.

His reason for acting as a secretary for Mr. Nash was simple enough. One of the oil man's pipelines was to become the foundation around which many small oil companies were to be merged into a large corporation. There was a wide speculative interest in the question, as to just what small companies were going into the merger.

One day Nash had happened to mention to Van Dike that his secretary was ill. The lawyer had an idea. If he could have his own man work for Nash for a few weeks, type his letters, take care of his correspondence, he ought to be able to discover all the details of the coming merger. So he had offered Nash the services of Barr, and the offer was accepted.

He had heard the demands the son had made upon his father for money. Knowing that Mrs. Nash was sailing for Europe, the thought had come to him that she would have a large amount of jewellery in her safe,
several days before the raid. He had no difficulty in securing the combination. But there was a vicious streak in him.

Harold had never liked Barr. It came out that the youth had refused to sit at the table with him. Angered by this the man had conceived the idea of not only taking the jewelry but also throwing suspicion upon the young man. After thinking it over for several days, he hit upon a plan.

He knew an expert engraver. In fact, the man had once been defended by Van Dike for counterfeiting. Barr remembered how the etcher had said he could counterfeit a fingerprint. It had been an easy matter to secure an impression of the fingers of the young man he hated. The etcher had made the dies, told him how to take an impression from them. Then on the night he had taken the jewels, he had made the fingerprints on each side of the safe.

When his voice died away, the coroner turned to give a much disgusted look at Bartley. His face was a study as he growled:

"He may have murdered Van Dike."

With an excited leap, the man was on his feet. I thought he would fall on his knees before us, as again and again he insisted he knew nothing about the murder. He corrected this, to add that he did know that the lawyer was going to meet a woman. Though the woman’s name did not pass his lips, I realized he knew who it was.

Motioning him back to his chair, Bartley placed a sheet of paper before him, telling him to pick up the pen and write down what he dictated. It was a short
but vivid account of what we had just been told. The
confession written, the coroner and myself signed as
witnesses. Lutley then picked up the two sheets of
paper and placed them in his pocket.
For a moment he stood looking down at the huddled
figure at the table. There was a disgusted look upon
his face, his eyes were cold. Picking up the package of
letters from the table, he motioned for us to follow as
he started for the door. Just before crossing the
threshold, he whirled around to bark out a warn-
ing.
"Remember, Barr, you get off the island to-night.
And if you ever breathe a word regarding Mrs. Cam-
bell, then it is God help you. There will be no criminal
lawyer like Van Dike to save you another time."
We went down the stairway to find some women,
evidently a maid and the cook, listening at the bottom
step. They scurried away when they glimpsed us, and
we heard the sound of doors being hastily closed in
the rear of the house. No one let us out, we opening
the front door ourselves.
After what we had been through, the fresh air, with
its tang of the sea, was a delightful change. A slight
breeze had sprung up, and was sweeping across the
water. It was refreshingly cool to our cheeks. The
dog came rushing through the hedge to leap around his
master's feet.
We went down from the veranda, turning to walk
across the soft green grass. No one spoke, and I
know I did not feel like speaking. But just after we
had passed through the hedge, and were approaching
the veranda of Nash's house, the doctor expressed his
surprise that Bartley had let the secretary off as easily as he did.

“Well, Doctor,” came the thoughtful reply, “I have the letters and the stock jewellery. Better still, we know that, Harold did not take them. But I do, not think Barr has got off so easily. I wired to Carter this afternoon—George Carter, a friend of ours who is in the Secret Service. There is a little change of drug running against Barr. It was dropped for a while but will be re-opened. Carter will be waiting for him when he steps off the boat.”

The doctor grunted with satisfaction, but made no reply. At the veranda steps we invited him to some in the house with us, but he refused. It was time he was getting back to his office, and he had a few calls to make. With that he said good-bye and ambled away to the front of the house.

We found our host in the library. He was doing nothing, simply leaning back in the chair smoking a cigar. But it was a delightful thing to see the look of contentment upon his face. Once more he was the kindly, unworried man we had always known. His son was home again—and Bartley had said the boy had done no wrong.

He waved a hand at us when we entered. Dropping into the first chair, Bartley eyed his friend for a second. Then came a question:

“Willard, while you had Barr as a secretary, did he ever get any information about your new merger?”

Nash started to laugh. He would look at Bartley, then bend forward and laugh again. I could not see what was amusing him, but I did in a moment.
"John," came his voice "he surely did get some
information, but not the kind he wanted. I had my
suspicions when Van Dike insisted that I take over his
own secretary for a while. Remembered my coming
merger, knew there was great anxiety in financial cir-
cles as to what companies were going into it. I smelted
a rat, so—"

Again her laughed, and the tone was so contagious
that we joined in with him. Waving his arm in a half
circle, he chuckled.

"I wrote a number of letters which Barr copied for
me, to my manager. It was all fixed. They referred
to a number of companies which might go into the mer-
ger. Their stock started to go up, so I unloaded. But
I never peeped, while Barr was here, of any of the real
concerns I was merging up. Van Dike just held the
bag for some cheap dogs and cats."

We laughed; then became serious. Bartley started
to tell of our afternoon's experience. Nash's face went
from red to white, then back again as the story was
unfolded. When it was over, he took the confession
which Bartley produced from his pocket, and slowly
read it. He rose to his feet; going over to the table,
he rang a bell.

"John," came his voice, shaking a little with emotion,
"you have brought me back my confidence in my son.
I will have Harold take his speed boat and sail me over
to the Point. I must radio his mother; the robbery
worried her. And I also think we need a drink."

The butler came hastening into the room. His face
beamed upon us when Nash gave him a command.
Hurrying from the room, he returned in a few moments
bearing with him a tray and three glasses. The bottle he placed upon the desk bore an old and honourable name. It went back several hundred years; and the pale yellow liquid which we drank was worthy of its historic past.

The drink over, Nash hurried out to find his son. Bartley had an errand to do, and as I was not invited to come along, I went up to our rooms. Taking the largest chair to the window, I sat doing nothing. A great many things had happened that day. We had heard many tales, solved at least one mystery. But one thing had not been solved. Who had killed Van Dike, and what had been the motive?

Once more we were back where we had started from. I realized that perhaps we had been foolish. So many people might have had reasons for killing the lawyer. Bartley was right when he said there had been no clues. In fact, there seemed nothing about which to form an opinion.

I gave up thinking about the crime after I remembered Bartley's statement, that he thought he knew who had committed it. Then I recalled his other statement, that he doubted if he would ever be able to prove it. This seemed absurd. Bartley always was able to bring his cases to a successful conclusion.

The afternoon was almost over. There fell a silence over the sea. Once in while I would hear an automobile go by, but there was no other sound to break the stillness. Dusk began to creep in from the ocean. The surface of the water changed in colour—the light blue vanished, giving place to a darker hue. Night was at hand.
When the butler knocked at the door to say dinner was served, I walked down to the dining room to find that Bartley and myself were to eat alone. Nash and his son had taken the motor boat to go to the Point, and send a radio to his wife. Where the Professor was I did not know. So by ourselves we had dinner, eating in silence.

The meal over, we went back again to our rooms. When the light was turned on, I saw a flat package on the table; beside it was a large square envelope—an envelope addressed to Bartley. A little surprised, he took it from my hand and tore it open. His face was a curious study as he read the contents.

Placing the letter on the table, he broke the string of the flat package and opened it. I could see it was a photograph, but of what I did not know. For several moments he studied it, then his hand picked up the letter from the table as he motioned I should come closer.

"Pelt," he said, his voice serious, "I want you to read the last paragraph of this letter."

For a moment he hesitated, then read.

"—and so, Mrs. Bartley, all her life, one woman will remember that it was you who saved her from disaster. There is no way I can express that gratitude, except by always remembering what you have done. But I send this photograph—I know you do not want it—but if sometimes your eyes fall upon it, it will make you remember the eternal gratitude of the woman of whom it is a likeness—"

His eyes met mine, and for some reason he flushed
a little. Picking up the photograph, he turned it around so I could see the likeness. It was a wonderful picture, one of the finest I have ever seen. The picture of a very beautiful woman—a woman whose white, finely-molded shoulders faded away into the shadows. Mrs. Cambel's beautiful upturned face.

We looked at it a moment; then going over to a grip, he threw back the cover to place the picture under some clothes. As he dropped into his chair, he slowly shook his head.

"She means all right. But that woman must learn not to be so active with her pen. I must give her a warning about it to-morrow. One might have expected, after all she went through, she would never wish to sign her name to a letter again."

I said nothing; there was nothing to say. I knew how much Bartley hated sentiment. But I realized that the woman's gift was just what she said. Always she would be grateful for what had been done, that she had been saved from disaster. Then I gave a start. Could we be sure the story would never come out? The murderer was yet to be discovered.

I tried to read for a while, finding the task difficult. Placing the book on the stand, I walked over to the window and glanced out at the night. The lawn was a deep pool of darkness filled with various shadows cast by the trees. The sea lay an expanse of gloom beyond the hedge. And it was still. Only the sound of the small waves breaking on the shore could be heard.

For a while I stood looking out of the window. Then it dawned upon me I could hear someone playing—someone whose music came floating up from the first
floor. With a glance at Bartley, I crossed over to open the door leading to the hall. The sound of a piano came to our ears.

Whoever was playing loved the instrument. It was a soft crooning melody which drifted up to us. It made one think of mountain streams, of little brooks dashing down to the sea. It stirred forgotten memories within one’s mind—memories which had not been felt for many years. And then the music changed.

As the piano became louder, it spoke of woe and evil. There was anxiety in the clashing chords, a cry for mercy as the melody changed again and became a simple, pleading prayer. Who it was that played, I did not know. But down in the music room, someone with the touch of a master was pouring out his soul at the keyboard—a soul troubled and lonely. As I turned to Bartley, he rose and hastened to my side. A second later we were softly going down the stairs.
CHAPTER XVI

The music room was in the front of the house. As we passed down the length of the hall, the music grew louder. Before a silken curtain we paused. Beyond it, the piano was murmuring a low, soft refrain. At times it would become so faint that we were barely able to hear the melody. Then it would grow louder, only to fade away again.

Pushing aside the curtain, we stepped through the doorway. The room was large, with several bay windows facing the sea. Save for a high reading lamp standing by the square piano in the further corner, there was no light. For a moment our eyes strained through the semi-darkness before we could make out the Professor.

The polished ebony piano reflected in fantastic shadows the glow from the light by the bench. A round circle of flame played over the slight figure at the keyboard. It ran along his shoulders, dropping down to the white keys. His shoulders swayed a little as his long fingers moved slowly over the keys.

So softly had we come into the room that he had not sensed our presence. There were two chairs by the door and we sank into them. Bartley was a few feet away from me, and in the darkness I could not see his face. So deep were the shadows, that the only place in the room that was bright was the keyboard of the instrument and the swaying figure on the bench.
I had not known the Professor could play. But his touch was that of a master. Under the delicacy of his fingers, the piano became a living thing. It sobbed and wept, laughed and danced as his mood swept from one theme to another. Yet no matter how joyful might be the melody, I noticed he always came back to the same theme in the end. What it was I did not know, but it was to haunt me for many days.

There would come a quick burst of gladness; then back again he would go to the low, sorrowful, suggesting refrain. At times he would touch the keys so softly that even across the room we found it hard to distinguish the notes. But no matter what he played, how loud the music became, in the end he swept into the same refrain—a theme repeated over and over.

There were lilting chords in the haunting melody. But somehow, though I knew little about music, it made me melancholy. I could see a rain-swept sea, a lonely house, a world without sunshine or friends. Darkness and gloom had come into the world—a darkness which threatened never to lift.

My first surprise passed away. There was no doubt the Professor could play. The beautifully-toned instrument was reflecting the mood that was in his heart. So in the darkened room, with only the faint light by the piano to dispel the gloom, we sat silent, listening.

How long we listened, I do not know. Nor was I ever able to discover what he played. Perhaps the truth is, he played a few chords of almost everything—weaving together many famous movements in a symphony of his own. But always after a moment, there
would come from the piano the same low, sad refrain, the same haunting melody.

There came the time when suddenly he raised his hands above his head, and brought them down upon the keyboard. Like a lost soul, the instrument crashed forth a long wail. We saw the thin figure bend over the keyboard, saw his head go down upon the white ivory. Then with an impulsive gesture, he rose to his feet.

We had not moved since we came into the room. The spell which had been cast upon us had kept us silent. I was sure he had not heard us when we entered. As he rose to his feet, he turned, glancing down the length of the room. The reflection from the light played across his face. I could see that it was drawn, sad and pathetic. For a moment he stood gazing ahead of him, as if his eyes pierced the darkness. Then he spoke, his voice low and grave.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Bartley. I did not know you were in the room."

There was some reply given. The Professor walked across the floor, and silently seated himself. He was only a few feet away from us. Though I could make out his outline, yet I was unable to see his face. For the first time since I had met him, he did not talk. Instead, leaning back in his chair, he kept very still.

It was an uneasy silence, though I do not know why I felt this. One of those moments when there creeps into one's soul a feeling that the world has vanished, and that after all, the anxieties of life do not matter. Then after a long silence, there came the voice of the Professor from the darkness. His tone was grave, the high-pitched note missing from his voice.
“How are you coming out, Mr. Bartley, in your investigation regarding Mr. Van Dike’s death?”

The question surprised me. It was the first time I had heard the man sitting across from me speak of the crime. His question was no answered for some time. When he spoke, Partley’s tone was grave, with a judicial air underlying it.

“It is hard to say, Professor. I feel rather sure I know who committed the murder, but to prove it in such a way that a jury would convict the man I have in mind—well—I doubt if that is possible.”

“I see,” replied the Professor, his voice thoughtful. Then he added. “I presume we would be surprised if we knew whom you had in mind.”

I heard Bartley shift his position in the chair, as his low voice agreed. No one spoke for a while, then came the Professor’s quiet tone again, and what he said caused me to sit upright in the chair.

“I have often wondered, Mr. Bartley,” he mused, “how a man would feel, who was under sentence of death. I pictured his dread, the anxiety. But four weeks ago a doctor told me—I might live at the longest not over four months. To-day, a second doctor confirmed the first—only he said it would be three months at the very most.”

We started to make some sort of sympathetic reply, but there was very little could say; the statement had left us both, I know, without words. There was no need to speak. Again there came the low voice—it was a weary voice, the tone that of a man for whom the world no longer existed.

“After all, I discovered my thoughts as to the feel-
nings of a condemned man were far different from what I had expected. When I first received my sentence, though I was shocked for a time, I was not afraid. In fact—" the words ceased as if the man was thinking. "In fact, I think I am going to be glad to have a long rest."

"We could not speak. There was a weary, heartbroken note in the thin voice. I knew of nothing I could say. Then he spoke again.

"I presume that if you did take the man who killed Van Dike to prison, it would be many months before he could be tried?"

"The way the courts are crowded now, it would take almost nine months before his trial could even be reached," was the reply. There was an odd inflection in Bartley's voice, which caused me to wonder.

The Professor seemed to be thinking this information over. He was silent for several minutes.

"And the trial would cost the state a great deal of money," he said at last. "And there would be brought out testimony which might injure innocent people forever. Van Dike was a famous lawyer, but he was a worthless bit of humanity. It seems too bad innocent people should suffer."

He paused, then added: "And you think you know how he was killed and who did it? It would be interesting to know how you discovered it. That is, if you could tell us without feeling you had to mention the name of the one you suspect."

There came a silence. That the Professor would like to have an insight as to how Bartley had worked upon this case was natural enough. But, I was sure
that his curiosity would not be gratified. Bartley never talked about his cases until they were over, and this one was far from over.

But to my surprise he started to speak. His voice was thoughtful, very grave. He seemed to pick his words carefully, searching for what he wished to say. More than once I looked over to his chair as he talked.

"After all, Professor, I presume you have the right to ask me to tell you what this murder has disclosed. I am not the best story-teller in the world. Perhaps you know, Pelt writes fiction. So I am going to tell you what I think, as if it was a story you were reading—a story to be completed in another chapter."

He was silent as if thinking how to start; then he spoke:

"Our discovery of Van Dike's body was, of course, an accident. From the first, I knew it was murder. The gun had been placed in the left hand in order to make whoever discovered the body think it was suicide. Van Dike, as you know, was a criminal lawyer, well known but with a very doubtful sort of a practice. Mixed up as he was in the underworld, there might have been many people who would have enjoyed having him out of the way.

"So," he paused for a second, continuing, "so though we ran into a situation which gave us many people who might have had a motive, and perhaps the opportunity of committing the murder, yet there were always three things which I kept in mind—psychological questions—"

"Indeed," was the interested comment, "what were they?"
“The first thought came to me the night we discovered the murder. The revolver was in the left hand—and Van Dike was right-handed!”

“I never thought of that!” came the voice of the Professor.

“No, I suppose you did not. But it was an odd and curious mistake. The gun was placed in the left hand to make it look like suicide. That fact made me discard any idea that the murder was committed by a person who knew Van Dike very well.”

“Why not?” I ventured.

“Anyone who knew Van Dike, knew he was right-handed. So I decided something else. The average person would have placed the gun in the right hand anyway; it was the natural thing to do—most people are right-handed. So I decided that the person who killed Van Dike did not know him very well, and was left-handed himself.”

“That is interesting,” remarked the Professor.

“The person who placed the gun in the hand was, of course, nervous when he did it. We are all creatures of habit—of habitual behaviour, as our eastern psychology would say. When the individual, working hurriedly and nervously, bent the still fingers of the lawyer around the gun, he did instinctively and without thinking, what was the usual thing for him to do—acted from habitual habit. Placed the gun in the left hand, because the left hand was the one he always used himself. Do you not think that sounds reasonable, Professor?”

“I would say you are correct: It sounds plausible.”

“Yes. I thought so. The murderer was left-handed;
that was my starting point. Then the individual who knew that you could bend the fingers after death around the gun was a person with more than the average intelligence. That fact is a technical fact, one an ordinary person never knows about. So I added to my belief that the murderer was left-handed, another idea. He was also an individual who had some medical knowledge, and perhaps even medical education, though of the latter I was not certain. So far as I could discover, there were at the most only five people on the island who had such an education."

"You felt the criminal belonged on the island?"

"I was never sure about it. But it did seem reasonable. The half-wrecked barn, near which the murder was committed, stands in a rather lonesome spot. It was dark and foggy the night Van Dike was killed. Such being the case, it appeared reasonable that anyone who could find his way about the island that evening in the fog and rain, who knew where the barn stood, must know the island very well—be either a native or a summer visitor."

There fell a silence. There was something about the darkness which I did not like. I rose to cross the room and turn on the lights, but the Professor begged me to allow the room to remain dim. He turned to Bartley

"I understood you to say there were three facts."

"Yes. We found the murder had taken place almost a mile away from where the car was discovered. At the inquest it was proved, I think without a doubt, that the murderer drove the machine from the spot where the crime was committed to the place where the car was found. Frankly, that puzzled me. It was
MURDER IN THE DARK

such an absurd thing to do. There was not only the chance that someone might see him and later speak about what they had seen, but there was something else. The whole thing was unreasonable.

"You see, the logical place to leave Van Dike after the murder was at the spot where he was killed. It was lonesome, far more secluded than where the body was discovered. If the murderer wished time, there was a chance that if the machine had been left near the barn, it might have been several days before it was discovered. Few people ever went past the place. But there was not a chance in the world that the parked machine containing the lawyer's body would avoid discovery many hours in the place where it was taken. And this decided me—"

As he paused and did not speak for a while, I became convinced of one thing. Bartley did know who committed the murder. There was confidence in his quiet tone, an air of sureness as he spoke. But there was also something else in the low voice—sadness mingled with sympathy.

"I decided," he continued at last, "that the murderer did not wish the car to stay where the crime had been committed; in fact, he wanted the machine to be discovered as quickly as possible. He was afraid, shall we say, of something else being discovered near the barn—something which would bring disaster upon someone he loved."

"And you say you know who this murderer is?" insinuated the Professor. There was an odd inflection in his voice as he asked the question.

"Yes. Let me picture the type of the individual I
have in mind—do it as though I were giving a synopsis of a plot for a novel."

His voice came floating over from the chair as he drew the picture. It was a man, he thought, to whom life had not been very good. An individual whose soul could dream and thrill, who, by circumstances, had been held down to a dreary treadmill of hated tasks. Suddenly there came into his life happiness and friendship. He pictured the person as one who had a great capacity for friendship, but had only found friends within the past few years.

Friends had come, and with friends, the opening of another world—a world where there was wealth and plenty. He shared all these things for a part of each year. Also, he discovered that there were evil people as well as good people in this new world he enjoyed for a while—people whose lack of ethics shocked him.

It was his idea that this man was unmarried, and that he had always wished for a son. So in the children of his friend, he compensated himself, pouring out all the love a lonely heart might have. Then, perhaps, or at least he thought so, a danger threatened one of the children.

The danger had been accidentally overheard. He had discovered an individual who could injure the one he loved; discovered this individual was a man without moral traits, cruel, evil and, as he decided, of no value to the world. Then one evening he heard something which caused him to be at a secret meeting place.

I gave a start at this point. Bartley was telling in a very guarded manner of what we both knew—of Harold Nash and his endeavour to aid Mrs. Cambell.
He was hinting that some other person had overheard them; knew of the meeting which was to take place with Van Dike. But who could he have in mind? I bent forward as I listened to his low voice.

"The individual I have in mind was afraid that the impulsive child of his friend might lose his head. He knew he had a revolver. He saw them go away in a car. He knew a short cut across the fields to their meeting place. It is my impression that when he reached it, Van Dike was already there; perhaps he had just got there.

"So the individual, in the darkness, crept up to the side of the car and listened. He heard a woman begging for the return of letters, heard the jeering voice of the lawyer, heard also the suggestion that she divorce her husband. He sensed that the man's arm was being placed around an unwilling woman as she vainly protested. No doubt he knew she would scream in a moment, and he realized it would bring his friend's son to the spot in an instant. The youth had a gun, was impulsive and would use it.

"I believe the man fired on the impulse of the moment; without thinking. Perhaps he thought the lawyer would serve the world far better out of it than in it. When the woman had rushed away, the man realized that the excited youth might forget the car standing within the barn. If the man's body was found where he had been shot, the other machine in the barn would be discovered and recognized. So he drove the machine away from the place. Then he made a mistake."

"What mistake?" asked the Professor
"Time limits are hard to figure out," came the reply. "After the shot had been fired the man kept himself hidden for a while. He saw the youth rush over to the car, gun in hand. As the young man tried to lift the fallen body of the lawyer from the floor, he placed the revolver, no doubt, on the seat. In his horror, the wild desire to find the woman, the youth forgot the gun. And when the murderer clasped the revolver in his victim's fingers, he made a mistake. He picked up the gun which had been on the seat—the wrong gun, the one the boy had left."

His voice died away, then he added:

"Telt, as he waited for me to bring the police, saw a hand reaching into the car. It is my opinion that the murderer suddenly realized he had placed the wrong gun in the lawyer's hand—went back to get it. Perhaps he even might have thought he could do what he had intended to do—place the gun that really was used in the still hand. What do you think, Professor?"

There was a thoughtful undercurrent in the man's weary voice, as if he were trying to think and speak at the same time.

"It sounds reasonable," he said. "It would make a good plot for a novel. But if I were writing the book, I would fill in a few details. Shall I—?"

There was an odd note in his voice—resolution mingled with regret.

"I would take your picture as being a truthful one of the type of individual who could have committed a murder of this kind. But I would go farther back. I would picture the early years of the man of whom you drew a picture. Years of toil, hard, dreary toil, with-"
out ever the chance to do what other people do. Years in which a small salary, with the exception of a few dollars, was sent to keep an aged mother in some degree of comfort. The burden, perhaps, being so great that when it was lifted the man was old. The years had passed by and his spirit was broken.

He paused as if thinking. When he spoke his voice was stronger.

"In the main, I think your description of what took place might be correct! I would add a few details. Suppose this man discovered that Van D. had changed a will which he had drawn; rather, intended to change it. He had left a large sum of money to a struggling institution; now was to cut it off. Suppose he discovered grave, evil things the man had done; the ruining of lives of unthinking young women. Suppose he discovered there was not a single good trait in the lawyer, that the son of his friend might be dragged into a sad mess and destroyed—"

He sighed as his voice was lowered. Then he spoke again.

"Of course, there would have to be more details filled in, Mr. Bartley. He could be in a garden when a woman tells a story of blackmail to a youth. He could see the excitement of the young man. He might overhear a place of meeting, see a young man rush wildly out in the night; know that he had a gun in his pocket. Then he might follow across the island to the meeting place with a gun he had taken from the house. And the rest might have been as you said."

The voice trailed away. Its tone was hopeless, weary. Perplexed and bewildered, I realized the Pro-
fessor nad but filled in the details of the acts which Bartley and I both knew. And as a wild, astonishing thought began to creep through my mind, he spoke again:

"Do you know, Mr. Bartley, I have pictured, as I thought over this murder, what I would do if I were in the murderer's place. What I would do if there were only a few months to live. And it is my idea—"

"Yes," Bartley insinuated; his voice so low I could hardly hear it.

"I say you know the guilty man. You could arrest him at once?"

There came an interruption; as Bartley broke in on him.

"But, Professor, though I am sure in my own mind as to who committed the murder, I cannot prove it. Only a confession from the guilty man would make it possible to convict him."

"Yes," was the answer, "I know that. But if I should in that guilty man's shoes, I think I would say this to you. If the man is arrested, the entire story will come out. The reputation of a good woman will be destroyed. A young man throughout his entire life will have to carry the stigma of being present at a murder. People will always wonder and will always talk. It hardly seems worth it after all.

"But if I were in his place, I think I would say something like this. The murderer made a sad mistake; he killed on the impulse of the moment—without thinking. After all, it cannot be undone. In a few weeks, at the most, he himself will be dead. I would say that I would write a confession, simply saying:
On such a day at such a place, I killed Van Dike. That would be all—I would say. I would give this confession to you to use later."

His tone had been very serious. Suddenly he laughed, though it was a sad laugh.

"How foolish of me. But that is what I would do if it were myself."

Bartley's voice came through the darkness. There was pity, mingled in a little note of admiration.

"If it were as you picture, that is just what I would advise the man to do."

There fell a silence. I heard, cut on the road, the shriek of an automobile horn. The murmur of the waves came drifting into the room. The Professor moved uneasily, then rose. As he walked over to the door, I saw Bartley rise. As the two men faced each other, Bartley's hand went out. The Professor clasped it, and for a second stood silent.

As their hands fell apart, the thin figure walked slowly over to the door. He started to go through the silken curtains, but suddenly he whirled around and faced us. The lights from the hall crossed his face—a face grave and white. Then he smiled:

"I have wondered all my life, Mr. Bartley, how I would feel under two circumstances: If I knew I had but a short time to live, and if I had committed a murder. The fact that my life will last but few days gives me no anxiety—"

He paused. A thoughtful look came into his eyes. He moved his head nervously.

"And the fact that I killed Van Dike does not cause me a single regret."
Startled, almost unable to believe my ears, I leaped to my feet to stare at the pathetic figure by the door. Part of the red siken curtain had draped itself around him. For a second his eyes met ours. A sad smile swept across his face. With a gesture he shook the curtain aside. We heard his dragging footsteps going lowly down the hall—footsteps weary and hopeless.
ASTOUNDED, I had sunk back in my chair. It could not be possible; it was absurd that the Professor should say he had murdered Van Dike. And yet I remembered the conversation; the implied knowledge which his weary voice had shown. I gave one look at Bartley.

"It is true, Pelt; and I wish it were not," was his simple reply.

"How long have you known?" I asked.

"Since this noon. He is left-handed, he studied medicine a year, but there was something else which made me thinking."

It proved to be a simple thing. The fact that although the Professor had talked almost without ceasing ever since we had been at the house had been something I had smiled over several times. But it was Bartley who had noticed that the man mentioned everything except the murder and the vanishing of Harold. The two chief topics of conversation, in this house at least, had never passed his lips.

This had struck Bartley as odd. He reminded me that someone had said that speech was given us to hide our thoughts. In the case of the Professor, it was true in this instance. From Willard Nash there had come the story of the deep love the odd little man had for his son. And yet he had never mentioned the murder or the boy's disappearance. Bartley had come to the
conclusion that he had not mentioned it because he was afraid to do so.

There were other things he had discovered which I knew nothing about. There was a path which started over in the field across from the hedge, which ran in an almost direct line to the house at the other side of the island. By using this path, it was possible to reach the tumbled-down building in less than thirty minutes. And the Professor had been away from the house the evening of the murder.

I reminded him that we had seen the man watching the couples who were dancing. He agreed, then said something I had not known. The Professor left the room shortly after Harold rushed away, and did not return until after ten-thirty. Not only that, there were two revolvers which belonged to Willard Nash. The Professor could very easily have taken one of them.

It seemed incredible that the little self-assertive figure, whose voice had rambled on without stopping every time I had seen him, could have committed the murder. But he had admitted it. Yet I could not understand just why he had done so. I said as much to Bartley.

He explained that unless one knew the psychological make-up of the man, it would be impossible to understand why he killed Van Dike. But if one pictured his weary years of struggle, his small income, one might begin to see the great love his starved soul could pour out to the son of a man who had been kind to him.

Nash was a relative but the relationship was very distant. He had taken the Professor into his home
every summer. Under the guise of having his library catalogued, he was able to force a goodly sum of money upon him, and the man's heart had responded—responded in love for the boy he wished was his own son.

Just when the Professor had realized the growing hatred of Harold for the lawyer, he did not know. But it alarmed him. The boy was reckless, excitable; he had a great admiration for Mrs. Cambell. He, study almost drove him to frenzy. When the Professor overheard them, when he heard the meeting suggested the night of the crime he was alarmed—alarmed over what the excitable boy might do.

It explained the murder, in a sense. Perhaps the fact he had mentioned, that the lawyer was to change his will and cut off the obscure college where the Professor taught, had something to do with it. The money meant a great deal to the college. To the Professor's mind, Van Dike was of no value to humanity. No one knew what tales he had heard of the lawyer whose private life was rather bad at the best.

Then, he reminded me, we must remember that the Professor knew he had but a few months to live. After all, we should realize that emotionally the man could not be very normal. He knew he was to die, he thought the boy he loved was in danger and he hated Van Dike. Out of those tiltings had come a murder.

"Could you have proved he was guilty?"

He rose to his feet, going over to the door to secure enough light to look at his watch. Turning, he shook his head:

"I doubt if it could be proven. If he were arrested, brought into court and tried, all he would have to do
would be to keep still. The theory was a beautiful one, sound from the standpoint of psychology, but there was little to link it all up. True we might have found a few things later—but it could not be proven. It is the only case I ever had where I knew a man was guilty and could not prove it if my life depended upon the proof."

"But you remember his last remark."

"Yes, but the Professor is to die in a few weeks. Nash mentioned the fact to me this afternoon. His heart is about gone. To-night will not help it any. It is better that he write his confession, as he hinted, and that after his death we give it to the authorities. It will save a lot of publicity, which would only injure people and do no good."

He suggested we might drive to the village. Taking our hats, we went out into the silent night. It was very dark in the rear of the house. The sea was hidden from our sight by the back line of the hedge, but we could hear the surf as it broke upon the sandy shore. Overhead were a few stars.

Silently we took the car from the garage and drove out to the street. Neither spoke, nor felt like speaking. I was still bewildered by what I had heard; still found it difficult to believe I had heard aright. So in silence, broken only by the faint purr of our engine, we drove down to the town hall.

When we climbed out of the car, we saw a light in the police station. Pushing open the door, we entered the first room—a room which had always been without a soul in it. But there were two people there now. Across a rough table, the chief and the doctor were
playing checkers. The room was blue from the smoke of their strong cigars.

They greeted us with a smile, though I noticed the chief was a little silent. But the doctor pushed back the checkerboard and started to talk. Comments were on nothing in particular from his lips. Then it came at once he wanted to know how Bartley had secured his information regarding Van Dike’s secretary.

He was told that it had come from the detective bureau of New York. The man had a police record and it was not a difficult thing to get it looked up. The doctor nodded. ‘He made some comment. The chief had been silent, but he suddenly spoke. There was a tone of impatience in his rough voice.

‘That’s all right, Mr. Bartley. But it don’t get us anywhere. We’ll never get to the end of the Van Dike murder. I expected big things from a man of your reputation, but it don’t look as if you are going to come across.”

Bartley laughed. Taking a cigarette from his case, he lighted it. Then he turned to the chief:

‘I have an idea, Miner, that in a few weeks from now the murderer will be known. In fact, I doubt if he will be alive then. It is my impression he has only a short time to live.’

I was looking at the coroner. Slumped back in his chair, the fat figure seemed at peace with the entire world. But at Bartley’s remark, there came a flash across his face. He sat up in the chair, his eyes grew large as in an excited voice he started to say:

‘Good God, I told a man to-day that he had but—’

Bartley raised his hand in a warning gesture.
chief did not see the motion, but the coroner checked the man; he was about to speak, his face was a mixture of astonishment and unbelief. As he stared at Bartley, there came the chief's complaining voice:

"When are you going to tell me all this? Let us know who killed the lawyer?"

"I am going to do more than that, was the calm retort. I am going to give you a signed confession."

The chief rose to his feet. For a moment he looked at Bartley as if he doubted he had heard aright. Something in the calm face caused him to hesitate. Then he asked:

"When do I get all this?"

The glances of the two men met and held. The chief's face became excited, a little anxious. But Bartley was calm. There was not an expression on his face when he answered, and he spoke only three words:

"Within three months."

There fell a silence. In it the chief studied the man with whom he had worked for the past ten days. Satisfied by what he saw in his face, he sank back in his chair. But it was not thinking of the chief or the dingy, smoke-filled room in which we stood. Instead my thoughts were with another man—a weary, tired man who had told us in a hopeless voice, only a few moments before, that he had but three months to live.