The Story in the Notebook

August Groner

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I

A QUIET winter evening had sunk down upon the great city. The clock on the clumsy church steeple of the factory district had not yet struck eight, when the side door of one of the large buildings opened, and a man came out into the quiet street.

It was Ludwig Amster, one of the workingmen in the factory, who was now starting on his homeward way. It was not a pleasant road, this street along the edge of the city. The town showed itself from its most disagreeable side here, with malodorous factories, rickety tenements, untidy open stretches, and dumping grounds that were disagreeable both to the eye and nostril.

Even by day the street that Amster takes is empty. Now by night it is absolutely quiet and dark, as dark as the thoughts of the solitary man. He walks along brooding over his troubles. Scarce an hour hence he has been discharged from the factory because of his refusal to submit to the injustice of his foreman.

The yellow light of the few lanterns shows nothing but high board walls and snowdrifts, stone heaps, and now and then the remains of a neglected garden. Here and there a stunted tree or a wild shrub bends its twigs under the white burden which the winter has laid upon them. Ludwig Amster, who has walked this street for several years, knows his path so well that he could take it blindfolded. The darkness does not worry him, but he walks somewhat more slowly than usual, for he knows that under the thin covering of fresh−fallen snow there lies the ice of the night before. He walks carefully, watching for the slippery places.

He had been walking about half an hour perhaps, when be came to a cross street. Here he noticed the tracks of a wagon, the trace still quite fresh; the slowly falling flakes did not yet cover it. The tracks lead out toward the north, on to the hilly open fields.

Amster is somewhat astonished. It is so seldom that a carriage drives past here, and these narrow wheel tracks could only have been made by an equipage of that character. The heavy trucks which pass these roads occasionally have much wider wheels. But Amster was to find still more to astonish him.

In one corner near the cross roads stands a solitary lamppost. The light of the lamp falls sharply on the snow, on the wagon tracks, and—on something else besides.

Amster halts, bends down to look at it, and shakes his head as if in doubt.

A number of small pieces of glass gleam up at him, and between them, like tiny roses, red drops of blood shine on the white snow. All this is a few steps to one side of the wagon tracks.

"What could have happened here? Here, in this weird spot where a cry for help could not be heard—where there would be no one to give help?"

So Amster asked himself, but his discovery gave him no answer. His curiosity was aroused, however, and he wished to know more. He followed tip the tracks and saw that the drops of blood led further on, to where there was no more glass. The drops could still be seen for a yard further, reaching out almost to the board fence that edged the walk. Through the broken planks of this fence the rough twigs of a thorn−bush stretched their brown fingers. On the upper side of the few scattered leaves there is snow, and blood.

Amster's wide, serious eyes soon find something else. Beside the bush there lies a tiny package. He lifts it up. It is a small, light, square package wrapped in ordinary brown paper. Where the paper comes together it is fastened by two little lumps of black bread which are still moist. He turns the package over and shakes his head again. On the outside is written in pencil, with uncertain letters as if scribbled in great haste: "For the nearest police station."

The words look like a cry for help frozen on to the ugly paper. Amster shivers; he has a feeling that this is a matter of life and death.

The wagon tracks on this lonely street, the broken pieces of glass and the drops of blood,—which show that some occupant of the carriage had broken through the windows, either in the hope of escape, or to throw out the package which would bring assistance;—all these facts group themselves together in the brain of the intelligent workingman, to form some terrible tragedy where his assistance, if given at once, might be of great use. He has a warm heart besides, a heart that reaches out to this unknown who is in distress, and who threw out the call for help which has fallen into his hands.

He waits no longer to ponder out the matter, but starts off at a run for the nearest police station. He rushes into the room and tells breathlessly of what he has found.

They take him into the next room, the office of the commissioner for the day. The official in charge, a young man who had been in earnest conversation with a small frail−looking elderly man, turns to Amster with a question as to what brings him there.

"I found this package in the snow."

"Let me see it."

Amster lays it on the table. The elderly man looks at it, and as the commissioner is about to open it, he hands him a paper−knife with the words: "You had better cut it open. sir."

"Why?

"It is sometimes good not to injure the seals that have fastened a package."

"Just as you say, Müller," said the young commissioner, smiling. He is still very young to have such a position, but his name and family connections have made it possible for him to obtain so responsible a place so soon. Kurt Von Mayringen is a very good−looking young man and has a most charming smile, even when he is told how to do a thing by one of his subordinates. But Müller is not an ordinary subordinate. He is one of the best known and most expert detectives on the force, and the handsome young commissioner knows that anything such an experienced man may say to him can only aid him in learning his business. He takes the knife, therefore, and cuts open the paper, taking out a tiny little notebook, on the outer side of which a handsome monogram gleams up at him in golden letters.

"A woman has made this package," said Müller, who has, been looking at the covering very carefully; "and this woman is blonde."

The other two look at him in astonishment. He shows them a single blond hair which had been in one of the bread seals.

"How I was murdered." These are the words that Commissioner Mayringen read aloud, after he had hastily turned the first few pages of the notebook, and had come to a place where the writing was heavily underscored.

The commissioner and Amster are much astonished at these words. The detective still gazes quietly at the seals of the wrapping.

"This heading reads like insanity," said the commissioner. Müller shrugs his shoulders, then turns to Amster. "Where did you find the package?"

"In the Garden Street."

"When?"

"About twenty minutes ago."

"Tell us all about it."

Amster gives a short, lucid report of what he had seen. His intelligent face, the directness of his words, show that he has observation and the power of describing what he has observed. His honest eyes awaken confidence.

"Where could they have been taking the woman?" asked the detective, more to himself than to the others.

The commissioner searches hastily through the notebook for a signature, but without success. " Why do you think it is a woman? This writing looks more like a man's hand me. The letters are so heavy and——"

"That is only because they are written with a broad pen," interrupted Müller, showing him the writing on the package. "Here is the same hand, but it is written with a fine, hard pencil, and you can see distinctly that this is a woman's handwriting. And besides, the skin on a man's thumb does not show the fine markings that you can see here on these bits of bread that have been used for seals."

The commissioner rose from his seat. "You may be right, Müller. We will take for granted, then, that there is a woman in trouble. It remains to be seen whether she is insane or not."

"Yes, that remains to be seen," said Müller dryly, as he reached for his overcoat.

"You are going before you read what is in the book?" asked Commissioner Von Mayringen.

Müller nodded. "I want to see the wagon tracks before they are lost. It may help me to discover something else. You can read the book and make any arrangements you find necessary after that." Müller was already wrapped in his overcoat. "Is it snowing already?" He turned to Amster.

"Some flakes were falling as I came here."

"All right. Come with me and show me the way." Müller nodded carelessly to his superior officer, his mind

evidently already engrossed by the new and interesting case, and hurried out with Amster. The commissioner was quite satisfied with the state of affairs. He knew the case was in safe hands. He seated himself at his desk again and began to read the little book which had come into his hands so strangely. His eyes ran more and more rapidly over the closely written pages, and his interest grew and grew.

When, half an hour later, he had finished the reading, he paced restlessly up and down the room, trying to bring order into the chaos of thoughts that rushed through his brain. And one thought came again and again, a thought which would not be gainsaid in spite of many improbabilities and many strange things of which the book was full, in spite also of the varying, uncertain handwriting and style of the message,—this one thought was: "This woman is not insane."

While the young official was pondering over the problem, Müller entered as quietly as usual, put his hat and cane in their places and shook the snow off his clothing. He was evidently pleased about something. Kurt Von Mayringen did not notice his entrance. He was again at the desk with the open book before him, staring at the mysterious words, "How I was murdered."

"It is a woman. A lady of position. And if she is mad, then her madness certainly has method." Müller said these words in his usual quiet way, almost indifferently. The young commissioner started up and snatched for the fine white handkerchief which the detective handed him. A strong sweet perfume filled the room. " It is hers," he murmured.

"It is hers," said Müller. "At least we can take that much for granted, for the handkerchief bears the same monogram, A. L., which is in the notebook."

Commissioner Von Mayringen rose from his chair in evident excitement—"Well?" he asked.

It was a short question, but full of meaning, and one could see that he was waiting in great excitement for the answer. Müller reported what he had discovered. The commissioner thought it little enough, and shrugged his shoulders impatiently when the other had finished.

Müller noticed his chief's dissatisfaction and smiled at it. He himself was quite content with what he had found.

"Is that all?" murmured the commissioner, as if disappointed.

"That is all," repeated the detective calmly, and added: "That is a good deal. We have here a closely written notebook, the contents of which, as I can see by your excitement, are evidently important. We have also a handkerchief with an unusual perfume on it. I repeat that is quite considerable. Besides this, we have the seals and we know several other things. I believe that we can save this lady, or if it be too late, we can avenge her at least."

The commissioner looked at Müller in surprise. "We are in a city of more than a million inhabitants," he said, almost timidly.

"I have hunted criminals in two hemispheres, and I have found them," said Müller simply. The young commissioner smiled and held out his hand. "Ah, yes, you—Müller—I keep forgetting the great things you have done. You are so quiet about it."

"What I have done is only what anyone could do who had that particular faculty. I do only what is in human power to do, and the cleverest criminal can do no more. Besides which, we all know that every criminal commits some stupidity, and leaves some trace behind him. If it is really a crime, of which we have found the trace here, we will soon discover it."

"Very well, then do what you can," said the commissioner, with a friendly smile.

The older man nodded, took the book and its wrappings from the desk, and went into a small adjoining room.

The commissioner sent for an attendant and gave him the order to fetch a pot of tea from a neighboring saloon. When the tray arrived he placed several good cigars upon it, and sent it in to Müller. Taking a cigar himself, the commissioner leaned back in his sofa corner to think over this first interesting case of his short professional experience.

In his little room the detective, put in a good humor by the thoughtful attention of his chief, sat down to read the book carefully. While he studied its contents his mind went back over his search in the silent street outside.

He and Amster had hurried out into the raw chill of the night. They reached the spot of the first discovery in about ten or fifteen minutes. Müller found nothing new there. But he was able to discover in which direction the wagon bad been going. The hoof−prints of the single horse which had drawn it were still plainly to be seen in the snow.

"Will you follow these tracks in the direction from which they have come?" he asked of Amster. "Then meet me at the station and report what you have seen."

"Very well, sir," answered the workman. The two men parted with a hand−shake.

Before Müller started on to follow up the tracks in the other direction, he took up one of the larger pieces of glass.

"Cheap glass," he said, looking at it carefully. "It was only a hired cab therefore, and a one−horse cab at that."

He walked on slowly, following the marks of the wheels. His eyes searched the road from side to side, looking for any other signs that might have been left by the hand which had thrown the package out of the window. The snow, which had been falling softly thus far, began to come down in heavier flakes, and Müller quickened his pace. The tracks would soon be covered, but they could still be plainly seen. They led out into the open country, but when the first little hill had been climbed a drift heaped itself up, cutting off the trail completely.

Müller stood on the top of this knoll at a spot where the street divided. Towards the right it led down into a factory suburb; towards the left to a residence colony; and straight ahead was open country, fields, pastures, farms, and moors, beyond which was another town of considerable size. Müller knew all this, but his knowledge of the locality was of little avail, for all trace of the carriage wheels was lost.

He followed each one of the streets for a little distance, but to no avail. The wind blew up the snow in such heaps that it was quite impossible to follow any trail under these conditions.

With an expression of impatience Müller gave up his search and turned to go back again. He was hoping that Amster might have had better luck. It was not possible to find the goal towards which the wagon had taken its prisoner, if she were indeed a prisoner—as soon as they had hoped. Perhaps the search must be made in the direction from which she had been brought.

Müller turned back towards the city again. He walked more quickly now, but his eyes took in everything to the right and to the left of his path. Near the place where the street divided, a bush waved its bare twigs in the wind. The snow, which had settled on it early in the day, had been blown away by the freshening wind, and just as Müller neared the bush be saw something white fluttering from one twig. It was a handkerchief, which had probably hung heavy and lifeless when he bad passed that way before. Now, when the wind held it outright, he saw it at once. He loosened it carefully from the thorny twigs. A delicate and rather unusual perfume wafted up to his face. There was more of the odor on the little cloth than is commonly used by persons of good taste. This handkerchief was far too fine and delicate in texture to belong to the sort of people who habitually passed along this street. It must have some connection with the mysterious wagon. It was still quite dry, and in spite of the fact that the wind had been playing with it, it had been but slightly torn. It could, therefore, have been in that position for a short time only. At the nearest lantern Müller saw that the monogram on the handkerchief was the same in style and initials as on the notebook, the letters A. L.

II

IT was warm and comfortable in the little room where Müller sat. He closed the windows, lit the gas, took off his overcoat—Müller was a pedantically careful person—smoothed his hair, and sat down comfortably at the table. Just as he took up the little book, the attendant brought the tea, which he proceeded at once to enjoy. He did not take up his little book again until he had lit himself a cigar. He looked at the outside of the dainty volume for many minutes before he opened it. It was a couple of inches long, of the usual shape, and had a cover of brown leather. In the left upper corner were the letters A. L. in gold. The leaves of the book, about fifty in all, were of a fine quality of paper and all closely written. On the first leaves the writing was fine, delicate, and orderly. But later on the letters became irregular and uncertain, as if written tremblingly or in terror. The change came in those leaves of the book which followed after the strange and terrible title, "How I was murdered."

Before Müller began to read he felt the covers of the book carefully. In one of them there was a tiny pocket in which he found a little piece of wall paper of a noticeable and distinctly ugly pattern. The paper had a dark blue ground with clumsy lines of gold on it. In the pocket he found also a tramway ticket, which had been crushed and then carefully smoothed out again. After looking at these papers, Müller put them back again into the cover of the notebook. The book itself was strongly perfumed with the same odor which had exhaled from the handkerchief. The detective did not begin his reading in that part of the book which followed the mysterious title, as the commissioner had done. He began instead at the very first words.

"Ah—she is still young," he murmured when he had read the first lines. "Young, in easy circumstances, happy, and contented."

These first pages told of pleasure trips, of visits from and to good friends, of many little events of everyday life. Then came accounts, written in pencil, of shopping expeditions to the city. Costly laces and jewels had been bought, and linen garments for children by the dozen. "She is rich, generous, and charitable," thought the detective, for the book showed that the considerable sums which had been spent here had not been for the writer herself. The laces were "for our church"; behind the account for the linen stood the words, "for the charity school."

Müller began to feel a strong sympathy for the writer of these notices. She showed an orderly, almost pedantic character, mingled with generosity of heart. He turned leaf after leaf, until he finally came to the words, written in intentionally heavy letters, "How I was murdered."

Müller's head sank down lower over these mysterious words, and his eyes flew through the writing that followed. It was quite a different writing here. The hand that penned these lines must have trembled in mighty terror. Was it terror of coming death, foreseen and not to be escaped? or was it the trembling and the terror of a overthrown brain? It was undoubtedly, in spite of the differences, the same hand which had penned the first pages of the book. A few characteristic turns of the letters were plain to be seen in both parts of the story. But the ink was quite different. The first pages had been written with a delicate violet ink, the latter leaves were penned with a black ink of uneven quality, of a kind used by poor people who write seldom. The words of this later portion of the book were blurred in many places, as if the writer had not been able to dry them properly before she turned the leaves. She, therefore, had had neither blotting paper nor sand at her disposal. And then the weird title!—Was it written at the dictation of insanity? or did A. L. know while she wrote it, that it was too late for any help to reach her?

Did she see her doom approaching so clearly that she knew there was no escape.

Müller breathed a deep breath before he continued his reading. Later on, his breath came more quickly and he clinched his fists several times, as if deeply moved. He was not a cold man, merely thoroughly self−controlled. In his breast there lived an unquenchable hatred toward all evil. It was this that had awakened the talents which made him the celebrated detective he had become.—"I fear that it will be impossible for anyone to save me now, but perhaps I may be avenged. Therefore, I will write down here all that has happened to me since I set out on my journey." These were the first words that were written under the mysterious title. Müller had just read them when the commissioner entered.

"Will you speak to Amster? He has just returned," he asked.

Müller rose at once. "Certainly. Did you telegraph to all the railway stations?"

"Yes," answered the commissioner, "and also to the other police stations."

"And to the hospitals? And to the various insane asylums?"

"No, I did not do that." Commissioner Von Mayringen blushed, a blush that was as becoming to him as was his frank acknowledgment of his mistake. He went out to remedy it at once, while Müller heard Amster's short and not particularly important report. The workingman was shivering, and the detective handed him a glass of tea with a good portion of rum in it.

"Here, drink this, you are cold—are you ill?"

Amster smiled sadly. "No, I am not ill, but I was discharged to−day, and am out of work now—that's almost as bad."

"Are you married?"

"No, but I have an old mother."

"Leave your address with the commissioner. He may be able to find work for you; we can always use good men. But now drink your tea." Amster drank the glass in one gulp. "Well, now we have lost the trail in both directions," said Müller calmly. "But we will find it again. You can help—as you are free now, anyway. If you have the talent for that sort of thing, you may find permanent work here."

A gesture and a look from the workingman showed the detective that the former did not think very highly of such occupation. Müller laid his hand on the other's shoulder, and said gravely: "You wouldn't care to take service with us?—This sort of thing doesn't seem very high, I know. But I tell you that if we have our hearts in the right place and our brains are worth anything, we are of more use to humanity than many a good citizen who wouldn't shake hands with us. There—and now I am busy. Good−night."

With these words Müller pushed the astonished man out of the room, shut the door, and sat down again with his little book. This was what he read:—

"Wednesday,—is it Wednesday? They brought me a newspaper to−day which had the date of Wednesday the 20th of November. The ink still smells fresh, but it is so damp here. The paper may have been older. I do not know, therefore, what day it is that I begin to write this account. I do not know either, whether I may not have been ill for days and weeks. I do not know what may have been the matter with me—I only know that I was unconscious, and that when I came to myself again, I found myself here in this gloomy room. Did any doctor see me? I have seen no one until to−day, except the old woman, whose name I do not know, and who has so little to say. She is kind to me otherwise, but I am afraid of her hard face and of the smile with which she answers all my questions and. my entreaties. 'You are ill'—these are the only words that she has ever said to me, and she pointed to her forehead as she spoke them. She thinks I am insane apparently, or she pretends to think so.

"What a hoarse voice she has! She must be ill herself, for she coughs all night long. I can hear it through the wall, she sleeps in the next room. But I am not ill—that is, I am not ill in the way she says. I have no fever now—my pulse is calm and regular. I can remember everything, until I took that drink of tea in the railway station. What could there have been in the tea? I suppose I should have noticed how anxious the stranger was to have me drink it.

"Who could the man have been? He was so polite, so fatherly in his anxiety about me. I have not seen him since then. And yet I feel that it is he who has brought me into this trap, a trap from which I may never escape alive. I will describe him. He is very tall, stout, and blond, and wears a long heavy beard which is slightly mixed with gray, On his right cheek his beard only partly hides a long scar. His eyes are hidden by large smoked glasses. His voice is low and gentle, his manners most correct—except for his giving people poison, or whatever else it was, in that tea.

"I did not suffer any—at least I do not remember anything except becoming unconscious. And I seem to have felt a pain like an iron ring around my head. But I am not insane, and this fear that I feel does not spring from my imagination, but from the real danger by which I am surrounded. I am very hungry, but I do not dare to eat anything except eggs, which cannot be tampered with. I tasted some soup yesterday, and it seemed to me that it had a queer taste. I will eat nothing that is at all suspicious. I will be in my full senses when my murderers come; they shall not kill me by poison at least.

"When I came to myself again (it was the evening of the day before yesterday), I found a letter on the little table beside my bed. It was written in French, in a handwriting that I had never seen before, and there was no

signature.

"This strange letter demanded of me that I should write to my guardian, calmly and clearly, to say that for reasons which I did not intend to reveal, I had taken my own life. If I did this, my present place of sojourn would be exchanged for a far more agreeable one, and I would soon be quite free. But if I did not do it, I would actually be put to death. A pen, ink, and paper were ready there for the, answer.

"'Never!' I wrote. And then despair came over me.—I may have indeed appeared insane. The old woman came in, and I entreated and implored her to tell me why this dreadful fate should have overtaken me. She remained quite indifferent, and I sank back, almost fainting, on the bed. She laid a moist cloth over my face, a cloth that had a peculiar odor. I soon fell asleep. It seemed to me that there was someone else beside the woman in the room with me. Or was she talking to herself? Next morning the letter and my answer had disappeared.

"It was as I thought. There was someone else in my room. Someone who had come on the tramway. I found the ticket on the carpet beside my bed. I took it up and put it in my notebook——

"I believe that it is Sunday to−day. It is four days now since I have been conscious. The first sound that I remember hearing was the blast of a horn. It must come from a factory, very near me. The old windows in my room rattle at the sound. I hear it mornings and evenings and at noon, on week−days. I did not hear it to−day, so it must be Sunday. It was Monday, the 18th of November, that I set out on my trip and reached here in the evening—(here? I do not know where I am)—that is, I set out for the Capital and know that I reached the Northern Railway Station there in safety.

"I was cold and felt a little faint—and then he offered me the tea—and what happened after that? Where am I? The paper that they gave me may have been a day old or more. And to−day is Sunday. Is it the first Sunday since my departure from home? I do not know. I know only this, that I set out on the 18th of November, to visit my kind old guardian, and to have a last consultation with him before my coming of age. And I know also that I have fallen into the hands of someone who has an interest in my disappearance.

"There was someone in the next room with the old woman. I heard a man's voice and they were quarreling. They are talking of me. He wanted her to do something which she will not do. He commanded her to go away, but she refused. What does he mean to do? I do not want her to leave me alone. I do not hate her any more, I know that she is not bad. When I listened I heard her speaking of me as of an insane person. She really believes that I am ill. When the man went away he must have been angry. He stamped down the stairs until the steps creaked under his tread. I know from that that it is a wooden staircase.

"I am safe from him to−day, but I am really ill of fright. Am I really insane? There is one thing that I have forgotten to write down. When I first came to myself I found a bit of paper beside me on which was written, 'Beware of calling in help from outside. One scream will mean death to you.' It was written in French like the letter. Why? Was it because the old woman should not read it? She knew of the piece of paper, for she took it away from me. It frightens me that I should have forgotten to write this down. Am I really ill? If I am not yet ill, this terrible solitude will make me so.

"What a gloomy room this is, this prison of mine. And such a strange ugly wall paper. I tore off a tiny bit of it and hid it in this little book. Someone may find it some day, and may discover from it this place where I am suffering, and where I shall, perhaps, die. There cannot be many who would buy such a pattern, and it must be possible to find the factory where it was made. And I will also write down here what I can see from my barred window. Far down below me there is a rusty tin roof; it looks as if it might belong to a sort of shed. Before me and to the right of me there are windowless walls, to the left at a little distance I can see a slender church spire, greenish in color, probably covered with copper, and before the church there are two poplar trees of different height.

"Another day has passed, a day of torturing fear. Am I really insane? I know that I see queer things. This morning I looked toward the window and I saw a parrot sitting there. I saw it quite plainly. It ruffled up its red and green feathers and stared at me. I stared back at it, and suddenly it was gone. I shivered. Finally I pulled myself together and went to the window. There was no bird outside, nor was there any trace of it in the snow on the window sill. Could the wind have blown away its tracks so soon? or was it really my sick brain that appeared to see this tropical bird in the midst of the snow? It is Tuesday to−day; from now on I will carefully count the days—the days that still remain to me.

"This morning I asked the old woman about the parrot. She only smiled and her smile made me terribly afraid.

The thought that this thing that is happening to me, this thing that I took to be a crime, may be only a necessity—this thought fills me with horror. Am I in a prison? or is this the cell of an insane asylum? Am I the victim of a villain—or am I really mad? My pulse is quickening, but my memory is quite clear. I can look back over every incident in my life——

"She has just taken away my food. I asked her to bring me only eggs, as I was afraid of everything else. She promised that she would do it.

"Are they looking for me? My guardian is Theodore Fellner; Church Street 14. My own name is Asta Langen.

"They took away my traveling bag, but they did not find this little book and a tiny flask of perfume which I had in the pocket of my dress. And I found this old pen and a little ink in a drawer of the writing table in my room.

"Wednesday. The stranger was here again to−day. I recognize his soft voice. He spoke to the woman in the hall outside my room. I listened, but I could catch only a few words: 'To−morrow evening—I will come myself—— No responsibility for you.' Were these words meant for me? Are they going to take me away? Where will they take me? Then they do not dare to kill me here? My head is burning hot. I have not dared to drink a drop of liquid for four days. I dare not take anything in which they might have put some drug or some poison.

"Who could have such interest in my death? It cannot be because of the fortune which is to be mine when I come of age; for if I die my father has willed it to various charitable institutions. I have no relatives, at least none who could inherit my money. I have never harmed anyone—who can wish for my death?

"There is somebody with her—somebody was listening at my door. I have a feeling as if I was being watched. And yet—I examined the door, but there is no crack anywhere and the key is in the lock. Yet I seemed to feel a burning glance resting upon me. Ah—the parrot! Is this another delusion? Oh, God, let it end soon! I am not yet quite insane, but all these unknown dangers around me will drive me mad. But I will fight against them.

"Thursday. They brought me back my traveling bag. My attendant is uneasy. She was longer in cleaning up the room than usual to−day. She seemed to want to say something to me, and yet she did not dare to speak. Is something to happen to−day, then? I did not close my eyes all night. Can one be made insane from a distance, hypnotized into it, as it were? I will not allow fear alone to make me mad. My enemy shall not find it too easy. He may kill my body, but that is all——"

These were the last words which Asta Langen had written in her notebook, the little book which was the only confidant of her terrible need. When the detective had finished reading it, he closed his eyes for a few minutes to go over in spirit the impressions he had won.

Then he rose and put on his overcoat. He entered the commissioner's room and took up his hat and cane.

"Where are you going, Müller?" asked Mr. Von Mayringen.

"To Church Street, if you will permit it."

"At this hour? It is quarter−past seven! Is there any such hurry, do you think? There is no train from any of our stations until morning. And I have already sent a policeman to watch the house. Besides I know that Fellner is a highly respected man."

"There is many a man who is highly respected until he is found out," remarked the detective.

"And you are going to find out about Fellner?" smiled the commissioner. "And this evening, too?"

"This very evening. If he is asleep I shall wake him up. That is the best time to find out the truth about a man."

The commissioner sat down at his desk and wrote out the necessary credentials for the detective. A moment later Müller was already in the street. He left the notebook with the commissioner. It was snowing heavily, and an icy north wind was howling through the streets. Müller turned up the collar of his coat and walked on quickly. It was just striking a quarter to twelve when he reached Church Street. As he walked slowly along the moonlit side of the pavement, a man stepped out of the shadow to meet him. It was the policeman who had been set to watch the house. Like Müller, he wore plain clothes.

"Well?" the latter asked.

"Nothing new. Mr. Fellner has been ill in bed several days, quite seriously ill they tell me. The janitor seems very fond of him.

"H'm—— We'll see what sort of a man he is. You can go back to the station now; you must be nearly frozen, standing here."

Müller looked carefully at the house which bore the number 14. It was a handsome old−fashioned building, a true patrician house, which looked worthy of all confidence. But Müller knew that the outside of a house has very little to do with the honesty of the people who live in it. He rang the bell carefully, as he wished no one but the janitor to hear him.

The latter did not seem at all surprised to find a stranger asking for the owner of the house at so late an hour. " You come with a telegram, I suppose? Come right upstairs then; I have orders to let you in."

These were the words with which the old janitor greeted Müller. The detective could see from this that Mr. Theodore Fellner's conscience must be perfectly clear. The expected telegram probably had something to do with the non−appearance of Asta Langen, of whose terrible fate her guardian evidently as yet knew nothing. The janitor knocked on one of the doors, which was opened in a few moments by an old woman.

"Is it the telegram?" she asked sleepily.

"Yes," said the janitor.

"No," said Müller, "but I want to speak to Mr. Fellner."

The two old people stared at him in surprise.

"To speak to him?" said the woman, and shook her head as if in doubt. "Is it about Miss Langen?"

"Yes, please wake him up."

"But he is ill and the doctor——"

"Please wake him up, I will take the responsibility."

"But who are you?" asked the janitor.

Müller smiled a little at this belated caution on the part of the old man and answered, "I will tell Mr. Fellner who I am. But please announce me at once. It is indeed because of the young lady that I come." His expression was so grave that the woman waited no longer, but let him in and then disappeared into another door. The janitor stood and looked at Müller with half−distrustful, half−anxious glances.

"It's no good news you bring," he said after a few minutes.

"You may be right."

"Has anything happened to our dear young lady?"

"Then you know Miss Asta Langen and her family?"

"Why, of course. I was in service on the estate when all the dreadful things happened."

"What things?"

"Why, the divorce—and—but you are a stranger, and I shouldn't talk about these family affairs to you. You had better tell me what has happened to our young lady."

"I must tell that to your master first."

The woman came back at this moment and said to Müller, "Come with me. Berner, you are to stay here until the gentleman goes again."

Müller followed her through several rooms to a large bed−chamber, where he found an elderly man, very evidently ill, lying in the bed.

"Who are you?" asked the sick man, raising his head from the pillow. The woman had gone out and closed the door behind her.

"My name is Müller, police detective. Here are my credentials."

Fellner glanced hastily at the paper. "Why do the police send to me?"

"It concerns your ward."

Fellner sat upright in bed now. He leaned over toward his visitor as he said . . . pointing to a letter on the table beside his bed: "Asta's overseer writes me from her estate that she left home on the 18th of November to visit me. She should have reached here on the evening of the 18th, and she has not yet arrived. I did not receive this letter until to−day."

"Did you expect the young lady?"

"I only knew that she would arrive sometime before the 3d of December. That date is her twenty−fourth birthday, and she was to celebrate it here."

"Did she not usually announce her coming to you?"

"No, she liked to surprise me. Three days ago I sent her a telegram, to ask her to bring certain necessary papers with her. This brought the answer from the overseer of her estate, an answer which has caused me great

anxiety. Your coming makes it worse, for I fear——" The sick man broke off and turned his eyes on Müller, so full of fear and grief that the detective's heart softened. He felt Fellner's icy hand on his, as the sick man murmured, "Tell me the truth—is Asta dead?"

The detective shrugged his shoulders. "We do not know yet. She was alive and able to send a message at half−past eight this evening."

"A message. To whom?"

"To the nearest police station." Müller told what he knew thus far.

The old man listened with an expression of such utter, dazed terror, that the detective dropped all suspicion of him at once.

"What a terrible riddle," stammered the sick man, as the other finished the story.

"Would you answer me several questions?" asked Müller. The old gentleman answered quickly: "Any one—every one——"

"Miss Langen is rich?"

"She has a fortune of over three hundred thousand guldens, and considerable land."

"Has she any relatives?"

"No," replied Fellner harshly. But a thought must have flashed through his brain, for he started suddenly and murmured, "Yes, she has one relative—a stepbrother."

The detective gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Why are you astonished at this?" asked Fellner.

"According to her notebook, the young lady does not seem to know of this stepbrother."

"She does not know of him. There was an ugly scandal in her family before her birth. Her father turned his first wife and their son out of his house on one and the same day. He had discovered that she was deceiving him, and also that her son, who was studying medicine at the time, had stolen money from his safe. What he had discovered about his wife made Langen doubt whether the boy was his son at all. There was a terrible scene, and the two disappeared from the home forever. The woman died soon after. The young man went to Australia. He has never been heard of since, and he has probably come to no good."

"Might he not possibly be here in Europe again, watching for an opportunity to make a fortune?"

Fellner's hand grasped that of his visitor. The eyes of the two men gazed steadily at each other. The old man's glance was full of sudden helpless horror, the detective's eyes shone brilliantly. Müller spoke calmly: "This is one clew. Is there no one else who could have an interest in the young lady's death?"

"No one but Egon Langen, if he bears this name by right—and if he is still alive."

"How old would he be now?

"He must be nearly forty. It was many years before Langen married again."

"Do you know him personally?

"No."

"Have you a picture of Miss Langen?"

Fellner rang a bell, and Berner appeared. "Give this gentleman Miss Asta's picture. Take the one in the silver frame on my desk." The old gentleman's voice was friendly but weak with fatigue. His old servant looked at him in deep anxiety. Fellner smiled feebly and nodded to the man. "Sad news, Berner! Sad news, and bad news! Our poor Asta is being held a prisoner by sane unknown villain who threatens her with death."

"My God—— Is it possible? Can't we help the dear young lady?"

"We will try to help her—or if it is—too late, we will at least avenge her. My entire fortune shall be given up for it. But bring the picture now."

Berner brought in the picture of a very pretty girl with a bright, intelligent face. Müller took the picture out of the frame and put it in his pocket.

"You will come soon again—and remember, I will give ten thousand guldens to the man who saves Asta, or avenges her. And tell the police to spare no expense—I will go to headquarters myself to−morrow."

Fellner was a little surprised that Müller, although he had already taken up his hat, did not go. The sick man had seen the light flash up in the eyes of the other as he named the sum. He thought he understood this excitement, but it touched him unpleasantly, and he sank back almost frightened in his cushions as the detective bent over him with the words: "Do not forget your promise, for I will save Miss Langen or avenge her. But I do

not want the money for myself. It is to go to those who have been unjustly convicted and ruined for life. It may give the one or the other of them a better chance for the future."

"And you—what good do you get from that?" asked the old gentleman, astonished. A soft smile illumined the detective's hard features and he answered gently: "I know then that there will be some poor fellow who has an easier time of it—than I had."

He nodded to Fellner—who bad already grasped his hand and pressed it hard. A tear ran down into his gray beard, and long after Müller had gone the old gentleman lay pondering over his last words.

Berner led the visitor to the door. As he was opening it Müller asked: "Egon Langen has a bad scar on his right cheek, has he not?"

Berner's eyes looked his astonishment. How did the stranger know this? And how did he come to mention this forgotten name? "Yes—he has—but how did you know it?" he murmured in surprise. He received no answer, for Müller was already walking quickly down the street. The old man stared after him for some few minutes—then suddenly his knees began to tremble. He closed the door with difficulty, then sank down on a bench beside it. The wind had blown out the light of his lantern—Berner was sitting in the dark without knowing it. A sudden terrible light, had burst upon his soul, so sharply that he hid his eyes with. his hands, and his old lips murmured: "Horrible! The brother against the sister."

The next morning was clear and bright. Müller was up early, for he had taken but a few hours' sleep in one of the rooms of the station before he set out into the cold winter morning. At the next comer he found Amster waiting for him. "What are you doing here?" he asked in astonishment.

"I have been thinking over what you said to me yesterday. Your profession is as good and perhaps better than many another."

"And you come out here so early to tell me that?"

Amster smiled. "I have something else to say."

"Indeed?"

The commissioner asked me yesterday if I knew of a church in the city that had a slender spire with a green top, and two poplars in front of it."

Müller looked his interest.

"I thought it might possibly be the Convent Church of the Grey Sisters—but I wasn't sure—so I went there an hour ago. It's all right, just as I thought. And as I suppose it has something to do with the case of last night I thought I had better report at once. I was on my way to the station."

"You have done well. You have saved us much time and have shown that you are eminently fitted for this business."

"If you really will try me—then——"

"We'll see. You can begin on this. Come to the church with me now."

The two men walked on quickly. In about half an hour they found themselves in a little square, in the middle of which stood an old church. Before the church, like giant sentinels, stood a pair of tall poplars. One of them looked sickly and was a good deal shorter than its neighbor. Müller nodded as if content.

"Is this the church the commissioner was asking about?" asked Amster.

"It is," was the answer. Müller walked on toward a little house built up against the church, evidently the dwelling of the sexton.

The detective introduced himself to this official, who did not look over−intelligent, as a stranger in the city who had been told that the view from the tower of this church was particularly interesting. A bright silver piece caused all distrust to disappear from the soul of the worthy man. With great friendliness he inquired when the gentlemen would like to ascend the tower. "At once," was the answer.

The sexton took a bunch of keys and told the strangers to follow him. A few moments later Müller and his companion stood in the tiny belfry room of the slender spire. The fat sexton, to his own great satisfaction, had been requested to remain below. The cloudless sky lay crystal−clear over the still sleeping city, and over the widespread snow−covered fields which lay close at hand on one side of the church. To the right were gardens and the low rambling buildings of the convent. To the left the huddled, high−piled dwellings of poverty.

Müller looked out of each of the four windows in turn. He spent some time at each window, but evidently without discovering what he looked for, for he shook his head in discontent. But when he went once more to the

opening towards the East, into which the sun was just beginning to pour its light, something seemed to attract his attention. He called up Amster and pointed from the window. "Your eyes are twenty years younger than mine, lend them to me. What do you see over there to the right, below the tall factory chimney?" Müller's voice was calm, but there was something in his manner that revealed excitement. Amster caught the infection without knowing why.

He looked sharply towards the direction in which Müller pointed and began: "To the right of the chimney I see a tall house, which is crowded in between other, newer buildings. This house seems to be very old and much more expensive than its neighbors. There are carvings and statues on it, the snow is lying on them. But the house is in bad condition, there are cracks in the wall we can see from here."

"And its windows?"

"I cannot see them. They are on the other side of the house, towards a courtyard which is inclosed by blank walls of other houses."

"And towards the front?"

"There is a low wall in front, which shuts off the courtyard from a narrow, neglected alley."

"I see it now myself. The alley leads through gardens and open lots."

"Yes, sir, that is it." Müller nodded as if satisfied. Amster looked at him in surprise, still more surprised, however, at the excitement he felt himself. He did not understand it, but Müller understood it. He knew that he had found in Amster a talent akin to his own, one of those natures who, once having taken up a trail, cannot rest until they reach the goal. He looked for a few moments in satisfaction at the assistant he had found by such chance, then he turned and hastened down the stair again.

"We're going to that house?" asked Amster when they were down in the street. Müller nodded.

Without hesitation the two men made their way through a tangle of dingy, uninteresting streets between modern tenements, until, about ten minutes later, they stood before an old three−storied building, which had a frontage of only four windows on the street. "This is our place," said the detective, looking up at the tall handsome gateway and the rococo carvings that ornamented the front of this decaying dwelling. It was very evidently of a different age and class from those about it.

Müller had already raised his hand to pull the bell, then he stopped and let it sink again. His eye had caught a placard pasted up on the wall of the next house and already half torn off by the wind. The detective walked over and raising the placard with his cane, he read the words on it.

"That's all right," he said to himself. Amster had thrown a look at the paper. But he could not connect the contents of the notice with the case of the kidnaped lady, and he shook his head in surprise when Müer turned to him with the words: "The lady we are looking for is not insane." On the paper was announced in large letters that a reward would be given to the finder of a red and green parrot which had escaped from a neighboring house.

Müller rang the bell, and they had to wait some few minutes before the door opened with great creakings, and the tousled head of an old woman looked out.

"What do you want?" she asked hoarsely, with distrustful looks.

"Let us in, and then give us the keys of the upstairs rooms." Müller's voice was friendly, but the woman grew perceptibly paler.

"Who are you?" she stammered. Müller threw back his overcoat and showed her his badge. "But there is nobody here, the house is quite empty."

"There were a lady and gentleman here last evening." The woman threw a frightened look at Müller, then she said hesitatingly: "The lady was insane, and has been taken to an asylum."

"That is what the man told you. He is a criminal and the police are looking for him."

"Come with me," murmured the woman. She seemed to understand that further resistance was useless. She carefully locked the outside door. Amster remained downstairs in the corridor, while Müller followed the old woman up the stairs. The staircase to the third story was made of wood. The house was evidently very old, with low ceilings, and many dark corners.

The woman led Müller into the room in which she had cared for the strange lady at the order of the latter's "husband." He had told her that it was to be for a short time only, until he could take the lady to an asylum. One look at the wall paper, a glance out of the window,—and Müller, knew that this was where Asta Langen had been imprisoned. He sat down on a chair and looked at the woman, who stood, frightened, before him.

"Do you know where they have taken the lady?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know the gentleman's name?"

"No, sir."

"You did not send the lady's name to the authorities?"(*)

(*) Any stranger taking rooms at a hotel or lodging house in Germany must be registered with the police authorities by the proprietor of the house within forty−eight hours of arrival.

"No, sir."

"Were you not afraid you would get into trouble?"

"The gentleman paid me well, and I did not think that he meant anything wrong, and—and——"

"And you did not think that it would be found out," said Müller sternly.

"I took good care of the lady."

"Yes, we know that."

"Did she escape from her husband?

"He was not her husband. But now tell me all you know about these people. The more truthful you are the better it will be for you."

The old woman was so frightened that she could scarcely find strength to talk. When she finally got control of herself again she began: "He came here on the 1st of November and rented this room for himself. But he was here only twice before he brought the lady and left her alone here. She was very ill when he brought her here, so ill that he had to carry her upstairs. I wanted to go for a doctor, but he said he was a doctor himself, and that he could take care of his wife, who often had such attacks. He gave me some medicine for her after I had put her to bed. I gave her the drops, but it was a long while before she came to herself again.

"Then he told me that she had lost her mind, and that she believed that everybody was trying to harm her. She was so bad that he was taking her to an asylum. But he hadn't found quite the right place yet, and wanted me to keep her here until he knew where he would take her. Once he left a revolver here by mistake. But I hid it so the lady wouldn't see it, and gave it to the gentleman the next time he came. He was angry at that, and said that I shouldn't have touched it."

The woman had told her story with much hesitation, and stopped altogether at this point. She had evidently suddenly realized that the lady was not insane, but only in great despair, and that people in such a state will often seek death, particularly if a weapon is left conveniently within their reach.

"What did this gentleman look like?" asked Müller, to start her talking again. She described her tenant as very tall and stout, with a long beard, slightly mixed with gray. She had never seen his eyes, for he wore smoked glasses.

"Did you notice anything particular about his face."

"No, nothing except that his beard was very heavy and almost covered his face."

"Could you see his cheeks at all?"

"No, or else I didn't notice."

"Did he leave nothing that might enable us to find him?"

"No, sir, nothing. Or yes, perhaps—but I don't suppose that will be any good!"

"What was it? What do you mean?"

"It gave him a good deal of trouble to get the lady into the wagon, because she had fainted again. He lost his glove doing it. I have it downstairs in my room, for I sleep downstairs again since the lady has gone!"

Müller had risen from his chair and walked over to the old writing desk which stood beside one window. There were several sheets of ordinary paper on it and a sharp−pointed pencil, and also—something not usually found on writing desks—a piece of bread from which some of the inside had been taken. "Everything as I expected it," he said to himself. "The young lady made up the package in the last few moments that she was left alone here."

He turned again to the old woman and commanded her to lead him downstairs. "What sort of a carriage was it in which they took the lady away?" he asked as they went down.

"A closed coupé."

"Did you see the number?"

"No, sir. But the carriage was very shabby, and so was the driver."

"Was he an old man?

"He was about forty years old, but he looked like a man who drank. He had a light overcoat on."

"Good. Is this your room?"

"Yes, sir."

They were down again in the lower corridor, where they found Amster walking up and down. The woman opened the door of the little room, and took a glove from a cupboard. Müller put it in his pocket and told the woman not to leave the house, as she might be sent for to come to the police station at any moment. Then he went out into the street with Amster. When they were outside in the bright light he looked at the glove. It was of a remarkably small size, made for a man with a slender, delicate hand, not at all in accord with the large, stout body of the man described by the landlady. Müller put his hand into the glove and found something pushed up into the middle finger. He took it out; it was a crumpled tramway ticket.

"Look out for a shabby old closed coupé, with a driver about forty, who looks like a drunkard, and wears a light overcoat. If you find such a one, engage it and drive in it to the nearest police station. Tell them there to hold the man until further notice. If the wagon is not free, at least take the number. And one thing more—but you will know that yourself—the cab we are looking for will have new glass in the right−hand window." Thus Müller spoke to his companion, as he put the glove in his pocket and unfolded the tramway ticket. Amster understood that they had found the starting point of the drive of the night before.

"I will go to all coupé stands," he said eagerly.

"Yes—but we may be able to find it quicker than that." Müller took out the little notebook, which he was now carrying in his pocket, and took from it the tramway ticket which was in the cover. He compared it with the one just found. They were both marked for the same hour of the day and for the same ride.

"Did the man use them?" asked Amster. The detective nodded. "How can they help us?"

"Somewhere on this stretch of the street railroad you will probably find the stand of the cab we are looking for. The man who hired it evidently arrived on the 6.30 train at the West Station—I have reason to believe that he does not live here—and then took the street car to this corner. This last ticket is marked for yesterday. In the car he will probably have arranged his plan to hire a cab. So you had better stay along the line of the car tracks. You will find me in room 7, police headquarters, at noon to−day. The authorities have already taken up the case. You may have something to tell us then. Good luck to you."

Müller hurried on, stopping only to take a hasty breakfast in a little café. He went at once to headquarters, made his report there, and then drove to Fellner's house. The latter was awaiting him with great impatience. Here the detective gathered much valuable information about the first marriage of Asta Langen's long−dead father. It was old Berner who could tell him most about these long−vanished days.

When he reached his office at headquarters again, he found telegrams in great number awaiting him. They were from all the hospitals and insane asylums in the entire district. But in none of them had there been a patient fitting the description of the vanished girl. Neither the commissioner nor Müller was surprised at this negative result. They were also not surprised at all that the various public authorities knew so little about the personality of the young lady. They were aware that they had to deal with a criminal of great ability, who would be careful not to fall into the usual slips made by his kind.

There was no news from the cab either, although several detectives were out looking for it. It was almost nightfall when Amster came breathlessly into room 7. "I have him, he's waiting outside across the way!" This was Amster's report.

Müller threw his coat on hastily. "You didn't pay him, did you? On a cold day like this the drivers don't like to wait long in any one place."

"No danger. I haven't money enough for that," replied Amster, with a sad smile. Müller did not hear him, as he was already outside. But the commissioner with whom he had been talking, and to whom Müller had already spoken of his voluntary assistant, entered into a conversation with Amster, and said to him finally: "I will take it upon myself to guarantee your future, if you are ready to enter the secret service under Müller. If you wish to do this, you can stay right on now, for I think we will need you in this case."

Amster bowed in agreement. His life bad been troubled, his reputation darkened by no fault of his own, and the work he was doing now had awakened an interest and an ability that he did not know he possessed. He was

more than glad to accept the offer made by the official.

Müller was already across the street and had laid his hand upon the door of the cab, when the driver turned to him and said crossly: "Someone else has hired me. But I am not going to wait in this cold. Get in if you want to."

"All right. But tell me first where you drove to last evening with the sick lady and her companion?" The man looked astonished, but found his tongue again in a moment: "And who are you?" he asked calmly.

"We will tell you that upstairs in the police station," answered Müller equally calmly, and ordered the man to drive through the gateway into the inner courtyard. He himself got into the wagon, and in the short time it took to drive in he had made a discovery. He had found a tiny glass stopper, such as is used in perfume bottles. He could understand from this why the odor of the perfume, which had now become familiar to him, was still so strong inside the old cab. Asta Langen had taken the stopper from the bottle in her pocket, so as to leave a trail of odor behind her.

III

FIFTEEN minutes after the driver had made his report to the commissioner for the day, the latter, with Amster, entered another cab. A well−armed policeman mounted the box of the second vehicle. "Follow that cab ahead," the commissioner told his driver. The second cab followed the one−horse coupé, in which Müller was seated. They drove first to 14 Church Street, where Müller told Berner to come with him. He found Mr. Fellner ready to go also, and it was with great difficulty that he could dissuade the invalid, who was already greatly fatigued by his morning visit to the police station, from joining them.

The wagons then drove off more quickly than before. It was now quite dark, a gloomy, stormy winter evening. Müller bad taken his place on the box of his cab and sat peering out into the darkness. In spite of the sharp wind and the ice that blew against his face, the detective could see that they were going out from the more closely built up portions of the city, and were now in new streets with half−finished houses. Soon they passed even these and were outside of the city. The way was lonely and dreary, bordered by high wooden fences on both sides. Müller looked sharply to right and to left.

"You should have become suspicious here," he said to the driver, pointing to one part of the fence.

"Why?" asked the man.

"Because this is where the window was broken."

"I didn't know that—until I got home."

"Hm—— You must have been nicely drunk."

The driver murmured something in his beard.

"Stop here, this is your turn down that street," Müller said a few moments later, as the driver turned the other way.

"How do you know that?" asked the man, surprised.

"None of your business."

"This street will take us there, just the same."

"Probably. But I prefer to go the way you took yesterday."

"Very well, it's all the same to me." They were silent again. The wind roared about them, and somewhere a fog−horn sounded.

It was now six o'clock. The snow threw out a mild light which could not brighten the deep darkness around them. About half an hour later the first cab halted. "There's the house up there. Shall I drive to the garden gate?"

"No, stop here." Müller was already on the ground.

"Are there any dogs here?" he asked.

"I didn't hear any yesterday."

"That doesn't mean anything. You didn't seem to hear much yesterday, anyway." Müller opened the door of the cab and helped Berner out. The old man was trembling.

"That was a dreadful drive," he stammered.

"I hope you'll be happier on the drive back," said the detective with friendliness, and added: "You may stay here with the commissioner now."

The latter had already left his cab with his companion. His sharp eyes glanced over the heavily shaded garden and the little house in its midst. A little light came out from two windows of the first story. The men's eyes looked toward them, then the detective and Amster walked toward a high picket fence which inclosed the garden on the side towards its neighbors. They shook the various pickets without much caution, for the wind made noise enough to kill any other sound. Amster called to Müller in a moment. He had found a loose picket, and his strong young arms had soon torn it out. Müller motioned to the other three to join them. A moment later they were all in the garden, walking carefully toward the house.

The door was closed, but there were no bars at the windows of the ground floor. Amster looked inquiringly at the commissioner, and the latter nodded, and said: "All right, go ahead." Amster broke one pane of the window and turned the latch. The inner window was broken already, so that it was not difficult for him to open it without any further noise. He disappeared into the dark room within, and in a few moments they heard a key turn in the

door and it opened gently. The men entered, all except the policeman, who remained outside. The blind of his lantern was slightly opened, and he had his revolver ready in his hand.

Müller had opened his lantern also, and they saw that they were in a prettily furnished corridor, upon which the staircase and one door opened.

The four men tiptoed up the stairway and the commissioner stepped to the first of the two doors which opened upon the upper corridor. He turned the key, which was in the lock, and opened the door—but they found themselves in a room as dark as the corridor. From somewhere, however, a ray of light fell into the blackness. The official stepped into the room, pulling Berner after him. The poor old man was in a state of trembling excitement when he found himself in the house where his beloved young lady might already be lying dead. One step more and a smothered cry came from his lips. The commissioner had opened the door of the adjoining room, which was lighted and handsomely furnished. Only the heavy iron bars across the closed windows showed that the young lady, who was leaning back wearily in an armchair, was a prisoner.

She looked up as they entered. The expression of utter despair and deep weariness which had rested on her pale face changed to a look of terror—then she saw that it was not her murderer, who was entering, but those who came to rescue. . . . A bright flush illumined her cheeks and her eyes gleamed. But the change was too sudden for her tortured soul. She rose from her chair, then sank fainting to the floor.

Berner threw himself on his knees beside her, sobbing out: "She is dying!"

Müller turned at the sound, for he had heard the door on the other side of the hall open, and a tall, slender man, with a smooth face and a deep scar on his right cheek, stood on the threshold, looking at them in dazed surprise. But for a moment only had he lost his control. The next second he was in his room again, slamming the door behind him. But it was too late. Amster's foot was already in the crack of the door, and he pushed it open to let Müller enter. "Well done," cried the latter, and then turned to the man in the room: "Here! stop that! I can shoot before you get that window open."

The man turned and walked slowly to the center of the room, sinking down into an armchair that stood beside the desk. Neither Amster nor Müller turned his eyes from him a moment, ready for any attempt on his part to escape. But the detective bad already seen something that told him that Langen was not thinking of flight. When he turned to the desk, Müller had seen his eyes glisten, while a scornful smile parted his thin lips. A second later he had let his handkerchief fall, apparently carelessly, upon the desk. But in this short space of time the detective's sharp eyes had seen a tiny bottle, upon which was a black label with a grinning skull. Müller could not see whether the bottle was full or empty, but he knew that it must hold sufficient poison to enable the captured criminal to escape open disgrace. Knowing this, Müller looked with admiration at the calmness of this villain, whose intelligent eyes were turned towards him with evident curiosity.

"Who are you and who else is here with you?" asked the man calmly.

"Detective Müller," replied his visitor, and added: "You must put up with us two for the time being, Mr. Egon Langen. The police commissioner is occupied with your stepsister, whom you were about to murder."

Langen put his hand to his cheek, looking at Müller between his lashes, as he said: "To murder? Who can prove that?"

"We have all the proofs we need already."

"I will acknowledge only that I wanted Asta to disappear."

Müller smiled: "What good would that have done you? You wanted her entire fortune, did you not? But that could have come to you only after thirty years, and you are not likely to have waited that long. Your plan was to murder your stepsister, even if you could not get a letter from her telling of her intention to commit suicide."

Langen rose suddenly, but controlled himself again and sank back easily in his chair. "Then the old woman told?" he asked.

Müller shook his head. " We knew through Miss Langen herself."

"She has spoken to no one for over ten days."

"But you let her throw her notebook out of the window of the cab."

"Ah—!"

"There, you see, you should not have let that happen."

Drops of perspiration stood out on Langen's forehead. Until now, perhaps, he had had some possible hope of escape. Now it was all over, he knew.

As calmly as he had spoken thus far, Müller continued, For thirty years I have been studying the hearts of criminals like yourself. But there are things I do not understand about this case, and it interests me very much."

Langen had wiped the drops from his forehead, and he now turned on Müller a face that seemed made of bronze. There was but one expression in it, that of cold scorn.

"I feel much flattered, old gentleman, to think that I can offer a riddle to one of your experience," the villain began. His voice, which had been slightly veiled before, was now quite clear. " Ask all you like, I will answer you."

Müller began: "Why did you wait so long before committing the murder? and why did you drag your victim from place to place when you could have killed her easily in the compartment of the railway train?"

"The windows of the compartment were open, my honored friend, and it was a fine warm evening for the season, because of which the windows in the other compartments were also open. There was nothing I could do at that time then, except to offer Asta a cup of tea when she felt a little faint on leaving the train. I am a physician, and I know how to use the right drugs at the right time. When Asta had taken the tea she knew nothing more until she woke up a day later, in the room in the city."

"And the piece of paper with the threat on it, and the revolver you left so handy for her?—Oh, but I forgot, the old woman took the weapon away before the lady could use it in her despair," said Müller.

"Quite right. I see you know every detail."

"But why did you not complete your crime in the room in the old house?" persisted Müller.

"Because I lost my false beard one day upon the staircase, and I feared the old woman might have seen my face, and recognized me again. I thought it better to look for another place."

"And then you found this house?"

"Yes, but several days later."

"And you hired it in the name of Miss Asta Langen—who would have been found dead here, several days after you had entered the house?"

"Several days, several weeks perhaps. I would wait until the woman who rented me the house had read in the papers that Asta Langen had disappeared and was being sought for. Somebody would have found her here, and her identity would have been easily established, for I knew that she had some important family documents with her."

Müller was silent a moment, with an expression of deep pity on his face. Then he continued: "Yes, someone would have found her, and her suicide would have remained a dark mystery, unless, of course, malicious tongues would have found evil reasons enough why a beautiful young lady should hide herself in a lonely villa to take her own life." Müller had spoken as if to himself. Egon Langen's lips parted in a smile so evil that Amster clenched his fists.

"And you would not have regretted this ruining the reputation as well as taking the life of an innocent girl?" asked the detective softly.

"No, for I hated her."

"You hated her because she was rich and innocent. She was very charitable and would gladly have helped you if you were in need. Besides this, you were entitled to a portion of your father's portion. It is about thirty thousand guldens, as Mr. Fellner tells me. Why did you not take that?"

"Fellner did not know that I had already received twenty thousand of this when my father turned me out. He probably would have heard of it later, for Berner was the witness. I did not care for the remaining ten thousand, because I would have had the entire fortune after Asta's death. I would have seen the official notice and the call for the heirs in Australia, and would have written from there announcing that I was still alive. If you bad come several days later, I should have been a rich man within a year."

His clenched fists resting on his knee, the villain stared out ahead of him when he ended his shameless confession. In his rage and disappointment be bad not noticed that Müller's hand had dropped gently on the desk and had softly taken the little bottle from under the handkerchief. Langen came out of his thoughts only when Müller's voice broke the silence. "But you miscalculated, if you expected to inherit from your sister. She is still a minor, and your father's will would have given you only the ten thousand guldens."

"But you forget that Asta will be twenty−four on the 3d of December."

"Ah, then you would keep her alive until then."

"You understand quickly," said Langen, with a mocking smile.

"But she disappeared on the 18th of November. How, could you prove that she died after her birthday, therefore in full possession of her fortune, and without leaving any will?"

"That is very simple. I would have bought papers up to the 4th and 5th of December, and left them here with the body."

"You are more clever even than I thought," said the detective dryly, as he heard the commissioner's step behind him. Müller put a whistle to his lips and its shrill tone ran through the house, calling up the policeman who stood by, the door.

Egon Langen's face was gray with pallor, and his features distorted, yet there was a ghost of a smile on his lips as he saw his captors enter the door. He put his hand out, raised his handkerchief hastily, and then a wild scream echoed through the rooms.

"I have taken your bottle, you might as well give yourself up quietly," said Müller calmly, holding his revolver near Langen's face. The prisoner threw himself at the detective, but was caught and overpowered by Amster and the policeman.

A quarter of an hour later the cabs drove back toward the city. Inside one cowered Egon Langen, watched by the policeman and Amster. Berner was on the box beside the driver, telling the now interested man the story of what had happened to his dear young lady. In the other cab Asta Langen sat with the friendly commissioner and Müller.

"Do You feel a little better now, my dear child?" asked the commissioner in sympathy, as he patted her cold hand. The girt nodded and said gently, " I feel as if some terrible weight were lifted from my heart and brain. But I don't think that I can ever forget those dreadful days, when I already had to accept it as a fact—that I was to be murdered."