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A good many years ago, when chance brought Max Carrados and Louis Carlyle together again and they renewed the friendship of their youth, the blind man's first inquiry had been a jesting, "Do you unearth many murders, Louis?" and the private detective's reply a wholly serious, "No; our business lies mostly on the conventional lines among defalcation and divorce." Since that day Carlyle's business had increased beyond the fondest dreams of its creator, but "defalcation and divorce" still constituted the bulwarks of his prosperity. Yet from time to time a more sensational happening or a more romantic course raised a case above the commonplace, but none, it is safe to say, ever rivalled in public interest the remarkable crime which was destined to become labelled in the current Press as "The Holloway Flat Tragedy."

It was Mr. Carlyle's rule to see all callers who sought his aid, for the very nature of their business precluded clients from willingly unbosoming themselves to members of his office staff. Afterwards, they might accept the discreet attention of tactful subordinates, but for the first impression Carlyle well knew the value of his sympathetic handshake, his crisply reassuring voice, his—if need be—humanly condoning eye, and his impeccably prosperous person and surroundings. Men and women, guilty and innocent alike, pouring out their stories felt that at last they were really "understood," and, to give Louis Carlyle his due, the deduction was generally fully justified.

To the quiet Bampton Street establishment one September afternoon there came a new client who gave the name of Poleash and wished to see Mr. Carlyle in person. There was, as usual, no difficulty about that, and, looking up from his desk, Louis registered the impression of an inconspicuous man, somewhere in the thirties. He used spectacles, wore a moustache, and his clothes were a lounge suit of dark material, cut on the simple lines affected by the prudent man who reflects that he may be wearing that selfsame garment two or three seasons hence. There was a slight air of untidiness—or rather, perhaps, an absence of spruceness in any detail−about his general appearance, and the experienced observer put him down as a middle−class worker in any of the clerical, lower professional, or non−manual walks of life.

"Now, Mr. Poleash, sit down and tell me what I can do for you," said Carlyle when they had shaken hands—a rite to which the astute gentleman attached no slight importance and invariably offered. "Some trouble or little difficulty, I suppose, umph? But first let me get your name right and have your address for reference. You can rely on this, Mr. Poleash"— the inclination of Mr. Carlyle's head and the arrest of his lifted pen were undeniably impressive—"every word you utter is strictly confidential."

"Oh, that'll be all right, I'm sure," said the visitor carelessly. "It is rather out−of−the−way all the same, and at first—"

"The name?" insinuated Mr. Carlyle persuasively.

"Albert Henry Poleash: P−o−l−e−a−s−h—twelve Meridon House, Sturgrove Road, Holloway."

"Thank you. Now, if you will."

"Of course I could tell you in a dozen words, but I expect you'd need to know the circumstances, so perhpas I may as well begin where I think you'll understand it best from."

"By all means," assented Mr. Carlyle heartily; "by all means. In your own words and exactly as it occurs to you. I'm entirely at your service, so don't feel hurried. Do you care—" The production of a plain gold case completed the inquiry.

"To begin with," said Mr. Poleash, after contributing a match to their common purpose, "I may say that I'm a married man, living with my wife at that address−a smallish flat which suits us very well as we have no children. Neither of us has any near relations either and we keep ourselves pretty much to ourselves. Our only servant is a daily woman, who seems able to do everything that we require—"

"One moment, if you please," interposed Mr. Carlyle briskly. "I don't want you to do anything but tell your story in your own way, Mr. Poleash, but if you would indicate by a single word the nature of the event that concerns us it would enable me to judge which points are likely to be most vital to our purpose. Theft—divorce—blackmail −− "

"No—murder," replied Mr. Poleash with literal directness.

"Murder!" exclaimed the startled professional. "Do you mean that a murder has been committed?"

"No, not yet. I am coming to that. For ordinary purposes I generally describe myself as a rent−collector, but that is because official Jacks−in−office seem to have a morbid suspicion of anyone who is obviously not a millionaire calling himself independent. As a matter of fact, I have quite enough private income to serve my purpose. Most of it comes from small house property scattered about London. I see to the management of this myself and personally collect the rents. It takes a few days a week, gives me an interest, keeps me in exercise, and pays as well as anything else I could be doing in the time."

"Quite so," encouraged the listener.

"That's always there," went on Mr. Poleash, continuing his leisurely narrative with no indication of needing any encouragement, "but now and then I take up other work if it suits me−certain kinds of special canvassing; sometimes research. I don't want to slave making more money than we have the need of, and I don't want ever to find that we haven't enough money for anything we may require.

"Ideal," contributed Mr. Carlyle. "You are a true philosopher."

"My wife also has no need to be dependent on anyone either," continued Mr. Poleash, without paying the least attention to the suave compliment. "As a costume designer and fashion artist she is fully qualified to earn her living, and in fact up to a couple of years ago she did work of that kind regularly. Then she had a long illness that made a great change in her. This brings me to one of the considerations that affect whatever I may wish to do: the illness left her a nervous wreck−jumpy, excitable, not altogether reasonable."

"Neurasthenia," was Mr. Carlyle's seasonable comment. "The symptom of the age."

"Very likely. It doesn't affect me—at least it doesn't affect me directly. Living in the same house with Mrs. Poleash, it's bound to affect me, because I have to consider how every blessed thing I do will affect her. And just lately something very lively indeed has come along.

"There is a girl in a shop that I got friendly with−no, I don't want you to put her name down yet. It began a year or eighteen months −− "

But I don't suppose that matters. The only thing I really think that I'm to blame about is that I never told her I was married. As first there was no reason why I should; afterwards−well, there was a certain amount of reason why I shouldn't. Anyhow, I suppose that it was bound to come out sooner or later, and it did, a few weeks ago. She said, quite nicely, that she thought we ought to get married as things were, and then, of course, I had to explain that we couldn't.

"I really hadn't the ghost of an idea that she'd take it so terribly to heart as she did. There's nothing of the Don Juan about me, as you can see it a glance. The thing had simply come about—one step leading to another. But she fainted clean away, and when she came to again she was like a solid block of ice to everything I said. And then to cap matters who should appear at that moment but a fellow she'd been half engaged to before I came along. She'd frequently spoken about this man—his jealousy and temper and so on—and begged me never to let him pick a quarrel with me. 'Peter' was the only name I ever heard him called by, but he was a foreign−looking fellow—an Italian; I think."

'Pietro,' perhaps?" suggested Mr. Carlyle.

"No; 'Peter' she called him. 'Please take me back home, Peter,' was all she said, and off they went together without a word from either to me. Whenever I've seen her since it's been the same. 'Will I please leave her as there

is nothing to be said?' and I've been trying to think of all manner of arrangements to put things tight."

"The only arrangement that would seem likely to do that is the one that's out of your power to make," said Mr. Carlyle.

"I suppose so. However, this Peter evidently had a different idea. This is what happened two nights ago. I woke up in the dark—it was about three o'clock I found afterwards—with one of those feelings you get that you've forgotten to do something. It was a letter that I should have posted: it was important that it got delivered some time the next day—the same day by then−and there it was in my breast pocket. I knew if I left it that I should never be up in time for the first morning dispatch, so I determined to slip out then and make sure of it.

"It would only be a matter of twenty minutes or so. There is a pillar−box nearer, but that isn't cleared early. I pulled on a few things and prepared to tiptoe out when a fresh thought struck me.

"Mrs. Poleash is a very uncertain sleeper nowadays, and if she is disturbed it's ten to one if she gets off again, and for that reason we use different rooms. I knew better than wake her up to tell her I was going out, but at the same time there was just the possibility that she might wake and, hearing some noise, look in at my door to see if I was all right. If she found me gone she would nearly have a fit. On the spur of the moment I pushed the bolster down the bed and rucked up my dressing gown—it was lying about—above it. In the poor light it served very well for a sleeping man, and I knew that she would not disturb me.

"In less time than I'd given myself I had done my business and was back again at the building. I was entering—my hand was on the knob of the outer door in fact—when the door was pulled sharply open from the other side and another man and I came face to face on the step. We both fell back a bit, I think, but the next moment he had pushed past me and was hurrying down the street. There was just enough light from the lamp across the way for me to be certain of him; it was Peter, and I'm pretty sure that he was equally sharp in recognising me.

"Of course I went up the stairs in double quick time after that. The door of the flat was as I had left it−simply on the handle as I had put up the latch catch, never dreaming of anyone coming along in that time—and all was quiet and undisturbed inside. But one thing was different in my room, although it took me a few minutes to discover it. There was a clean cut through my dressing gown, through the sheet, through the bolster. Someone, Mr. Carlyle, had driven a knife well home before he discovered his mistake."

"But that was plain evidence of an attempt to murder," declared Mr. Carlyle feelingly—he disliked crimes of violence from every point of view. "Your business is obviously to inform the police."

"No," replied the visitor slowly; "no. Of course I thought of that, but I soon had to let it slide. What would it mean? Visits, inquiries, cross−examinations, explanations. Everything must come out. After a sufficient exhibition of nerve−storm Mrs. Poleash would set about getting a divorce and I should have to go through that. Then I suppose I should have to marry the other one, and, when all's said and done, that's the last thing I really want. In any case, my home would be broken up and my whole life spoiled. No, if it comes to that I might just as well be dead."

"Then what do you propose doing, may I ask? Calmly waiting to be assassinated?"

"That's exactly what I came to see you about. You know my position, my difficulty. I understand that you are a man of wide experience. Putting aside the police and certain publicity, what should you advise?"

"Well, well," admitted the expert, "it's rather a formidable handicap, but we will do the best for you that is to be done. Can you indicate exactly what you want?"

"I can easily indicate exactly what I don't want. I don't want to be murdered or molested and I don't want Mrs. Poleash to get wind of what's been going on."

"Why not go away for a time? Meanwhile we could find out who your man is and keep him under observation."

"I might do that−unless Kitty took it into her head that she didn't want to go, and then, of course, I couldn't leave her alone in the flat just now. After Tuesday night's business—this is what concerns me most—should you think it likely that the fellow would come again or not?"

Mr. Carlyle pondered wisely. The longer he took over an opinion, he had discovered—providing he kept up the right expression—the greater weight attached to his pronouncement.

"No," he replied with due authority. "I should say not−not in anything like the same way. Of course he will naturally assume that you will now take due precautions—probably imagine that the police are after him. What

sort of fastenings have you to your doors and windows?"

"Nothing out of the way. They are old flats and not in very good repair. The outer door is never kept locked, night or day. The front door of our flat has a handle, a latch lock, and a mortice lock. During the day it is simply kept on the latch; at night we fasten the other lock, but do not secure the latch, so that the woman can let herself in when she comes−she has one set of keys, I another, and Mrs. Poleash the third."

"But when you were out on Tuesday night there was no lock fastened, I understand?"

"That is so. Simply the handle to turn. I purposely fastened the latch lock out of action as I found at the door that I hadn't the keys with me and I didn't want to go back to the room again."

"And the inner doors?"

"They have locks, but few now work—either the key is lost or the lock broken. We never trouble about them−except Kitty's room. She has scrupulously locked that at night, since she has had burglars among other nerve fancies."

Mr. Carlyle shook his head.

"You ought at the very least to have the locks put right at once. Practically all windows are fitted with catches that a child can push back with a table−knife."

"That's all very well, but, you see, if I get a locksmith in I shall have to make up some cock−and−bull story about house−breaking to Mrs. Poleash, and that will set her off. And, anyway, we are on the third story up."

"If you are going to consider your wife's nerves at every turn, my dear sir," remarked Mr. Carlyle with some contempt, from the security of his single state, "you will begin to find yourself in rather a tight fix, I am afraid. How are you going to account for the cut linen, for instance?"

"Oh, I've arranged all that," replied Mr. Poleash, nodding sagaciously. "My dressing gown she will never notice. The sheet and bolster case—it was a hot night so there was only a single sheet fortunately—I have hidden away in a drawer for the present and put others in their place. I shall buy another of each and burn or lose these soon−Kitty doesn't keep a very close check on things. The bolster itself I can sew up well enough before it's noticed."

"You may be able to keep it up," was Mr. Carlyle's dubious admission. "At all events," he continued, "as I understand it, you want me to advise you on the lines of taking no direct action against the man you call Peter and at the same time adopting no precautions that would strike Mrs. Poleash as being unusual?"

"Nothing that would suggest burglars or murder to her just now," assented Poleash. "Yes; that's about what it comes to. You may be able to give me a useful tip or two. If not−well, I know it's a tough proposition and I don't grudge the outlay."

"At least let us see," replied the professional man, never failing on the side of lack of self−confidence. "Now as regards—"

It redounds to Louis Carlyle's credit as an inquiry agent that in an exacting world no serious voice ever accused him of taking unearned money; for so long as there was anything to be learned he plied his novel client with questions, explored surmises and bestowed advice. Even when they had come to the end of useful conversation and the prolific notebook had been closed Carlyle lingered on the topic.

"It's an abnormal situation, Mr. Poleash, and full of professional interest. I shall keep it in mind, you may be sure, and if anything further occurs to me, why, I will let you know."

"Please don't write on any account," begged Mr. Poleash with sudden earnestness. "In fact, I'd ask you to put a line to that effect across my address. You see, I'm liable to be out at any post time, and if my wife should happen to get curious about a strange letter, why, that, in the language of the kerb, would blow the gaff."

"I see," assented Mr. Carlyle. "Very well; it shall be just as you like."

"And if I can settle with you now," continued Poleash; "for of course I don't want to have an account sent. Then some day−say next week— I might look in to report and to hear if you have anything further to suggest."

"You might, in the meanwhile, consider the most practical course —that of having your man kept under observation."

"I will," promised the other. "But so far I'm all in favour of letting sleeping dogs lie."

Not unnaturally Mr. Carlyle had heard that line before and had countered it.

"True, but it is as well to know when they wake up again," he replied. With just the necessary touch of dignity and graciousness he named and received the single guinea at which he assessed the interview and began to

conduct Mr. Poleash towards the door— not the one by which he had entered from the waiting−room but another leading directly down into the street. "Have you lost something?"

"Only my hat and things−I left them in your ante−room." He held up his gloved left hand as though it required a word of explanation. "I keep this on because I am short of a finger, and I've noticed that some people don't like to see it."

"We'll go out that way instead then−it's all the same," remarked Carlyle, as he crossed to the other door.

Two later callers were sitting in the waiting−room, and at the sight of them Mr. Carlyle's somewhat cherubic face at once assumed an expression of the heartiest welcome. But beyond an unusually mellifluent "Good afternoon!" he said nothing until his departing client was out of hearing. Names were not paraded in those precincts. With a muttered apology Mr. Poleash recovered his belongings from among the illustrated papers and hurried away.

"And why in the world have you been waiting here, Max, instead of sending in to me?" demanded the hospitable Carlyle with a show of indignation.

"Business," replied Mr. Carrados tersely. "Your business, understand. Your chief minion was eager to blow a message through to you but 'No,' I said, 'we'll take our proper turn.' Why should I interrupt the Bogus Company Promoter's confession or cut short the Guilty Husband's plea?"

"Joking apart, that fellow who just went brought a very remarkable story," said Mr. Carlyle. "I should be glad to know what you would have had to say to him when we have time to go into it." (Do not be too ready to condemn the gentleman as an arrant humbug and this a gross breach of confidence: Max Carrados had been appointed Honorary Consultant to the firm, so that what would have otherwise been grave indiscretions were strictly business discussions.)

"In the meantime the suggestion is that you haven't taken a half−day off lately and that Monday morning is a convenient time."

"Generous man! What is happening on Monday morning then?"

"Something rather surprising in wireless at the Imperial Salon−ten to twelve−thirty. I know it's the sort of thing you'll be interested in, and I have two tickets and want someone fairly intelligent to go with."

"An ideal chain of circumstances," rippled Mr. Carlyle. "I shall endeavour to earn the price of my—"

"I am sure you will succeed," retorted Carrados. "By the way, it's free."

To a strain of this intellectual horseplay the arrangements for their meeting were made, and that having been the only reason for the call, Mr. Carrados departed under Parkinson's watchful escort. In due course the wireless demonstration took place, but (although an invention then for the first time shown bore no small part in one of the blind man's subsequent cases) it is unnecessary to accompany them inside the hall, for with the enigma centring in Mr. Poleash that event had no connection. It is only touched upon as bringing Carrados and his friend together at that hour, for as they walked along Pall Mall after lunching Mr. Carlyle suddenly gave a whistle of misgiving and surprise and stopped a hurrying newsboy.

"Holloway Flat Tragedy," he read from the bill as he investigated sundry pockets for the exact coin. "By gad, if that should happen to be—"

"Poleash! My God, it is!" he exclaimed as soon as his eye had found the paragraph concerned−a mere inch in the "Stop Press" news. "Poor beggar! Tshk! Tshk !"−his clicking tongue expressed disapproval and regret. "He ought to have known better after what had happened. It was madness. I wonder what he actually did—"

"Your remarkable caller of last Thursday, Louis?"

"Yes; but how do you come to know?"

"A trifling indiscretion on his part. With a carelessness that must be rare among your clients I should say, Mr. Poleash dropped one of his cards under the table in your waiting−room, where the conscientious Parkinson discovered it."

"Well, the unfortunate chap doesn't need cards now. Listen, Max.

"NORTH LONDON TRAGEDY

"Early this morning a charwoman going to a flat in Meridon House, Holloway, made a gruesome discovery. Becoming suspicious at the untouched milk and newspapers, she looked into a bedroom and there found the occupier, a Mr. Poleash, dead in bed. He had received shocking injuries, and everything points to deliberate murder. Mrs. Poleash is understood to be away on a holiday in Devonshire."

"Of course Scotland Yard takes it up now, but I must put my information at their service. They're devilish lucky, too. I can practically hand over the miscreant to them and they will scoop the credit."

"I was to hear about that," Carrados reminded him. "Suppose we walk across to Scotland Yard, and you can tell me on the way."

At the corner of Derby Street they encountered two men who had just turned out of the Yard. The elder had the appearance of being a shrewd farmer, showing his likely son the sights of London and keeping a wide awake eye for its notorious pitfalls. To pursue appearances a step farther they might even have been calling to recover the impressive umbrella that the senior carried.

"Beedel," dropped Mr. Carlyle beneath his breath, but his friend was already smiling recognition.

"The very man," said Carrados genially. "I'll wager you can tell us something about the Poleash arrangements, inspector."

The two plain−clothes men exchanged amused glances.

"I can tell you this much, Mr. Carrados," replied Inspector Beedel, in unusually good spirits, "my nephew George here is going to do the work and I'm going to look after the bouquets at the finish. We're on our way there now."

"Couldn't be better," said the blind man. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind us going up there with you?"

"Very pleased," replied Beedel. "We were making for the station."

"You may as well help to fill our taxi," suggested Carrados. "Mr. Carlyle may have something to tell you on the way."

On the whole Mr. Carlyle would have preferred to make his disclosure to head−quarters, but the convenience of the arrangement was not to be denied, and with a keen appreciation of the astonishing piece of luck Beedel and George heard the story of the inquiry agent's client.

"It looks like being simply a matter of finding this girl, if the conditions up there bear out this tale," remarked George, between satisfaction at so veritable a clue and a doubt whether he would not have preferred a more complicated case. "Did you happen to get her name and address, sir?"

"No," admitted Mr. Carlyle with a slight aloofness, "it did not arise. Poleash was naturally reluctant to bring in the lady more than he need and I did not press him."

"Makes no odds," conceded George generously. "Shop−girl—kept company with a foreigner—known as Peter. Even without anything else there ought to be no difficulty in finding her."

Sturgrove Road was not deserted, and there was a rapid concentration about the door of Meridon House "to see the 'tecs arrive." On the whole, public opinion was disappointed in their appearance, but the action of George in looking up at the frontage of the building and then glancing sharply right and left along the road was favourably commented on. The policeman stationed at the outer door admitted them at once.

A sergeant and a constable of the local division were in possession of No.12, and the scared daily woman, temporarily sustained by their impression of absolute immobility, was waiting in the kitchen to indicate whatever was required. Greetings Oil a slightly technical plane passed between the four members of the force.

"Mrs. Poleash has been sent for, I suppose?" asked Mr. Carlyle.

"We telephoned from our office to Torquay some hours ago," replied the sergeant. "They'll send an officer to the place she's staying at and break it to her as well as possible. That's the course we usually follow." He took out a weighty presentation watch and considered it. "Torquay. I don't suppose she could be here yet."

"Not even if she was in first go," amplified his subordinate.

"Well," suggested George, "suppose we look round?"

The bedroom was the first spot visited. There was nothing unusual to be seen, apart from the outline of the bed, its secret now hidden beneath a decorous covering−nothing beyond the rather untidy details of the occupant's daily round. All these would in due course receive a careful scrutiny, but at the moment one point drew every eye.

"Hold one another's hands," advised the sergeant, as he prepared to turn down the sheet. The hovering charwoman gave a scream and fled.

"That's a wild beast been at work," said Inspector Beedel, coolly drawing nearer to appreciate the details.

"My word, yes!" agreed George, following a little reluctantly.

"Shocking! Shocking!" Mr. Carlyle made no pretence about turning away.

"Killed at the first blow," continued the sergeant, indicating, "though it's not the only one. Then his face

slashed about like a fancy loaf till his own mother wouldn't know him. Something dreadful, isn't it? Finger gone? Oh, that's an old affair. What're you to make of it all?"

"Revenge−revenge and rage and sheer bloodthirstiness," summed up Mr. Carlyle. "Was anything taken?"

"Nothing disturbed so far as we can see, and the old party there" −− a comprehensive nod in the direction of the absent charlady— "says that all the things she knows of seem to be right."

"What time do they put it at?" asked Beedel.

"Dr. Meadows has been here. Midnight Saturday to early Sunday morning, he said. That agrees with the people at the flat opposite hearing the door locked at about ten on Saturday night and the Sunday morning milk and paper not being touched."

"Milk−can on the doorstep all day, I suppose?" suggested someone.

"Yes; people opposite noticed it, but thought nothing of it. They knew Mrs. Poleash was going away on Saturday and thought that he might have gone with her. Mrs. Jones, she doesn't come on Sundays, so nothing was found out till this morning."

"May as well hear what she has to say now," said Beedel. "No need to keep her about that I know of."

"Just one minute, please, if you don't mind," put in Mr. Carlyle, not so much asking anyone's permission as directing the affair. The sight of a wardrobe had reminded him of the dead man's story, and he was now handling the clothes that hung there with keen anticipation. "There is something that I really came especially to see. This is his dressing gown, and, yes, by Jupiter, it's here!"

He pointed to a clean cut through the material as they gathered round him.

"What's that?" inquired the sergeant, looking from one face to another.

"Previous attempt," replied Beedel shortly.

"There ought to be a sheet and bolster−case somewhere about," continued the eager gentleman, now thoroughly intrigued, and under the impulse of his zeal drawers and cupboards were opened and their contents gingerly displaced.

"Something of the sort here among the shirts," announced George.

"Have them out then. Not likely to be any others put away there." The hidden things were unfolded and displayed and here also the tragic evidence lay clear before them.

"By gad, you know, I half thought he might have dreamt it until this came," confessed Mr. Carlyle to the room at large. "Tshk! Tshk! How on earth the fellow could have gone " He remembered the quiet figure lying within earshot and finished with a tolerant shrug.

"Let's get on," said Beedel. These details could very well have waited had been his thought all along.

"I'll fold the things," volunteered Mr. Carrados. All the others had satisfied their curiosity by glance or scrutiny and he was free to take his time. He took up the loose bundle in his arms and with the strange impulse towards light that so often moved him he turned away from them and sought the window.

"Now, missis, come along and tell us all about it," called out the young constable.

"No," interposed the inspector kindly, "the poor creature's upset enough already without bringing her in here again. Stay where you are, Mrs. Jones, we're coming there," he announced from the door, and they filed along the skimpy passage into the dingy kitchen. "Now can you just tell us quietly what you know about this bad business?"

Mrs. Jones's testimony, given on the frequently expressed understanding that she was quite prepared to be struck dead at any point of it if she deviated from the strictest line of truth, did not disclose any new feature, while its frequent references to the lives and opinions of friends not concerned in the progress of the drama threatened now and then to stifle the narrative with a surfeit of pronouns. But she was listened to with patience and complimented on her nerve. Mrs. Jones sadly shook her antique black bonnet and disclaimed the quality.

"I could do nothing but stand and scream," she confessed wistfully, reliving to the first dreadful moment at the bedroom door.

"I stood and screamed three times before I could get myself away. The poor gentleman! What harm was he, for to be done in like that!"

There was a string of questions from one or another of the company before she was finally dismissed−generally from Beedel or George with Mr. Carlyle's courteously assertive voice intervening once or twice: the Poleashes had few visitors that she had ever seen—she was only there from eight to six−and she had never known of anyone staying with them; no one had knocked at the door for anything on Saturday; she had not

noticed anyone whom she could call to mind as "a foreigner" loitering about or at the door recently (a foreign family lived at No. 5, but they were well spoken of); neither Mr. or Mrs. Poleash had talked to her of anything uncommon of late— the gentleman was mostly out and "she" wasn't one of the friendly sort; the couple seemed to get on together "as well as most," and she had never heard a "real" quarrel; Mrs. Poleash had gone off for a week (she understood) about noon on Saturday, and Mr. Poleash had accompanied her to Paddington (as he had mentioned on his return for tea); she had last seen him at about five o'clock on Saturday, when she left, a little earlier than usual; she knew nothing of the ashes in the kitchen grate, not having had a fire there for weeks past; the picture post card (passed round) from Mrs. Poleash, announcing her arrival at Torquay, she had found on the hall floor together with the Sunday paper; she was to go on just the same while Mrs. Poleash was away, coming daily to "do up," and so on; it was a regular arrangement "week in and week out."

"That seems to be about all?" summed up Inspector Beedel, looking round. "We have your address, Mrs. Jones, and you're sure to hear from us about something pretty soon."

"Before you go," said a matter−of−fact voice from the door, "do you happen to remember what you were doing last Thursday afternoon?" It was the first question that Mr. Carrados had put, and they had scarcely noticed whether he had re−joined them yet or not.

"Last Thursday afternoon?" repeated Mrs. Jones helplessly. "Oh, Lor', sir, my head's in that whirl—"

"Yes, but it isn't so difficult if you think−early closing day, you know."

This stimulus proved effective and the charwoman remembered. She had something special to remember by. On Thursday morning Mrs. Poleash had passed on to her a single ticket for that afternoon's performance at the Parkhurst Theatre, and told her that she could go after she had washed up the dinner things.

"So that you were not here at all on Thursday afternoon? Just one more thing, Mrs. Jones. Sooner or later a photograph of your master will be wanted. Is there one anywhere about?"

"The only one I know of stands on the sideboard in the little room. There may be others put away, but not being what you might call curious, sir—"

"I'm sure you're not," agreed Carrados. "Now, as you go you shall point it out to us so that there can be no mistake."

"You couldn't make no mistake because there's only that and one of her stands there," explained Mrs. Jones, but she proceeded to comply. "There it "Yes?" said the blind man, close upon her.

"I'm sorry, sir, indeed. I must have made a mistake—"

"I don't think you made any mistake," he urged. "I don't think you really think so either."

"I'm that mithered I don't rightly know what to think," she declared. "That isn't him."

"Is it the frame? No, don't touch it−that might be unlucky, you know— but you can remember that."

"It's the frame, right enough. I ought to know, the times I've dusted it."

"Then the photograph bas been changed: there's nothing unlikely in that. When was the last time that you noticed the other one there?"

Quite recently, it would seem, but taking refuge behind her whirling head Mrs. Jones held out against precision. It might have been Friday or it might have been Saturday. Carrados forbore to press her more exactly, and she departed, sustained by the advice of Authority that she should have nothing to say to nobody, under the excuse, if need be, that she had answered enough questions already for one day.

"While we are here," said the sergeant—they were still in the "little room," the only one that looked out on the front—"you might as well see where he got in." He went to the window and indicated certain marks on the wood− and stone−work. "We found the lower sash still a few inches up when we came."

"Went the same way as he came, I suppose," suggested George.

"Must have done. All the keys are accounted for, and Mrs. Jones found the front door locked as usual. And why not; why shouldn't he? There's the balcony, and you hardly have to lean out to see the stairway window not a yard away. Why, it's as easy as ring−a−roses. Might have been made for it."

"Tshk! Tshk!" fumed Mr. Carlyle unhappily. "After what I said. And not one of the locks has been seen to."

"Locks?" echoed the young policeman, appearing that moment at the door. "Why, here is a chap with tools, says he's come to repair and fit the locks!"

"Well; if this isn't the fair nefus ultra!" articulated the sergeant. "However, show him in, lad."

The locksmith, looking scarcely less alarmed than if he had fallen into a den of thieves, had a very short and

simple tale to tell. His shop was in the Seven Sisters Road, and on Friday afternoon a gentleman had called there and arranged with him to come on Monday and repair some locks. He had given the name of Poleash and that address. The man knew nothing of what had taken place and had come as fixed.

"It's a pity you didn't happen to make it Saturday, Mr. Hipwaite," said Inspector Beedel, as he took a note of this new evidence. "It might—I don't say it would, but it might—have prevented murder being done."

"But that's the very thing I was not to do," declared Hipwaite, with some warmth. "'Don't come on Saturday because the wife is very nervous, and if she thinks burglars are about she'll have a fit,' he said—those very words. 'She'll be away on Monday, and then by the time she comes back she mayn't notice.' Was I likely to come on Saturday?"

Plainly he was not. "That's all right," it was conceded, "but there's nothing in your line doing to−day." So Mr. Hipwaite departed, more than half persuaded that he had been hardly used and not in the least mollified by being concerned in so notable a tragedy.

"Before I go," resumed the sergeant, leading the way back to the kitchen, "there's one other thing I must hand over. You heard what Mrs. Jones said about the fire—that there hadn't been one for weeks as they always used the stove?"

"That's what I asked her," George reminded him. "Someone has had a fire here."

"Correct," continued the officer imperturbably. "It's also what I asked her a couple of hours before you came. Someone's had a fire here. Who and what for? Well, I've had the cinders out to see and now I'll make over to you what there was."

"Glove fasteners," commented the inspector. "All the metal there was about them. Millions of the pattern, I suppose."

"Burned his gloves after the job—they must have been in a fair mess," said George. " 'Audubon Freres' they're stamped—foreign make."

"That reminds me—there's one thing more." It was produced from the sergeant's pocket−book, a folded fragment of paper, charred along its edge. "It's from the hearth; evidently a bit that fell out when the fire was made. Foreign newspaper, you will see; Italian it looks to me."

Mr. Carlyle, Inspector Beedel, and George exchanged appreciative glances. Upon this atmosphere of quiet satisfaction there fell something almost like a chuckle.

"Did anyone happen to notice if he had written 'Si parla Italiano' in red on the wall over the bed?" inquired the guileless voice.

The young constable, chancing to be the nearest person to the door, rose to this mendacious suggestion by offering to go and see. The others stared at the blind man in various stages of uncertainty.

"No, no," called out Mr. Carlyle feelingly. "There is no need to look, thank you. When you know Mr. Carrados as well as I do you will understand that although there is always something in what he says it is not always the something you think it is. Now, Max, pray enlighten the Company. Why should the murderer write 'Italian spoken' over the bed?"

"Obviously to make sure that you shouldn't miss it," replied Mr. Carrados.

"Well," remarked the sergeant, demonstrating one or two simple exercises in physical drill as a suitable preparation, "I may as well be going. I don't understand Italian myself. Nor Dutch either," he added cryptically.

Mr. Carlyle also had nothing more to stay for. "If you have done here, Max—" he began, and turned only to find that Carrados was no longer there.

"Your friend has just gone to the front room, sir," said the constable, catching the words as he passed. "Funny to see a blind man getting about so "But a sudden crash of glass from the direction referred to cut short the impending compliment.

It was, as Carrados explained, entirely his own preposterous fault.

Nothing but curiosity about the size of the room had impelled him to touch the walls, and the picture, having a weak cord or an insecure nail. . . had it not brought something else down inits fall?

"Only the two frames from the sideboard, so far as I can see," replied Carlyle. "All the glass is shattered. But I don't suppose that Mrs. Poleash will be in a condition to worry about trifles. Jolly good thing you aren't hurt, that's all."

"Of course I should like to replace the damage," said the delinquent.

Inspector Beedel said nothing, but as he looked on he recalled one or two other mischances in the past, and being of an introspective nature he continued to massage his chin thoughtfully.

* * * * *

Three days later the inquest on the body of Albert Henry Poleash was opened. It was of the merest formal description, proof of identity and a bare statement of the cause of death being the only evidence put forward. An adjournment for a week was then declared.

At the resumed inquiry the story of Poleash's death was taken forward, and the newspaper reader for the first time was encouraged to see in it the promise of a first−class popular sensation. Louis Carlyle related the episode of his unexpected client. Corroboration of that wildly romantic story was forthcoming from many sides. Mr. Hipwaite carried the drama two days later by describing the dead man's visit to his shop, the order to repair the locks, and his own futile journey to the flat. Mrs. Jones, skilfully piloted among dates and details, was in evidence as the discoverer of the body. Two doctors— a private practitioner called hurriedly in at the first alarm and the divisional surgeon—agreed on all essential points, and the police efficiently bridged the narration at one stage and another and contrived to present a faithful survey of the tragedy.

But the most arresting figure of the day, though her evidence was of very slight account and mainly negative, was the unhappy widow. As she moved into the witness−box, a wan, graceful creature in her unaccustomed, but, it may be said, not unattractive crepe, a rustle of compassion stirred the court and Mr. Carlyle, who had come prejudiced against her, as an automatic reflex of his client's fate, chirruped sympathy.

Mrs. Poleash gave her testimony in a low voice, not particularly attractive in its tone, and she looked straight before her with eyes neither downcast nor wandering. Her name, she said, was Katherine Poleash, her age twenty−nine. She knew nothing of the tragedy, having been in Torquay at the time. She had gone there on the Saturday afternoon, her husband seeing her off from Paddington. Their relationship was perfectly friendly, but not demonstrative. Her husband was a considerate but rather reserved man with no especial interests. Up to two years ago she had been accustomed to earn her own living, but a nervous breakdown had interfered with her capacity for work. It was on account of that illness that she had generally occupied a separate bedroom; it had left her nervous in many ways, but she was surprised to hear that she should have been described as exacting or ill−tempered.

"'Not wholly reasonable and excitable,' were the precise terms used, I think," put in Mr. Carlyle gallantly.

"It's much the same," she replied apathetically.

Continuing, she had no knowledge at all of any intrigue between her husband and a shop−girl, such as had been referred to, nor had she ever heard of the man Peter, either by name or as an Italian. She could not suggesting what quarter of London the shop in question was likely to be as the deceased was accustomed to go about a good deal. The police already had a list of the various properties he owned. At the conclusion of her evidence Mrs. Poleash seemed to be on the point of fainting and had to be assisted out.

There was nothing to be gained by a further adjournment. The cause of death—the real issue before that court—was reasonably clear. The jury brought in a verdict of "Wilful Murder against Some Person or Persons Unknown." Before the reporters left the police asked that the Press should circulate a request for anyone having knowledge of a shop−assistant who had been friendly with a foreigner known as Peter or Pietro, or with a man answering to Mr. Poleash's description, to communicate with them either at New Scotland Yard or to any local station. The Press promised to comply and offered to publish photographs of Mr. Poleash as a means toward that end, only to learn that no photograph possessing identification value could be found. So began the memorable paperchase for an extremely nebulous shop−assistant and a foreigner whose description began and ended with the sobriquet "Peter the Italian."

* * * * *

"I was wondering if you or Inspector Beedel would come round one day to see me" said Mr. Carrados as George was shown into the study at The Turrets. Two full weeks had elapsed since the conclusion of the inquest and the newspaper value of the Holloway Flat Tragedy had sunk from a column opposite leader page to a six4ine fill−up beneath "Home and General." "Your uncle used often to drop in to entertain me with the progress of his cases."

"That wasn't his way of looking at it, Mr. Carrados. He used to say that when it came to seeing through a brick wall you were−well, hell!"

"Curious," remarked Mr. Carrados. "I don't remember ever hearing Inspector Beedel make use of that precise expression."

George went a trifle red and laughed to demonstrate his self−possession.

"Well, perhaps I dropped a word of my own in by accident," he said. "But that was what he meant−in a complimentary sense, of course. As a matter of fact, it was on his advice that I ventured to trouble you now."

"Not 'trouble,'" protested the blind man, ever responsive to the least touch of diffidence. "That's another word the inspector wouldn't use about me, I'm sure."

"You're very kind," said George, accepting a cigarette, "and as I had to come this way to see another—oh, my Lord, another !— shopgirl, why, I thought—"

"Ah; how is the case going?"

"It's no go, Mr. Carrados. We've seen thousands of shop−girls and hundreds of Italian Peters. I'm beginning to think," said the visitor, watching Mr. Carrados's face as he propounded the astonishing heresy, "that there is no such person."

"Yes?" replied Carrados unmoved. "It is always as well to look beyond the obvious, isn't it? What does the inspector say?"

"He says, 'I should like to know what Mr. Carrados really meant by "Italian spoken," and what he really did when he smashed that picture.'"

Carrados laughed his appreciation as he seemed actually to watch the blue smoke curling upwards.

"How easy it is to give a straightforward answer when a plain question is asked," he replied. "By 'Si parla Italiano' I ventured to insinuate my own private opinion that there was no Italian Peter; when I broke the picture I tried to obtain some definite evidence of someone there was."

George waited in the hope of this theme developing, but his host seemed to consider that he had said all that was necessary, and it is difficult to lead on a man into disclosures when you cannot fix him with your eye.

"Poleash may have been mistaken himself," he continued tentatively; "or he may have purposely misled Mr. Carlyle on details, with the idea of getting his advice but not entirely trusting him to the full extent."

"He may," admitted the placid smoker.

"One thing I can't ~understand is how ever the man set about keeping company with a girl without spending more on her than he seems to have done. We found a small pocket diary that he entered his current expenses in, and there isn't a single item for chocolates, flowers, theatres, or anything of that sort.".

"A diary?"

"Oh, he didn't keep a diary; only entered cash, and rents received, and so on. Here it is, if you care to—examine it."

"Thank you, I should. I wonder what our friend Carlyle charged for the consultation?"

"I don't remember seeing that," admitted George, referring to the pages. "Thursday, the 3rd, wasn't it? No, curiously enough, that doesn't appear. . . . I wonder if he never put down any of these what you might call questionable items for fear of Mrs. Poleash seeing?"

"Not unnaturally," agreed Carrados. "You found nothing else of interest then—no addresses or new names?"

"Nothing at all. Oh, that page you've got is only his memorandum of sizes and numbers and so on."

"Yes; quite a useful habit, isn't it?" The long, vibrant fingers touched off line after line without a pause or stumble. "When he made this handy list Albert Henry Poleash little thought Boots, size 9; hat, size 7 1/8; collars, size 16; gloves, size 8 3/4; watch, No.31903; weight, 11st 8lbs. There we have the man: *Ex pede Herculem,* as the motto has it—only in this case of course the hat and gloves are more useful."

"Very true, sir," said George, whose instinct was to keep a knowing front on all occasions.

When Parkinson was summoned to the room some time later he found his master there alone. Every light was blazing on, and, sitting at his desk, Mr. Carrados confronted a single sheet of paper. With his trained acuteness for the minutiae of every new condition Parkinson immediately took mental photographs of the sheet of paper with its slim written column, of the position and appearance of the chair George had used, of the number and placing of cigarette ends and matches, of all the details connected with the tray and contents, and of a few other matters. It was his routine.

"Close the door and come in," said Carrados. "I want you to carry your mind back about four weeks to the last occasion when we called at Mr. Carlyle's office together. As we sat in the waiting−room I asked you if the things

left there belonged to anyone we knew."

"I remember the circumstance perfectly, sir.

"I want the articles described. The gloves?"

"There was only one glove−that for the right hand. It was a dark grey suede, moderately used, and not of the best cut. The fastening was a press button stamped 'Audubon Freres.' The only marking inside the glove was the size, 7 1/2."

Carrados made a note on the sheet before him. "The hat?" he said. "What size was that?"

"The size of the hat, printed on an octagonal white ticket, was 6 3/4, sir."

"Excellent, so far, When the caller passed through you saw him for a moment. Apart from clothes, which do not matter just now, was there any physical peculiarity that would identify him?"

"He had a small dark mole beneath the left eye. The lobe of his right ear was appreciably less than the other. The nail of the middle finger of the right hand was corrugated from an injury at some time."

Carrados made a final note on the paper before him.

"Very good indeed, Parkinson," he remarked. "That is all I wanted."

* * * * *

A month passed and nothing happened. Occasionally a newspaper, pressed for a subject, commented on the disquieting frequency with which undetected murder could be done, and among other instances mentioned the Holloway Flat Tragedy and deplored the ease with which Peter the Italian had remained at large. The name by that time struck the reader as distantly familiar.

Then one evening early in November Beedel rang Mr. Carrados up. The blind man happened to take the call himself, and at the first words he knew that the dull, patient shadowing of weeks was about to fructify.

"Yes, Inspector Beedel himself, sir," said the voice at the other end. "I'm speaking from Beak Street. The two you know of have just gone to the Restaurant X in Warsaw Street. The lady has booked two seats at the Alhambra for to−night, so we expect them to be there for the best part of an hour."

"I'll come at once," replied Carrados. "What about Carlyle?"

"He's been notified. Back entrance in Boulton Court," said the inspector. "I'm off there now myself."

It was the first time that the two the blind man "knew of" had met since the watch was set, and their correspondence had been singularly innocuous. Yet not a breath of suspicion had been raised and the same elaborate care that had prompted Mr. Carrados to bring down a picture to cover the abstraction of a small square of glass had been maintained throughout.

"Nice private little room upstairs, saire," insinuated the proprietor as "the two" looked round. He guessed that they shunned publicity, and he was right, although not entirely so. With a curt nod the man led the way up the narrow stairway to the equivocal little den on the first floor. The general room below had not been crowded, but this one was wholly empty.

"Quite like old times," said the woman with an unmusical laugh as she threw off her cloak−there was little indication of the sorrowmg widow now, "I thought we had better fight shy of the 'Toledo' for the future."

"'M yes," replied her companion slowly, looking dubiously about him −− he no longer wore glasses or moustache, nor was his left hand; the glove now removed, deficient of a finger. "The only thing is whether it isn't too soon for us to be about together at all."

"Pha!" she snapped expressively. "They've gone to sleep again. There isn't a thing−no not a single detail−gone wrong. The most that could happen would be a raid here to look for Peter the Italian!"

"For God's sake don't keep on that," he urged in a low voice. "Your husband was a brute to you by what you say, and I'm not sorry now it's done, but I want to forget it all. You had your way:

I've done everything you planned. Now you are free and decently well off and as soon as it's safe we can really marry—if you still will."

"If I still will," she repeated, looking at him meaningly. "Do you know, Dick, I think it may become desirable sooner even than I thought."

"Sssh!" he warned; "here comes someone. You order, Kitty—you always have done! Anything will suit me." He turned to arrange his overcpat across an empty chair and reassured his hand among the contents of the nearest pocket.

Downstairs, in his nondescript living−room, the proprietor of the Restaurant X was being very quickly and

efficiently made to understand just so much of the situation as turned on his immediate and complete acceptance of it. In the presence of authority so vigorously expressed the stout gentleman bowed profusely, lowered his voice, and from time to time placed a knowing finger on his lips in agreement.

"Hallo," said the man called "Dick" as a different attendant brought a dish. "Where has our other waiter got to?"

"Party of regular customers as always has him just come in," explained the new one. "'Ope you don't mind, sir."

"Not a brass button."

"It's all right, inspector," reported the "waiter." "He has the three marks you said—mole, ear, nail."

"Certain of the woman?"

"Mrs. Poleash, sure as snow."

"Any reference to it?"

"Don't think so while I'm about. Drama just now. Has his little gun handy."

"Take this in now. Leave the door open and see if you can make him talk up. . . . If you two gentlemen will step just across there I think you'll be able to hear."

Carrados smiled as he proceeded to comply.

"I have already heard," he said. "It is the voice of the man who called on Mr. Carlyle on September the third."

"I think it is the voice," admitted Mr. Carlyle when he had tiptoed back again. "I really think so, but after two months I should not be prepared to swear."

"He is the man," repeated Carrados deliberately.

Inspector Beedel, clinking something quietly in his pocket, nodded to his waiter.

"Morgan follows you in with the coffee," he said. "Put it down on the table, Morgan, and stand beside the woman. Call me as soon as you have him."

It was the sweet that the first waiter was to take, and with it there was a sauce. It was not exactly overturned, but there was an awkward movement and a few drops were splashed. With a clumsy apology the waiter, napkin in hand, leaned across the customer to remove a spot that marked his coat−sleeve.

"Here!" exclaimed the startled man. "What the devil are you up to?"

It was too late. Speech was the only thing left to him then. His wrists were already held in a trained, relentless grasp; he was pressed helplessly back into his chair at the first movement of resistance. Kitty Poleash rose from her seat with a dreadful coldness round her heart, felt a hand upon her shoulder, cast one fearful glance around, and sank down upon her chair again. Before another word was spoken Inspector Beedel had appeared, and the grip of bone and muscle on the straining wrists was changed to one of steel. Less than thirty seconds bridged the whole astonishing transformation.

"Richard Crispinge, you are charged with the murder of this woman's husband. Katherine Poleash, you are held as an accessory." The usual caution followed. "Get a taxi to the back entrance, Morgan."

Half a dozen emotions met on Crispinge's face as he shot a glance at his companion and then faced the accuser again.

"You're crazy," he panted, still labouring from the effort. "I've never even seen the man."

"I shouldn't say anything now, if I were you," advised Beedel, on a quite human note. "You may find out later that we know more than you might think."

What followed could not have been charged against human foresight, for at a later stage it was shown that a certain cable failed and in a trice one side of Warsaw Street was involved in darkness. What happened in that darkness−where they had severally stood and after−who moved or spoke−whose hand was raised−were all matters of dispute, but suddenly the black was stabbed by a streak of red, a little crack−scarcely more than the sharp bursting of a paper bag−nearly caught up to it, and almost slowly to the waiting ears came the sound of strain and the long crash of falling glass and china.

"A lamp from down there!" snapped Beedel's sorely−tried voice, as the ray of an electric torch whirled like a pygmy searchlight and then centred on a tumbled thing lying beyond the table. "Look alive!"

"They say there is gas somewhere," announced Mr. Carlyle, striking a match as he ran in. "Ah, here it it."

No need to ask then what had happened, though how it had happened could never be set quite finally at rest; for if Kitty Poleash was standing now, whereas before she had sat, the weapon lay beyond her reach close to the

shackled hands. A curious apathy seemed to fall upon the room as though the tang of the drifting wisp of smoke dulled their alertness, and when the woman moved slowly towards her lover Beedel merely picked the pistol up and waited. With a terrible calmness she knelt by the huddled form and raised the inert head.

"Good−bye, my dear," she said quietly, kissing the dead lips for the last time; "it's over." And with a strange tragic fitness she added, in the words of another fatal schemer, "We fail!"

She seemed to be the only one who had any business there; Beedel was abstracted; Carlyle and Carrados felt like spectators walking on a stage when the play is over. In the street below the summoned taxi throbbed unheeded; they were waiting for another equipage now. When that had moved off with its burden Kitty Poleash would follow her captors submissively, like a dog without a home.

"It isn't a feather in our caps to have a man slip away like that," remarked the inspector moodily as the two joined him for a word before they left; "but, of course, as far as they are both concerned, it's the very best that could have happened."

"In what way do you mean the best?" demanded Mr. Carlyle with a professional keenness for the explicit.

"Why, look at what will happen now. He's saved all the trouble and thought of being hanged, which it was bound to be in the end, and has got it over without a moment's worry. She will get the full benefit of it as well, because her counsel will now be able to pile it all up against the fellow and claim that he exercised an irresistible influence over her. Personally, I should say that it's twelve of one and thirteen of the other, and I don't know that she isn't the thirteen, but she is about as likely to be hanged as I am to be made superintendent tomorrow."

* * * * *

"Max," said Mr. Carlyle, as they sat smoking together the same night, "when you think of the elaboration of that plot it was appalling."

"Curious," replied Carrados thoughtfully. "To me it seems absolutely simple and inevitable. Perhaps that is because I should have done it— fundamentally, that is−just the same way myself."

"And got caught the same way?"

"There were mistakes made. If you decide to kill a man you must do it either secretly or openly. If you do it secretly and it comes to light you are done for: If you do it openly there is the chance of putting another appearance on the crime.

"These two—Crispinge and Mrs. Poleash—knew that in the ordinary way the killing of the husband would immediately attract suspicion to the wife. Under the fierce scrutiny it could not long be hidden that the woman had a lover, and the disclosure would be fatal. Indeed, if Poleash had lived, that fact must shortly have come to light, and it was the sordid determination to secure his income for themselves before he discovered the intrigue and divorced his wife that sealed his fate and forced an early issue.

"If you intend to commit a murder, Louis, and know that suspicion will automatically fall on you, what is the first thing that you would wish to effect? Obviously that it should fall on someone else more strongly. But as the arrest of that someone else would upset the plan, you would naturally make his identity such that he would have the best chance of remaining at large. The most difficult person to find is one who does not exist.

"There you have the whole strategy of the sorry business. Everything hinged on that, and when you once possess that clue you not only see why everything happened as it did but you can confidently forecast exactly what will happen. To go on believing that you had talked with the real Poleash it was necessary that you should never actually see the man as he was. Hence the disfigurement. What assailant would act in that way? Only one maddened by a jealous fury. The Southern people are popularly the most jealous and revengeful, so we must have a native of Italy or Spain, and the Italian is the more credible of the two. Similarly, Mr. Hipwaite is brought in to add another touch of corroboration to your tale. But why Mr. Hipwaite from a mile away? There is a locksmith quite near at hand; I made it my business to call on him, and I learned that, as I expected, he knew Poleash by sight. Plainly he would never have served the purpose."

"Perhaps I ought to have been more sceptical of the fellow's tale," conceded Mr. Carlyle; "but, you know, Max, I have a dozen fresh people call on me every month with queer stories, and it's not once in a million times that this would happen. I, at any rate, saw nothing to rouse suspicion. You say he made mistakes?"

"Crispinge, among divers other things he's failed in, has been an actor, and with Mrs. Poleash's coaching on facts there is no doubt that he carried the part all right. Being wise after the event, we may say that he overstressed the need of secrecy. The idea of the previous attack, designed, of course, to throw irrefutable evidence into the

scales, was too pronounced. Something slighter would have served better. Personally, I think it was excess of caution to send Mrs. Jones out on the Thursday afternoon. She could have been relied upon to be too 'mithered' for her recollections to carry any weight. It was necessary to destroy the only reliable photograph of Poleash, but the risk ought to have been taken of burning it before she went off to establish her unassailable alibi, and not leaving it for her accomplice to do. In the event, by handling the frame after he had burned his gloves, Crispinge furnished us with the solitary fingerprint that linked up his identity."

"He had been convicted then?"

"Blackmail, six years ago, and other things before. A mixture of weakness and violence, he has always gravitated towards women for support. But the great mistake−the vital oversight—the alarm signal to my perceptions—"

"Yes?"

"Well, I should really hardly like to mention it to anyone but you. The sheet and the bolster−case that so convincingly turned up to clinch your client's tale once and for all demolished it. They had never been on Poleash's bed, believe me, Louis. What a natural thing for the woman to take them from her own, and yet how fatal! I sensed that damning fact as soon as I had them in my hands, and in a trice the whole fabric of deception, so ingeniously contrived, came down in ruins. Nothing—nothing—could ever retrieve that simple, deadly blunder."