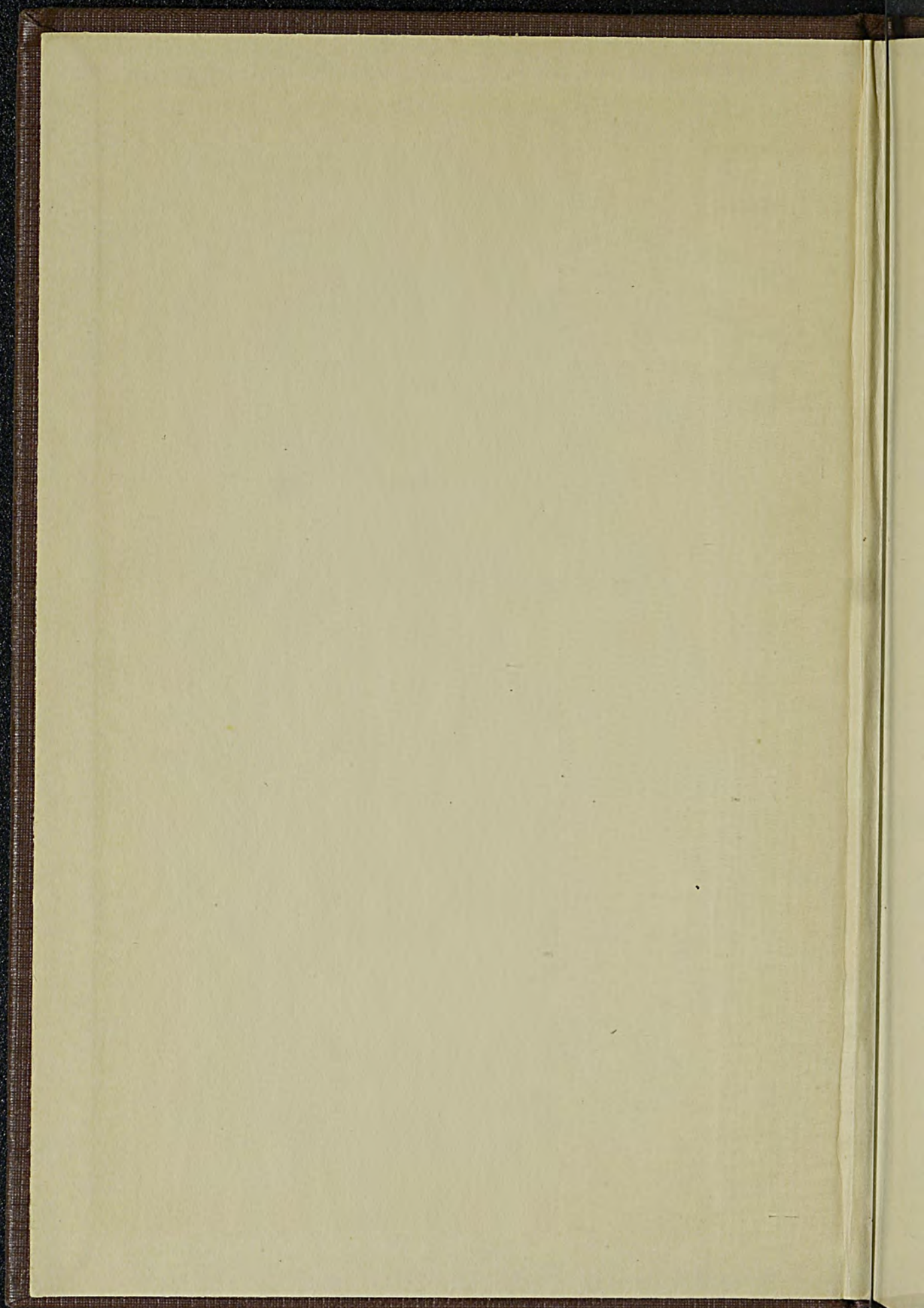


GHOST HOUSE

CONDÉ B. PALLEN



ghost novel

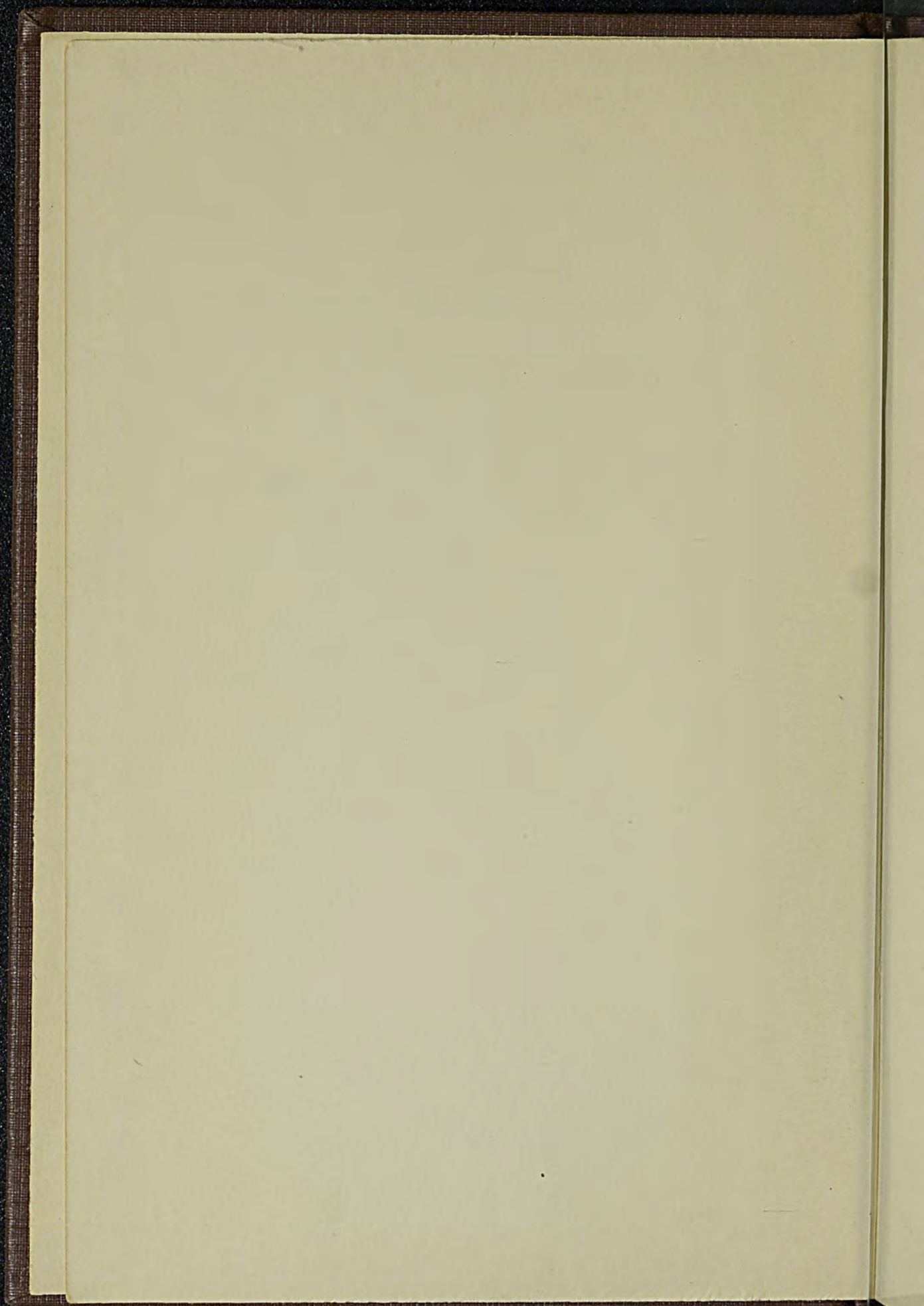
Locke SPEC. pg. 172

1st

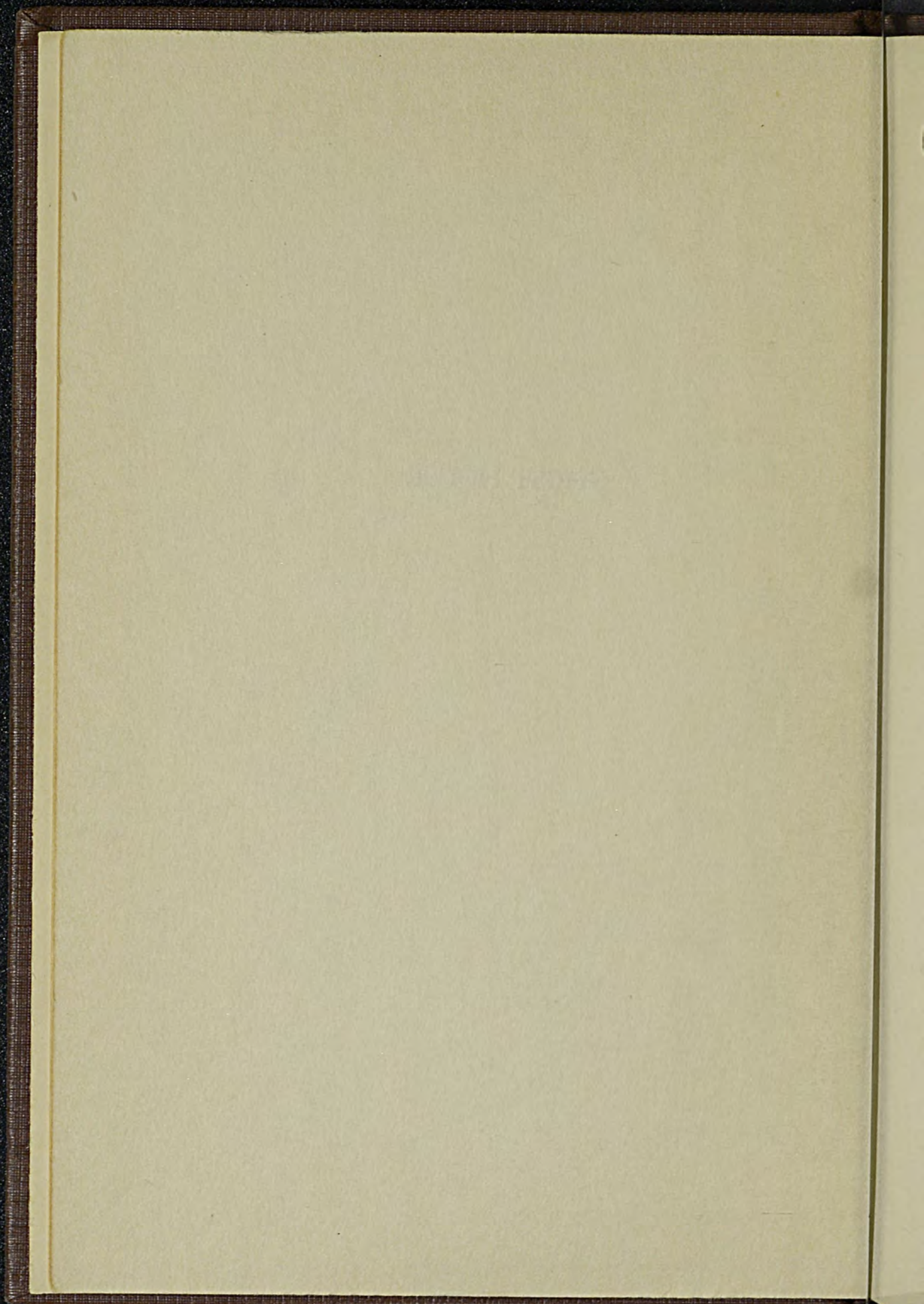
845⁰⁰

B(11) 153

pg 1137



GHOST HOUSE



GHOST HOUSE

By

CONDÉ B. PALLÉN

*Author of "Crucible Island," "As Man to Man," etc.
In Preparation, "The King's Coil"*



NEW YORK

MANHATTANVILLE PRESS

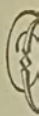
1928

COPYRIGHT, 1928, BY
CONDÉ B. PALLÉN

Printed in the United States of America

*And over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
That told as plain as whisper in the ear:
The place is haunted.*

THOMAS HOOD



it
to
ow
w
w
at

H
T
suc
ren
ho
sh
it
evi
nat
list
ma
kno
its

CHAPTER ONE

THE whole village was agog; Peyton House had a tenant. People went about shaking their heads and gossip was rife. Nobody understood it; nobody could explain it. Pettigrew, the local realtor, revealed nothing to the many inquiries that came over the phone. "Don't know" was his laconic answer when asked the name of the tenant. "Didn't rent it" was his reply to all who in eager curiosity dropped in at the office.

Well might Claxville be astonished, for the Peyton House had remained tenantless for over twenty years. The story ran that more than thirty years ago several successive tenants had decamped in short order, none remaining a week at a time. All declared that the house was haunted; all departed in panic. It was shunned by everybody. Weird stories grew up about it in the town and the neighboring countryside. Its evil reputation spread far and wide and even became national. The Psychical Society investigated it and listed it as an extraordinary phenomenon of ghostly manifestation. So the Peyton mansion, otherwise known as Ghost House, had stood empty on the top of its bleak hill just south of the town. Even in the bril-

liant sunshine it presented a sinister appearance. Delapidated and run down, its grounds unkempt and overgrown with rank weeds, its bleak windows stared out upon the surrounding country in awful portent, a place accursed and dreadful.

How long would the new occupant remain, was the universal query. Expectation was on tiptoe at the end of the first week. But the new tenant stayed. A second week passed, and contrary to all prophecy, the occupant held on undaunted. A third week, and then a fourth dropped out of the calendar, and the situation remained unchanged.

All sorts of stories went floating around since the new occupant had moved in. People who had passed the house at night along the road at the bottom of the hill, told of a strange pale light through the windows, not at all like the usual illumination from an occupied dwelling, but a yellowish or greenish light without any shine to it. One man declared the walls themselves seemed to give out a sickish glow every now and then. This phenomenon was most apparent on clear nights, especially if the moon were shining. Some said they had heard a faint humming like the sound of an aeroplane at a great distance. One man, whose curiosity had drawn him as far as the front portico, declared that he had heard an unearthly shriek and fearful moans. It was too much for his nerves and he immediately turned tail and fled pell-mell down the hill.

In due time curiosity and gossip died down, for no information could be gleaned from the new inmates of Peyton House. The tenant himself never came into town. Only glimpses of him had been had by casual passers-by or by the tradespeople who had occasion to bring supplies. He was described as a spare man seemingly about forty years of age, with smooth face and grayish hair; he had a slight stoop. This was as much as any one had been able to distinguish. Two negro servants, a man and a woman, made up his ménage. These occupied an outhouse some fifty feet back of the main building. The tradespeople who delivered supplies, tried to pump them, but were always met with a studied reticence and a shake of the head. With such meager fare to feed on, surmise and gossip were soon starved out, and Claxville settled back into its accustomed rut. To ignore one's neighbors is to court resentment, but the tenant of Ghost House was too absorbed to concern himself about other people.

One man alone kept up his interest in the fact that the Peyton House had a new tenant, but it was clandestine; he took good care to conceal it. This was Cyrus Tetherington, the richest man in town, and an old bachelor. He spent little of his time in Claxville, for the most part living in New York City. Claxville saw him only at rare intervals. When the new tenant came he was away and did not learn of that event for a month after. His automobile passed Ghost House

about nine o'clock in the evening as he was returning from the City. Tetherington gazed up at the house, as he always did when he chanced by it, and was startled to find it not dark and blank, a somber silhouette against the sky, but all its windows staring at him with a pale owlsh light. He could scarcely believe his eyes. He muttered an imprecation and shouted to his chauffeur to stop.

"Do you see that?" he asked in a startled tone, pointing to the house above.

"Yes, sir," answered the stupefied man, as he gazed up at the staring windows. "It's haunted, sir," he added in an awed voice.

Tetherington frowned heavily, his mouth compressed with tightened lips that went blue. He laid his hand on the door as if about to get out, then changed his mind and leaning back called to his chauffeur to go on. The man responded with alacrity. He was evidently nervous, and gave his engine gas so generously and suddenly that the car fairly jumped forward, and sped away like a fleeing greyhound. What might have been taken for a sour smile flickered for an instant about Tetherington's lips. He turned around in his seat and gazed long and hard at Ghost House until it disappeared behind a curve in the road.

Tetherington's household was awaiting him. Several servants flocked to the entrance on his arrival. As

he ascended the steps he heard his chauffeur telling the others about the Peyton house.

"That's old stuff," the butler was saying to the chauffeur, "been there over a month now. Forget it. We all know about it. It's just some crank I say, who's taken the place, so as nobody'll bother him. He knows people steer clear of haunted houses. It's all nonsense anyhow."

Tetherington declined the meal that had been prepared for him, gave orders that he was not to be disturbed, and went straight to his rooms, a suite on the second floor. Here he locked himself in and began pacing up and down with a nervous tread, his brows contracted into a deep frown, his lips twitching. He was much perturbed. Why did his agent rent the place? It is true that he had given instructions not to rent the Peyton house, but that was long ago, and who was the fool who had been crazy enough to take the tumbled-down and forbidding mansion?

The room he was in was an ante-room to his bedroom just beyond, both fronting the street-side. Back of these was a bathroom and another smaller room half library and half den. It was to this latter that Tetherington, after some fifteen minutes of nervous pacing up and down, retired, locking and bolting the door between. The windows overlooked a small park with a heavy growth of trees whose dense foliage completely screened that side of the house from any too curious

neighbor. Nevertheless, he carefully and secretively closed the shutters and pulled down the window curtains.

He then proceeded to a small safe built in the wall, and took from it a bundle of papers. Selecting one he returned the others and seated himself at a desk against the opposite wall. Spreading the paper before him he began studying it with absorbing intentness. It was a blue print at the top of which was written in red ink, "Key to the House." It seemed to be an outline plan of a large house with numerous traceries in dotted lines variously lettered at intersecting points. At last Tetherington rose, looked at his watch—it was eleven.

Some ten minutes after he let himself out of the front door, closing it silently after him. The street was deserted and dark, for Claxville was economical and put out its street lights at ten. Turning up the collar of his coat and slouching his hat over his face, he walked southward stealthily until he came within sight of the Peyton house.

Every window gave out a faint greenish glow. Broken clouds were scudding across the sky, with a moon back of them. Every time the moonlight fell upon the house through a rift, the greenish light seemed to glow more intensely, and indeed the very walls seemed to participate in the sickly luster. Tetherington stopped dead.

After a moment he started across the fields taking a

short cut in the direction of the house. As he neared it he slackened his pace, walking with extreme caution. Within a hundred yards he stopped again in the shadow of a clump of trees, though the night was dark enough to conceal him at that distance from any observer. Here he fell upon his hands and knees, crawling slowly until he came under one of the windows on the lower floor.

The bottom of the window was about eight feet from the ground, but with the aid of a heavy vine and the rough masonry of the rubble work, upon which he found a footing, he cautiously drew himself up to a position where he could look in. The greenish glow filled the room, but gave no illumination to the interior. Tetherington strained his eyes gazing, but the harder he looked, the more opaque became the scene inside. It was more like a blurring haze visible itself but giving no relief to the balked eye. At the same time a low humming sound came to him. He rubbed his eyes and peered and peered until they ached, but to no avail. It seemed as if he were staring into opaque glass, or that a film of some nature had accumulated on the windowpane. He took out a handkerchief and tried to wipe the pane clear. His astonishment grew to consternation when he discovered that not only was there no clarification of vision through his effort, but, what he did not observe at first, when he lifted his arm it disappeared in the uncanny glow through the win-

dow. He tried it several times, each time with the same effect. He dropped back to the ground puzzled and apprehensive. A sense of fear seized him, though it all seemed preposterous.

"Nonsense," he muttered to himself, "some optical delusion."

He stood several minutes contemplating the phosphorescent glow which seemed to increase and subside at intervals. He thought he felt a numbness in his arm and began to rub it, though not vigorously, as if he were fearful that he might make a noise, for he felt singularly depressed and subdued.

He climbed up again and thrust his whole arm upward against the window. It still disappeared from his vision. He passed it to and fro several times across and up and down, but it remained invisible. He was more than puzzled this time. He felt his skin prickle and a shiver passed down his spine. He dropped again to the ground and backed away from the house to the deepened shadows of the trees.

Skirting the clump of trees he passed around the house to the rear and descended the hill back of the outhouse, where it fell off abruptly and was covered with a heavy undergrowth of stubby oak and tall grass. Cautiously making his way to the rear of the outhouse, and picking his path carefully with the aid of a pocket flashlight, after many pauses and retracing of his steps,

he came to an opening some four feet wide concealed by a heavy growth of bushes.

Stooping on hands and knees he crawled into the aperture, and after some ten feet in this posture, found himself in what proved to be a fair-sized room just under the rear portion of the outhouse. Flashing his pocket torch around, he located an electric switch and turned on a flood of light.

The room was simply a rough excavation with dirt walls and floor. Ranged against the far wall was an apparatus like a telegrapher's board with a number of keys. Above this, tacked on a deal board, was a diagram similar to the one which had so absorbed Tetherington's attention that same evening. Dust had accumulated over the face of the diagram and the apparatus with keys. He flicked off the dust with his handkerchief and seated himself on a rough stool.

After a few moment's study of the diagram, he first pressed one key and then another, a grim smile playing about his lips. On the instant the electric light dimmed, and the greenish glow which he had seen in the main building pervaded the room, accompanied by a low humming. Tetherington's jaw dropped. His outstretched hand over the keys had disappeared. He glanced down at his arms; they too were invisible. The green glow seemed to pervade his whole being like a subtle and sublimated essence that wrapped him around and penetrated to the marrow of his bones with

icy coldness. He jumped to his feet in a gripping terror to discover that his whole body had vanished from view. Shaking like an aspen, with every nerve aquiver, he rushed to the aperture in a frenzy of fear and dropping down, plunged headlong into it. Reaching the opening after a protracted agony of haste in the cramped posture on hands and knees, he fled incontinently down the hill.

CHAPTER TWO

I

HAWKINS and Hawkins, Realtors, occupied commodious offices on the 20th floor of the Stockpoole Building, just off Broadway, in the downtown district. Hawkins and Hawkins was a leading and prosperous firm in the real estate business with a large clientele among the rich. It did an immense rental and sales business in the city and in the suburbs.

Mr. Hawkins, senior member of the firm, sat at his big mahogany desk, dictating to his private secretary. His phone rang several times. With a gesture of impatience he took up the instrument.

"Why do you ring me?" he asked testily, "I told you that I was not to be interrupted. Long distance? Insistent? Well, who is it? Tetherington from Claxville? All right, put him on." After a moment's pause, "Yes, yes. Certainly, Mr. Tetherington. Hold the wire, I'll have it looked up."

He pressed a button on his desk, and in a moment a clerk appeared in answer to the summons.

"Get me the file card of the Peyton property at Claxville." Turning to his stenographer, with his hand on

the mouth of the phone: "This is a nuisance, Miss Peyton, but when a client insists—especially one as big as Tetherington—I suppose I have to comply."

Miss Peyton looked up and nodded.

"By the by, Miss Peyton, that's curious. Our client is asking about the new tenant, who has rented the Peyton House in Claxville. Same name as yours, and it is an odd name."

Miss Peyton opened her eyes a bit wider with mild interest. Just then the clerk returned with the card record of the Peyton House. Mr. Hawkins scanned it and began talking again into the phone.

"Hello! Here's the information you are asking for. The tenant of the Peyton house is George Temple Graves. He's some sort of a scientist chap. Highly recommended by the Dalton Research Institute. I understand he is doing some sort of experimental work—no, I don't know what it is. He said he wanted an old house in a quiet place. He didn't ask for any refitting or decorating—was easily satisfied. Yes, I told him that the house was said to be haunted. That didn't seem to faze him in the least. Has a year's lease at two hundred a month. Paid six months in advance. Top price for an old ramshackle and out-of-repair house. Couldn't be rented in a thousand years to anybody else. Thought it a good opportunity. The property has been vacant for a number of years.—Don't mention it; no trouble, glad to be of service to you. Good-by."

II

Tetherington put down the receiver and sat back in his chair pondering. It was the day following his experience at Ghost House. He had been badly shaken at first, but had recovered his equanimity after getting the information about the new tenant of Ghost House.

So, that was it; some kind of research work going on last night which he had run up against. Pish, but he had been silly, and he laughed sourly to himself at the thought of his headlong flight. Still there was something uncanny in the experience of seeing his arms and then his body vanish in that strange greenish glow. It seemed to have frozen his very marrow, and he shuddered at the recollection.

In spite of himself there was a sense of uneasiness at the bottom of his soul. Why did the fellow hit on Ghost House for his experiments? There were plenty of abandoned houses around.

Nonsense, he argued with himself, what harm could come of the experimental work going on there. Some dry as dust work, by some dried-up scientist, who was too absorbed to think of anything or notice anything outside the circle of his own scientific burrow.

But it was strange that as soon as he touched the keys connecting the wiring into the house, instead of conveying the message he intended, the force, whatever

it was energizing in the house, instantly flooded over into the room beneath the outhouse and completely paralyzed him with horror. It was, of course, some purely natural force unknown to himself and perhaps dangerous to one who unwittingly exposed himself, as he had done. His instant retreat had perhaps saved him from death. He would never again try to operate the keyboard under the outhouse while an experiment was evidently being conducted in the main building. But it was important to find out just what was going on. He would beard the lion in his den and call on the new tenant that afternoon.

III

George Temple Graves was leisurely smoking his pipe and pensively gazing at the ceiling in an idle moment in a rear room on the second floor of Ghost House. It was a bare room, save for a large desk in the center of the floor; some chairs, one a morris chair, in which Graves was reclining, and some book shelves against one of the walls to the side. Papers littered the top of the desk. Several books stood negligently on it, one of them lying open as if it had been just consulted. It was the typical den of a man laboriously working out some absorbing problem which had focused his attention to the exclusion of all other interests. His face was plainly that of a student, introspective in ex-

pression, but keen, not that of a simple dreamer, but practical in pursuit of an idea of concrete realization. Graves pulled at his pipe vacantly—his inner eye fixed upon some abstraction—layers of blue smoke above him undulatingly drifting across the room in an otherwise imperceptible sluggish draught. He didn't notice the entrance of an old colored woman, until she addressed him.

"Mistah Geowrge, dere's a gen'lman downstairs askin' for yuh. Dis yere is his cyard," as she handed it to Graves. "He done just 'sisted to see yuh tho I 'scused you pow'fully. An' 'deed Ah don't like his looks. He ain't 'stocracy, Mistah Geowrge; Ah can see dat, sure enuf."

"What makes you think, Aunt Beulah, that he isn't aristocracy?" asked Graves, as he looked at the name on the card, on which was engraved the name Mr. Silas Tetherington.

"Cause no gen'lman 'sists on seein' anoder gen'lman, when de oder gen'lman 'scuses hisself from de interview. I knows what's manners, I does, specially when dey isn't visible. De cloes don't make 'stocracy, Mistah Geowrge, dat's sartin. Ah's known dat since Ah was a piccaninny from way back."

"All right, Aunt Beulah, but this gentleman happens to be our landlord. He owns this house."

"Well, tain't no sort of place nohow. All tumble down and ramshackle and creepy like. Ah ain't been

comfortble since Ah been heah. Ah don't see why yuh wants to come here nohow, Mistah Geowrge. It ain't fit for humans to libe in. Ah's powful glad Ah don' hab to sleep here in de nighttime. Eben in de daylight it kinder makes me shibery. When Ah'se cookin' down dere in de kitchen, Ah gets queer feelin's, as if somebody was awatchin' me, and Ah tanks de Good Lord, when Ah gets done with de work and gets away to de outhouse for de night. Dere's something funny about it all, Ah tells you, Mistah Geowrge; for Rastus, who talks his ole head off when he gets de chance, just shuts up his mouf when he's in dis house. Tain't like him a bit. Ah knows dat nigger am skeart."

"Well, you don't have any queer feelings in the outhouse, do you, Aunt Beulah?"

"No, suh, Ah doesn't. De outhouse is mos comfortble, an Rastus talks out dere jus' as he allus do when he ain't skeart. Dey says dis house is hanted, Mistah Geowrge, and it sure is creepy eben in de daytime."

"All right, Aunt Beulah, let it go at that. As long as you and Rastus are not disturbed in the outhouse, I suppose you will rest satisfied. But the fact is I haven't heard or seen anything here at night, even though they say the house is haunted. It's just the place where I can work undisturbed, and its reputation will keep people away. That's the reason I took it. But run along, Aunt Beulah, and tell Mr. Tetherington that I will be down right away."

Aunt Beulah made her exit muttering to herself and shaking her head. Graves rose, shook out the ashes from his pipe and stood for a moment looking at the card. "I wonder what he comes for," he mused to himself. "It's a nuisance. If he weren't my landlord, I wouldn't see him at all."

Mr. Tetherington was seated in the hall. Aunt Beulah had shown the visitor scant courtesy. His insistence upon seeing her master had roused her prejudice to the point of rudeness. Graves was rather punctilious in points of etiquette and was a bit annoyed at Aunt Beulah's treatment of his visitor.

"Mr. Graves, I presume," said Tetherington, rising, as Graves descended and approached. "Pardon my intrusion, but the fact is I was curious to see the man who has rented the Peyton house which bears such an evil reputation. You are the first tenant in over twenty years."

"So I have heard," replied Graves. "But I owe you an apology for the discourtesy of Aunt Beulah in leaving you here in the hall. She is an old servant in my family, and sometimes takes privileges; I had given orders that no visitors were to be admitted, and she took them literally, even against landlords. Won't you come into the dining room, which happens to be the only room furnished on the lower floor?"

"You see," went on Graves, after the two men were seated, "this is only a workshop after all. I have spared

myself the trouble of fitting it up. I hope to finish my work here in a reasonable time and then vacate. I took the house because it was said to be haunted. In fact, I took it because it has that reputation. People are apt to keep away from haunted houses, I imagine."

"Yes," said Tetherington, with a half smile, as though he were an exception. "But you know as well as I that haunted houses are all nonsense. Just people's imagination. You've been here a month and more, I believe, and I'm sure you haven't been disturbed."

"Not in the least. Neither by ghostly visitants on the inside, nor by flesh and blood intruders from the outside. It is a happy situation. I am very busy. My work is of a very intensive character, and demands my entire and closest attention. You happen to catch me at an idle moment, of which I don't have very many."

"Oh, I understand," said Tetherington, with an apologetic smile. "There is, however, some excuse on the part of your landlord for dropping in for a moment, though, I confess, out of mere curiosity. I heard only the other day from my agents that you are a scientist of reputation engaged in research work. I trust that I am not impertinent in asking the nature of your investigations?"

"That would be difficult to explain," parried Graves, "and frankly, we scientists are not given to talking about our work until we are sure of our conclusions, and as yet I am far from that. I am working on a

mere theory, and theories with us don't count, save as tentative bridges to facts."

"That's very interesting. Of course, I am a simple layman in these matters. But science is so much discussed publicly these days in the newspapers and magazines, that it whets one's curiosity to know more about the many marvels that are being unfolded before our eyes. There's the radio for instance. I have become quite an enthusiast. I have a radio set both in my city house and here in my house in Claxville."

"It is a wonderful discovery," said Graves, "but still in its infancy. In time, I believe, we shall probe further into its secrets. But however far we go, we are always on the edge of a mystery. As fast as science pulls back one veil there is always another veil behind. Beyond our little knowledge always looms the unknown. Every new discovery we make is only another step into the infinite. But it is a fascinating game."

"I can well believe it," acquiesced Tetherington. "When you have reached your conclusion in your investigation, I trust you will let me know. Meantime, is there anything I can do for you here within reason? I know the house is old and dilapidated. I would be glad to do some minor repairs, if they will add to your comfort. Your tenancy may help to destroy its unsavory reputation and lead to a more permanent occupant in the future."

"Nothing, thank you," answered Graves. "As I said,

this is only a temporary workshop. I am too absorbed to bother about inconveniences. For my needs, which are limited, I am most comfortable."

"Meantime, if anything occurs to you that I might do to help you I would be greatly pleased," said Tetherington, as he rose to depart. "By the by, I wonder if it would be asking you too much to let me take a look over the house. I haven't been here in a long time, and when you vacate, I hope to put the place in order with a view to a more permanent tenant than yourself. After your occupancy, perhaps the ghosts will be laid in popular estimation. The fact that you have discovered no ghosts," he went on with a deprecating smile, "will clear its evil reputation."

There was something of a strained note in Tetherington's voice that caused Graves to glance sharply at him for an instant.

"Why, yes," answered Graves, "I will be glad to show you over. Only I must make an exception to the left-hand front room on the second floor, and the cellar. I have some very delicate instruments adjusted in that room. That is sacrosanct. I permit no one to go in there, and only enter it myself in an insulated suit of my own devising, for some very special and delicate work. In fact, save with such precaution, it would be dangerous to any one unacquainted with the nature of the work. The front cellar, I must also prohibit. It is stored with chemicals of most unstable

equilibrium, and I trust no one there except myself. Not that they are dangerous," Tetherington's face showed a faint apprehension, "but simply that they could be easily disturbed even by the vibrations of the voice, or an unfamiliar footstep."

"I see, I see," said Tetherington, with some constraint, and then in pleasant acquiescence, "I appreciate your solicitude and precaution. I would not dream of encroaching upon such scientifically hallowed precincts." There was just the faintest echo of derision in the last words. Graves caught it, but said nothing.

As they went through the house, Tetherington made notes, with comments now and then on what might be done in the way of repairs or renovations. When they passed the door of the left front room on the second floor, he paused and smiled dryly.

"You know it makes me feel like Bluebeard's wife. It rouses my curiosity to the highest pitch."

"Yes, human nature is much alike after all, in both the male and the female of the species," laughed Graves.

"I wonder what he was after," mused Graves to himself when Tetherington had taken his departure.

IV

That night Ghost House remained dark; there was no greenish glow from its windows. Save for the soli-

tary light in Graves' den, the house was shrouded in darkness, and an oppressive silence seemed to enswathe it. Drifting clouds in half-obscured skies, permitted a crescent moon to shed down a faint and uncertain light now and then. The great portico brooded in deep shadow, and between the struggling moonlight and the shadows of the cloud drifts, the weather-stained walls assumed fantastic shapes.

Graves busied himself over a complicated number of mathematical calculations in his study until nearly midnight. The result evidently did not satisfy him. Discarded papers, thickly penciled with figures and mathematical formulæ, strewed the floor.

"Something wrong, it doesn't work out. I'll have to try it all over in the morning, when I am fresher," he said to himself. "A good night's sleep will clear my brain." He stretched himself weariedly, took up his pipe, and after a leisurely smoke, went to bed. His bedroom adjoined the front left-hand room to the rear. His head barely touched the pillow before he was in a deep slumber.

He woke with a start, how long after, he didn't know. Through the windows the meager moonlight streamed in with a cold silvery brilliance. A brisk wind had cleared the skies of spind-drift. A minute of profound silence ensued and then a low moaning seemed to come from the left-hand front room. Graves lifted himself on his elbow listening. A prickly sen-

sation ran down his spine. But that passed as he gathered his wits and took himself in hand. He eased himself from his elbow and slowly dropped back on his pillow, now thoroughly awake and free from his surprise. The moaning sound had ceased. He lay perfectly still with every faculty at tension. In a few moments came a slow fall of footsteps as if some one were walking in the hall outside his door. This was followed in quick succession by several heavy thuds that seemed to come from the floor below, followed by a sudden strident shriek that pulled Graves bolt upright in bed with his heart thumping. "God!" he ejaculated, for in spite of himself, the sound was so unearthly to his horrified ear that it curdled his blood. Shaking himself free from the momentary terror, he jumped from the bed, hurried to the door and threw it open. He was now complete master of himself.

"Just what I have been waiting for, and yet I can't help feeling creepy," was his self-comment. He stepped out into the hall, carefully shutting the door after him, and then stood for a few moments listening.

From the window at the front of the hall there was just sufficient light to see objects in dim outline. Graves moved cautiously to the head of the stairs, his hand resting lightly on the banister. He stood waiting. Again the low moaning from the front room, footsteps along the hall, and heavy thuds from below, followed by the piercing shriek, that came as far as he could

judge, from nowhere in particular, filling the entire house with its shrill intensity.

He mentally checked up the successive order. After an interval of what seemed to him perhaps ten seconds, they were repeated, first the moaning, then the footsteps, the thudding and the shriek. Graves was now fully composed but tensely alert in every faculty. After another interval of profound silence, again came the sounds, but this time with the order reversed, the shriek coming first. This he noted as data for consideration in his study of the manifestations in Ghost House.

He turned and hastened to his bedroom. There he took from a locker at the head of his bed what looked like a diver's suit. This he rapidly donned, carefully adjusting and buckling it. The headpiece was a helmet with a glass visor. The costume was heavy and cumbersome, as if made of some metallic substance. Graves moved in it slowly, for all the world like a diver at the bottom of the sea. Going to the door opening into the front room which he had denied to Tetherington, he opened it and entered switching on a light.

In the center stood a curious-looking apparatus, circular in form, with a series of projections, like motion picture cameras. Commanding the entire room, the apparatus stood upon a low platform resting on glass feet. Back of the camera-like projections, and taking

up the middle space, was a cylindrical-shaped affair in appearance like a small conning tower.

Swinging open a segment of the apparatus, which turned noiselessly, Graves entered the tower-shaped center. Its interior, about three feet in diameter, was fitted with several small dials and switch levers, a dial and lever corresponding to each camera-like projection. A metal stool occupied the middle space. Seating himself on this, Graves waited, listening.

This time the mysterious noises did not begin with the moaning, but with footfalls in the hall, and then in rapid succession the heavy thudding from below. He immediately pressed down one of the levers. A low humming sound pervaded the room while a faint greenish glow like a thin mist slowly spread through the room. In rapid succession he threw on the other levers, the humming sound deepening and the green mist thickening as each lever slid into its place, until the humming grew to the heavy droning base of the propellers of an aeroplane, and the greenish glow deepened like a dense fog enveloping and obscuring everything. No sooner had Graves applied his levers than the mysterious sounds ceased.

"Not in tune," he muttered to himself, and reaching over he gradually manipulated a lever attached to a large dial directly in front of him. As the dial hand slowly turned, the hands of all the smaller dials ad-

vanced correspondingly, the humming increasing in intensity, and the greenish light thickening.

"Full power now," he exclaimed, as all the dial hands marked the maximum point. He sat for a full half-hour immobile. He then switched off each lever. The humming ceased and the greenish glow died away. A faint and peculiar odor pervaded the room like decayed rose leaves. From the back of each projector, ten in all, Graves extracted a compact black metal box, on the front of which he carefully closed a shutter. These he packed into a metal case at his feet. He carried this into his bedroom and deposited it in a cabinet evidently made for the purpose. Having divested himself of his diver-like suit, he sat on the edge of his bed for a while listening. A deep silence ensued. A heavy lassitude came over him after the tension of the past hour. He yawned and stretched himself. "Nothing more to-night, I imagine," he muttered to himself. "I ought to have something better this time. To-morrow will show."

In a few minutes he sank into a heavy slumber. A wind had arisen outside, and wisps of dark clouds were gathering athwart the face of the crescent moon now sinking towards the horizon. Shadows passed across the window opening into the sleeping man's room, making fantastic shapes as they came and went. Presently a gray mist started creeping up the hill, like a slow tide rising from the sea. Fantastic arms reached

out from it as it rose upwards, like tentacles of some monstrous octopus. Now one, then another stretched up curling and licking the sides of the house, until the entire building was engulfed and it stood a blurred mass wrapped in a gray pall.

CHAPTER THREE

I

CATHERINE PEYTON, stenographer at Hawkins and Hawkins, Realtors, was off on a two weeks' vacation, a vacation which she felt she badly needed, for she was not a strong young woman. She found that she had nerves after eleven months pounding a typewriter and taking dictation day in and day out in a busy office, that kept going at top speed throughout the year. Nerves under a constant strain gradually begin to fray a bit. It was wearing on a young woman who devoted herself to her work with scrupulous care. She just could not do anything unless it was done well, and to do well at full speed, she had come to learn, was calling on one's nervous energy faster than nature could supply. When her vacation came she was more than ready and eager. The Saturday which was to release her from her grind was a blessed day.

"You look a bit pale, Miss Peyton," remarked Mr. Hawkins that morning. "A little rest will do you good. But I hate to let you go," and Mr. Hawkins

took his eternal cigar casually out of his mouth as he spoke. "You have got so used to my ways and do everything so thoroughly and quickly, that I don't know how I will be able to get along with anybody else for the next two weeks."

It was a compliment, and Hawkins was not wont to deal in compliments. To him life was a machine that ground along in an unswerving routine, where everybody was a cog that fitted. Out of the machine, money kept clicking ever faster and faster into his coffers, and money alone counted in Hawkins' estimate of life.

Miss Peyton smiled her appreciation, but did not feel the least sympathetic with Mr. Hawkins' anticipated discomfiture for the next two weeks. She was tired and knew it. Hawkins didn't know it. He was thinking only of his own inconvenience. Nevertheless she wanted to appear gracious, and expressed her thanks to Hawkins for his consideration, and declared her belief that he would find some one of the stenographers in the office who would be able to fill her place quite well, during the short two weeks she would be away. There was Mary Ryan, for instance, a bright girl and a first-class stenographer, who could soon adapt herself to Mr. Hawkins' ways. Hawkins grunted dubiously at the notion that Miss Ryan could fill Miss Peyton's place, but perforce resigned himself to the situation.

So Miss Peyton departed for her vacation and Miss

Mary Ryan, the following Monday, in fear and trembling, for Mr. Hawkins was a great personage in the eyes of the employees of Hawkins and Hawkins, Realtors, undertook to fill Miss Peyton's place.

II

Monday morning found Miss Peyton in Claxville, the guest of Mrs. James Pettigrew, the wife of James Pettigrew, Realtor, of that quiet little burg some three hours by rail from the great metropolis where Hawkins and Hawkins served their numerous clients.

Claxville was one of the oldest towns in the Empire State. Its beginnings were prerevolutionary, and it had a history, of which its inhabitants were justly proud. In fact it had given a Revolutionary general to the cause of freedom, as a bronze statue of the hero, in the middle of the square in front of the ancient Court House, bore ample testimony. It was in this square in front of this statue that Fourth of July meetings were held, and patriotic harangues were delivered by distinguished orators invited for the occasion. Otherwise, Claxville was the usual American small town, living its life in the usual small-town way, without undue excitement, and contentedly.

Mrs. Pettigrew, née Melinda Brant, had been a

schoolmate of Kitty Peyton at Miss Rutger's boarding school some years back, where the two girls had been chums. During the intervening years they had kept up a fairly regular correspondence, and had seen each other at intervals, the net result of which was Kitty's promise to visit Melinda (Melly for short) at some time, and this happened to be the time.

Kitty was luxuriating in a complete rest. Her nerves were relaxing. It was good to be out of the noise and strain of the big City and away from the racking tension of the strenuous office of Hawkins and Hawkins. Claxville was quiet and sleepy. Life there seemed one long repose and nobody ever hurried. The very air seemed slumberous. Kitty found herself sleeping like a top and even dozing off in the daytime. A siesta in the daytime was beyond the modest dreams of any cog in Hawkins' great machine, whose perpetual motion never ceased during the day's eternal grind. A vacation in Claxville was like being in Lotos Land and Melly coddled Kitty immensely.

"Poor tired dear," she would say, "you're just going to sleep and sleep, and eat and eat, until you get roly-poly and the roses fairly bloom in your cheeks;" for Melinda was of the motherly kind, with a heart as big as her own ample body, turning the scales at twice the figure which indicated Kitty's slender person. And forthwith Kitty began to thrive at an astonishing pace.

It seemed as miraculous as the blooming of a flower in a motion picture under one's very eyes. At the end of a week, a glow of color had begun to show in her face, and her slenderness was growing rounder and rounder, whereat Melly took much pride over her maternal success in the rejuvenation of "the city-driven-slave," as she called Kitty.

"That Moloch of a city," she would declare to Kitty, "just eats up girls like you. It's a shame that girls have to go out to earn their own living these days when they ought to be married, with a home of their own and with children of their own." Melly could exhibit two rosy and thriving youngsters as vindication of her jeremiad against the City and modern industrial conditions that were destroying young womanhood in this age of machinery. Progress without babies was barren profit, and the human race was doomed to extinction under the merciless grind of its horrid wheels. Melly announced her gospel emphatically and indignantly. She was an unsparing reactionary in a callous world that gave scant heed to her prolific creed.

"Kitty, you ought to be married. It's high time, my dear. Remember you're not as young as you once were."

"See here, Melly, dear," laughed Kitty, "I didn't come up here to be reminded of time in its flight, and

I have to make my living, and besides, 'nobody's asked me, sir, she said.'"

"Nonsense," asserted Melly. "Any girl who's anything can always find a man. Besides, Kitty, you are a very pretty girl, even if you don't seem to know it. You needn't blush like that. Just a week here has simply transformed you. I'd fall in love with you myself if I were a man," and Melly proceeded to hug Kitty, as if she were a man.

"Well, Melly, if they are as rough as all that, I beg to be excused. Besides, I don't want *any* man, if you please, but *the* man, and I haven't come across him yet."

"Tush, Kitty, you are getting too particular. That's the way with girls who wait for *the* man. The man goes by, and you are left high and dry all forlorn. When my Jimmy came along I just took him without more ado, and soon found that he was *the* man."

"Lucky girl," answered Kitty. "But it isn't everybody who draws a winning number so easily out of the lottery of life."

Just then *the* man put in his appearance with a cheery "Hello, girls," as he swung into the room and proceeded to salute Melly with a resounding kiss, for James Pettigrew, Realtor, was all business at the office, while at home he was just Jimmy, a hearty, adoring slave of Melly who knew it and just loved it, and ac-

cepted it as her proper due. Woman on the pedestal, man at the plow, babies in the cradle, was the well-established slogan of the Pettigrew tribe. It was nature's way and normal people never argued against nature's way.

"I was just telling Kitty that she ought to be getting married," declared Melly to the man who had just come from the plow. "Look at her, Jimmy. A little rest and air has made her blossom like a rose. It's a shame that she has to go back to the City and slave away in that inferno of work and wear herself out over a typewriter."

"By George, you're right, Melly. Kitty is looking a hundred per cent," and Jimmy scanned Kitty with admiring eyes. "If I weren't chained to Melly's chariot wheels, I'd proclaim myself your devoted slave," and Jimmy gallantly kissed Kitty's hand.

"He's a great goose, isn't he, Kitty? But really, now, Jimmy, don't you think I'm right?"

"Of course you are, dear. Were you ever wrong? You can depend upon it, Kitty, that when Melly says it, it's so. My only regret is that I am precluded by previous engagement from entering the lists myself. That's how much I agree with Melly. She's always right."

"See here, Mr. James Pettigrew, be serious. I really mean what I'm saying, at least I mean this much. I

don't think that Kitty should go back to the City for another month at least. She has picked up so wonderfully in one short week, that if she leaves at the end of another week, all the good she has gained will be lost in short order if she returns at the end of her vacation."

"Look here, you two," interrupted Kitty, "please let me put in a word, seeing that I am the much-discussed subject of your conversation. I haven't the faintest notion of getting married, and secondly, if I overstay my time, what about my job? And I assure you 'no job, no eats,' as they say in the City."

"We'll arrange that," blithely answered Melly. "Jimmy will write your Mr. Hawkins—he must be a brute, anyhow, to work a girl to death—and tell him that you are not well enough to return."

"And I suppose Hawkins," put in Jimmy, "will wire immediately that Miss Peyton may stay another month with full pay. Melly, you don't know the Hawkinses of this world."

"I am afraid Jimmy is right," said Kitty. "It's very good of you, Melly, but Hawkins is Hawkins, and I know him. It's out of the question. Meantime I'm enjoying myself thoroughly, and I won't spoil my good time by thinking of going back until the time comes."

"That's good philosophy, Kitty. Sufficient for the time is the joy thereof," said Jimmy with an air of finality.

"Very good," said Melly with a pout, "I'll write myself."

"All right, Madame Pull-the-Chestnuts-out-of-the-Fire. See how you'll get your fingers burnt."

So Melly wrote, expatiating on Kitty's rundown condition into almost pernicious anæmia, and how seriously she needed a prolonged vacation. In fact, if Kitty didn't get at least a full month, she might develop tuberculosis. Melly even parenthetically suggested that Kitty should get *full pay* for the whole month, and fully fortified this request with the insinuation that Hawkins and Hawkins had made many times that much out of Kitty's services, and the firm ought to be generous. All this Melly backed up with her own peculiar views of the iniquity of modern industrialism. She didn't show her letter either to Jimmy or to Kitty, for she intended to expound her mind to Hawkins himself, and she knew that Jimmy and Kitty would object to her militant methods. Hawkins read the epistle, bit off the end of his cigar, grunted once or twice, and dictated in answer a polite snub to Mrs. Pettigrew, to the effect that Mr. Hawkins was very sorry not to be able to comply with her request, but that the office was short-handed, and that Miss Peyton's services were really indispensable. She would have to return promptly at the end of the stipulated time which terminated her vacation.

"The horrid brute," was Melly's comment, coupled with an indignant tirade against the business world in general, for enslaving her sex. Kitty put her arms around Melly's neck and tried to mollify her storming friend. But Melly wasn't to be placated. And when Jimmy remarked something about the emancipation of woman and the new freedom she enjoyed in the modern world, Melly stormed anew.

"The little fools," she cried, "the new freedom indeed! Nothing of the sort. It's the most degrading slavery in the world, and the idiots don't see it. Women chained to typewriters and ledgers and machines, surrendering their womanhood and all that's best in them to the greed of the world."

"Phew!" ejaculated Jimmy, "but that's putting it a bit strong, Melly dear. Yes, I admit," as Melly faced him stormily, "there's a good deal in what you say. But how are we going to help it? Woman is in the toils. How are we going to get her out of them? You can't turn the world topsy-turvy in a night, and that's what would happen—"

"I don't care what would happen, James Pettigrew. I'd smash all the machinery in the world to save its womanhood. After a while you'll have nothing but machines left, and machines don't have babies."

"I fully agree, Melly dear. I'd hate a machine-made baby. It would be awful," acquiesced James Pet-

tigrew, the first article of whose domestic creed was never to argue with Melly on the subject of women, babies, or anything domestic.

"You're not a bit funny, Jimmy. But we won't talk any more about it. I'm mad as a hatter at that brute, Hawkins. I just hope something will happen to him for his meanness. Of course, I don't mean anything really serious, but I'd like to pay him back in his own coin." Melly wasn't vindictive, but merely indignant. She would have given even Hawkins a glass of cold water if he really needed it.

Jimmy kept discreetly silent and winked at Kitty. Kitty laughed at Melly's flare-up.

"It's sweet of you, Melly, to champion me. But heigh-ho! what must be, must be, and back I go, when my time is up. A job's a job for a' that." So Kitty flourished and bloomed more and more for the next week, to Melly's growing delight.

When her time was up, Kitty went back to the City amid Melly's lamentations at the monstrous iniquity of it all. "Come back whenever you can, and tell that brute, Hawkins, that he's nothing but a grad-grind."

"How long do you suppose I'd last if I did," laughingly answered Kitty as she took her departure, and she pictured to herself Hawkins' expression if she were to tell him Melly's compliment and his grunt of disdain and the short shrift she would get. Anyhow,

Hawkins wasn't nearly as bad a tyrant as Melly's indignation had painted him. Besides, Kitty enjoyed her independence and she refused to entertain the idea of being a clinging vine.

CHAPTER FOUR

KITTY reached the City that same evening. She felt like a different woman than when she left two weeks before. She was no longer fagged and ragged, but refreshed and buoyant. A little rest, fresh air, and quiet, and what a change! Work, why she could work ten hours a day now and never feel it! She smiled to herself as she thought of Melly's railing. Great-hearted Melly with her happy family. How fortunate to have such a dear friend! Work was good, and why shouldn't women work as well as men? They were as good as men and were entitled to as good a chance. She had made good in her job and given satisfaction to her employer. She was independent, her own master. Yes, master, that was the right word, not mistress, which was after all a feminine word. The world was no longer a mere masculine world; women had come into their own. Of course, Melly's was a happy lot, a good husband, two cherubic children, comfortable and provided for. But not every married woman was as happy as Melly; her's was a very exceptional case, and Melly deserved it all.

As the picture of Melly's household rose before her—

she was seated before her glass diligently polishing her nails—she glanced at herself in the mirror. She *was* pretty, as Melly had said, and good to look at, and then she blushed at her vanity, which she had rarely indulged. Light chestnut hair with a natural wave, hazel eyes that were almost dark beneath well-arched brows, perhaps a trifle heavy, but not too heavy, a fair skin with a tinge of rose in her cheeks, thanks to her two weeks in the fresh air of Claxville; a good mouth, a kissable mouth, neither small nor large, just the right sort of mouth above a somewhat decided chin that curved into a creamy throat below.

This was the inventory, as she gazed at herself for a brief few moments, with a little compunction for the indulgence. Indeed she had not so critically surveyed her possible charms since—well, since she had left school. She didn't even carry a vanity case and paint her lips and powder her nose on the streets! In the work-a-day world into which she had been thrown for several years past she had given herself entirely to work. She had not thought of marriage—it was only Melly's suggestion that had stirred the long-dormant notion in her mind for a moment. "It's silly," she muttered to herself. "Melly always was sentimental, and a working woman hasn't time for sentiment."

With a little laugh she rose, then glanced again in the mirror just for a moment, and proceeded to prepare for bed.

"Of all the foolishness I've heard in a long time, that remark of Melly's about falling in love with me if she were a man, was the foolishest I've ever heard. Not since—now what was his name?—that gawky boy with fiery red hair, who lived next door and used to write ardent love notes to me—what was his name? Let's see—it was over seven years ago— Stop it, Kitty Peyton, you're a business woman now, making an independent living and free, thank the Lord! Woman's whole existence is not love. That's an out-of-date and silly sentiment in these modern days," and Kitty laughed to herself at the thought.

There was Nettie Burns, who had married Tommy Culkins, Collector for Hawkins and Hawkins, a little over a year ago, and who came back to the office on a visit a short while since, radiantly happy with the sweetest baby in her arms. And how the girls did gather around that mite of humanity and each one hug it and coo over it as if it might have been her own! And how proud Nettie was! But Nettie was of the clinging sort, not in the least of the independent and self-reliant kind.

So Kitty ruminated as she drowsed and dozed, Melly's "you ought to be getting married," popping up obtrusively every now and then in her half-awake maunderings, until she finally floated away into a dreamless sleep. Only the shadows glimpsed her slumbering beauty, as she lay with half-parted lips that

seemed to be smiling. The night noises of the City droned in the distance, for she lived in a quiet and remote street. She slept heavily and healthily, scarcely stirring. With the morning she awoke. For a little time she lay passive and as consciousness came to her she aroused herself and gazed a little bewildered around her. Then she realized that she was back in the City again and business awaited her. As Melly would say, "she was in the toils again."

CHAPTER FIVE

I

KITTY put in her appearance at Hawkins and Hawkins, Realtors, ahead of time. She was the first on the scene with the exception of Tommy, the office boy. As she entered the outer office, Tommy, who was ostensibly tidying up, stared at her in evident surprise. Tommy greeted her with a grin.

"Hello, Miss Peyton, but you sure surprised me. Gee, but you're looking fine." And Tommy surveyed her with open admiration. "I didn't know you at first. Fact, Miss Peyton, but you sure are changed. Your vacation done you good, I'll say. You're sure good to look at now."

Kitty was taken aback. Tommy was getting familiar and even impudent, and Kitty bristled. "What do you mean, Tommy?" she said with something of asperity in her tone. Tommy reacted sheepishly. Miss Peyton had never bulked in Tommy's masculine estimation as pretty, and here she suddenly appears on the scene a vision of beauty in Tommy's east-side eye.

"I didn't mean nothin', Miss Peyton, 'deed I didn't; 'cept you're looking fine. Vacations are great things

for young ladies," Tommy blurted out in awkward apology.

"All right, Tommy," she smiled forgivingly, and started toward the inner office.

"Say, Miss Peyton!" Tommy called after her as she opened the door. "Haven't you heard?"

"Heard what, Tommy?"

"'Bout the Ole Man." Something in Tommy's voice caught her attention apprehensively.

"What do you mean, Tommy—what about the Old Man?"

"Had a stroke yesterday," Tommy announced sententiously. "Gee, but there was some time around here when the Ole Man was took. Miss Ryan, she just went into hysterics, and all the girls was dead skeert, and the ambulance came hustlin' up the street, and they carried him out on a stretcher, and his face was red wid his eyes turned up. My, but it was excitin', almost as excitin' as a fire!"

Kitty, wide-eyed, gazed at the boy who was proud to be the purveyor of such startling news. Her knees trembled under her and her face went colorless. She had returned fresh and buoyant, even keen for her work, and now her world went crashing about her. If an earthquake had rocked the building and split it asunder, she could not have been more startled. She gasped and felt as if she would faint.

She had been Mr. Hawkins' private secretary for

four years. He was a not unkindly man; brusque in his manner, not perhaps as thoughtful as he might be; worked her, it is true, with little consideration, but on the whole it was a good position with fair pay.

She sat down abruptly in the nearest chair, staring at Tommy, who was standing exasperatingly by in unperturbed stoicism like the "tough guy" who was his heroic idea.

Kitty recalled how Melly had wished that something might happen to Hawkins, and it had happened with a vengeance. But that was absurd, and Melly had taken it back in the next breath. Kitty felt herself on the verge of the hysterical, but managed to hold herself in hand. She felt that Tommy would gloat over that peculiarly feminine weakness.

The rising noise of the City came to her from the streets below. The big machine of business was growing to full blast. The machine must keep going no matter what happened. This sort of thing was happening every day. Hawkins and others like him were passing out constantly into the beyond and things went on as usual without a ripple in the great sea of life. But she, a human waif in that great maelstrom, was being whirled around adrift for the moment and gasping. She gazed down vacantly at her shoe tips.

Tommy had resumed his tidying up. He had announced his great piece of news and enjoyed the effect, and then calmly ignored it, for Tommy's sensibilities

were not delicate and his psychological perceptions were untrained. He couldn't realize that his recital had been a thunderbolt on the nerves of the feminine complex. What had happened was all a part of the day's doing in his young and metropolitan life. He had seen much for his years, and become blunted under the machine's ceaseless hammering. He read the yellowest of newspapers, and fed himself upon daily tabloid pabulum with an ever-growing appetite, and the constant panorama of death, murder, robbery and human misfortunes and infelicities in general, left him case hardened. The hideous mien of vice had become familiar to his still young eyes, and the monster was waiting to embrace him in no distant future.

Kitty sat weak and miserable and stunned.

Finally she managed to ask, "Was he dead, Tommy?"

"Yep," answered Tommy, "dead as a door-nail, the doctor said. Just flopped over at his desk, and Miss Ryan, she let out a turrible yell, and everybody rushed in, and there was the Ole Man, lyin' over the arm of his chair, and Miss Ryan havin' cunniption fits. She took on awful."

Kitty shuddered, and put her hands to her eyes.

She was thankful that it had happened when she was not there. After a few moments she felt steadier, and rising, went into the inner office. There was Hawkins' desk with his swivel chair, papers in proper

order on the top, just as if nothing unusual had occurred. Kitty took only a glance and went back to the outer office, and sat down again. How strange it seemed, the sudden tragedy of death, and everything going on as usual. Kitty shivered and wondered.

Death had never come so close to her before, save when her mother died. But that memory was hazy; she had been too young to understand. Except for a sense of loneliness and emptiness, which had soon faded away, she could recall little. Of her father she had no recollection at all. She had been taken by Aunt Louise, who died while she was away at school, and Aunt Louise, an austere spinster, was not a lady to awaken very deep or tender affections. Aunt Louise believed in duty spelled in cold capital letters and thought that young people should walk the strict and narrow path in puritanical rigidity.

So death had been a remote and unthinkable something, whose chill she had never felt before, and now death was sitting down beside her. Hawkins was in no sense a lovable man, but he did have her respect and had always treated her fairly, even if he were at times harshly exacting. He believed business was business, and business absorbed him. Women were in business and a part of business, and simply entitled to a business deal. Sex in business didn't enter into his consideration, and for that matter, as far as she knew, sex played little part in his life, although she

knew there was a Mrs. Hawkins. But Mrs. Hawkins stayed at home. No doubt Mrs. Hawkins preferred to stay at home, for she had never been seen in the offices of Hawkins and Hawkins. Kitty found herself wondering what Mrs. Hawkins was like. She could not picture Hawkins in a domestic, much less a tender rôle. Love was apparently a thing entirely apart from his mammonized life, and it struck Kitty in all of a heap what a curious place the world was anyhow. Death crowding life, and life all askew and she herself a tossed straw in the maelstrom.

II

In due course, Mr. Van Kester, second member of Hawkins and Hawkins, Realtors, put in his appearance, very grave, very formal, and scrupulously neat in his apparel, with a constant carnation in his button-hole. Mr. Van Kester was of an ancient Manhattan family, of unimpeachable social position. Indeed, his unimpeachable social relations was his trump card in the firm. He had the entrée into select circles, where Hawkins—the name was a sufficient bar sinister in the Van Kester exclusive circles—could never hope to break in. So Hawkins had taken Van Kester into the firm with an eye to building up a rich landed clientele. For this exclusive and aristocratic service Van Kester received a moderate salary and an interest chiefly based

on commissions. Hawkins alone determined the policy of the firm, and Van Kester hewed close to the line.

Of all this Kitty was aware. Now that Hawkins, the real pillar of the firm, was gone, she wondered what would eventuate. Van Kester was not business; he was social. The main prop was gone, and Kitty had been the private secretary of the main prop. Indeed, the position was practically personal, and Van Kester had his own private secretary, a Miss Van Puter, a maiden lady of the same social strata as Van Kester, but in reduced circumstances, who had to vulgarly earn her living.

So Kitty began to speculate where she would come in under the new conditions. It became alarming the more she thought of it. With Hawkins gone, wasn't her position lost? A new position, at least as good a one, would not be easily forthcoming. Stenographers and private secretaries were a drug in the business world. The want columns in the newspapers were plethorically crowded with the ads of jobless stenographers, who seemed to be legion. The prospect was not reassuring, and the clouds piled thick upon Kitty's horizon.

It was in the midst of these somber reflections that Mr. Van Kester came in. He barely glanced at Kitty, and nodding in a distrait manner, passed on into the inner office. Her impulse was to follow him. On second thought she refrained. This was scarcely the

time, and she knew Mr. Van Kester to be a very punctilious gentleman. He always observed the forms of etiquette with scrupulous care, and besides was concerned no doubt with his own future and the firm's. Kitty surmised that Van Kester was rather in the same boat as herself, for, after all, he really had only a job dependent entirely upon Hawkins. She might have felt sorry for him, if she wasn't feeling so sorry for herself, but her own trouble loomed so loweringly and heavily that it crowded out everything else.

By this time the office began to fill up with the incoming employees. The female contingent were all aflutter; the male, grave and silent. They greeted Kitty according to their respective moods, the girls feverishly telling her all about it, especially Mary Ryan's exhibition of nerves. The men had little to say. In fact they had little chance, even if they wanted to, amid the subdued volubility of the opposite sex. It was a big event in their lives, though the world outside of the Hawkins circle wasn't concerned in the least over it, in fact hadn't heard of it. The earthquake, which had rocked Hawkins and Hawkins from center to circumference, hadn't caused a tremor even in the offices of the same building. The metropolis was a huge city, with estranged millions living alongside of each other, grouped in miniature worlds of their own, as alien to each other as if they were separated by oceans. It came as an appalling thought to Kitty on

that eventful morning, as her fellow employees hastened to tell her all about the tragedy to Hawkins and Hawkins. Kitty listened as each added to the oft reiterated tale of how it happened, though none knew exactly, as Mary Ryan was the only one there when it happened, and Mary had been taken home in a state of collapse, and was still at home trying under the doctor's care to get back to something like normal. Indeed Mary was just prostrated and couldn't be expected back for several days to come. And so the chatter ran on until Kitty's overwrought nerves could stand no more. She got up abruptly and left.

III

When Kitty reached the street she stood hesitating, undecided what she would do. Not back to her room at any rate; that were to court her own perplexed and perturbed thoughts. She didn't want to think about it. She was still dazed. It was a revolution in her life, a big and perhaps a disastrous revolution in her small world. She thought of a tempest in a teapot, but it was her teapot, and it made a tremendous rumpus within that narrow periphery.

By habit she made for the subway. It rather surprised her when she got to the station platform not to see it jammed with jostling passengers. Then she remembered it was not a rush hour, and that she

wouldn't have to be squeezed breathless through a door, and wouldn't have to hang on a strap sandwiched in a swaying crowd. Before she knew it, she was at the Grand Central Station. She got out, just to go somewhere, and ascended to Forty-second Street. People by instinct go where crowds gather, and Kitty was simply following the instinct of gregariousness without any set purpose.

Without reflecting she walked westward as far as Fifth Avenue, and stood on the corner irresolute. A continuous stream of buses kept going by like a parade of huge green beetles. A happy idea came to her. Why not take a ride on top of a bus? It was an easy way of going somewhere without consciously going anywhere, and relieved one of the burden of solution.

The day was fairly cool and the sun came down through a faint haze, tempering its heat. She hailed the first that passed and climbed atop.

She rode all the way to its terminus, little heeding where she was going, or seeing, for her thoughts pursued her. A free and independent woman she had said to herself the night before, a business woman, just as good as a man in the business world, and now—it came bitterly to her—cast adrift on this great sea of humanity surging and battling around her. Somehow she felt very small and lonely after all, a bit of flotsam tossed up by rough waters. With life striving agitatedly all around one, yet how very lonely one could

be, "never more alone than when in a crowd," she had read somewhere, and now how poignantly she was realizing it! And then she thought of Melly, sheltered and guarded; no worry, no striving and battling with the machine. What a contrast to her own forlorn situation. How life coddled one person and scourged another. Kitty sighed to herself and felt mightily like crying, a very feminine proclivity but not at all becoming in a business woman. After all, there were other jobs and she knew herself to be thoroughly competent. If she could only get another good job, she would cling to it like a leech. Security was the best kind of happiness after all. So her thoughts came trooping through her mind, now despondently and now resolutely as they marched athwart her varying mood.

IV

Destiny or chance, as you may vary the term according to your special philosophy, has much to do with our lives, a remark that anybody might make, except the young, who are ignorant enough of life to believe that they are captains of their souls. Had Hawkins been a prudent man, and not indulged an unruly appetite, he might have still been in ardent pursuit of the Mammon of iniquity, but he now possessed just a metallic casket in a shallow trench of earth with a company of sundry worms. Hawkins had indulged

in too much lobster at lunch the day he was stricken and presto! a paltry attack of acute indigestion sent the blood surging to his brain and death claimed him on the instant. If he had not over-eaten lobster, Kitty might have been taking dictation from him at that very moment instead of riding atop of a Fifth Avenue bus, plunged in her gloomy thoughts and worrying over the shift of fortune that had darkened her skies from sunshine to lowering clouds. Captain of our souls indeed! What hollow irony in the phrase at such a time.

We do not mean that Kitty was speculating in this wise about destiny, but that destiny had her in hand and had placed her on top of a Fifth Avenue bus for purposes of its own. Destiny might even seem capricious, but destiny really takes a long view of things mundane.

Just as a lobster had made havoc with her scheme of life by removing Hawkins from the scene, so a newspaper left by chance on the seat next to her turned the current of her existence into a new and unknown channel. The wind caught the abandoned sheet and flapped it annoyingly against her. She picked it up with the intention of brushing it to the floor, when her eye chanced upon the advertising column under the caption, "Positions Wanted." Half way down the column one ad stood out in bolder type than the rest. The

advertiser evidently intended it should be seen. It took Kitty's eye immediately, and she read:

Expert stenographer wanted. Must be thoroughly competent and experienced in secretarial work. Position strictly confidential. References required. Don't apply unless conditions can be filled. Address General Post Office G 107, Claxville, N. Y.

Kitty read a second time. Claxville! Who in sleepy Claxville could want an experienced stenographer and secretary! Confidential, too. Kitty was puzzled and interested. As Hawkins and Hawkins, Realtors, had no further use for her services—of this she felt certain—this might be worth inquiring into. Claxville! How funny! It was the last place in the world, where one would think anybody would want a private secretary and a stenographer in combination. She tore the ad out and tucked it away in her hand bag.

That night she wrote a long letter to Melly, telling her of the tragedy that had disrupted Hawkins and Hawkins, Realtors, for she felt in her heart that Hawkins and Hawkins was done for, and the impending result in her own fortunes loomed black, for she could not see that Mr. Van Kester could or would retain her, or even that Van Kester could possibly carry on the business. Van Kester was a very light weight and

Hawkins and Hawkins needed a heavy weight like the lamented departed. It was in this vein that she confided to Melly. It was a pessimistic and lachrymose epistle.

She enclosed a copy of the Claxville ad, and asked Melly if she could possibly imagine who could want an expert stenographer in all of Claxville. It was such a sleepy little town—Melly knew it—that an expert stenographer and secretary seemed a laughable superfluity within its slow precincts. "Don't get offended, Melly dear," she wrote. "You know what I mean, and it does seem funny, and don't show this to *the* man. It might hurt his rustic pride. He's such a boomer for Claxville."

v

The second day after—the funeral took up the next day and the office was duly closed with crêpe on the door—Kitty entered the widowed precincts of Hawkins and Hawkins, Realtors, in some trepidation. She asked to see Mr. Van Kester, and was ushered in by Tommy, who grinned when he saw her, for Tommy had never subdued his mouth to a smile. The lugubrious shadow of death which had hung over the precincts during the interim of the obsequies, had passed, and the offices clattered and bustled with busi-

ness as usual. Everybody seemed just the same. Life forgets very swiftly.

Mr. Van Kester occupied the late lamented Hawkins' swivel chair. Mr. Van Kester was evidently going to carry on in Mr. Hawkins' place. How far, only the gods knew, and they must have been grieving at the picture of Van Kester in Hawkins' swivel chair.

As Kitty came in, Mr. Van Kester rose punctiliously and greeted her in his best formal manner, which conveyed no assurance to Kitty. Indeed she felt a decided lowering of hope in her heart.

"Pray be seated, Miss Peyton," he said, looking at her blandly through owlishly rimmed glasses, which he only wore in the office, pince-nez being his habit outside and in society circles. He seated himself only after Kitty had taken the chair beside the desk.

"Well, Miss Peyton?" interrogated Van Kester in a neutral, non-committal voice. Hope dropped all the way down to zero in Kitty's soul.

"I would like to know," Kitty began nervously, "what my status in the office is at present? I understand, of course, that my position as Mr. Hawkins' secretary has come to an end and that you have your own secretary, but I thought I might fit in somewhere. Is there any other position that I might fill?"

"Yes, yes, I see. It is a bit embarrassing, I assure you, Miss Peyton, but I'm afraid that I cannot see my way clear to retaining you. Yours was a purely per-

sonal position and with Mr. Hawkins' decease, why, naturally, your functions here will no longer be—eh—required. Pardon me, Miss Peyton, I trust I do not give you pain in making this announcement. I would gladly take you on as my secretary, but, as you know, I have a very competent person,” and Mr. Van Kester smiled rapidly in his effort to soften the blow. “Nor do I see how I can fit you in anywhere. In fact, I am cutting down the force. I have always thought we were overmanned, and I shall hereafter run the business much more economically.”

“Oh, I never for a moment thought of taking Miss Van Puter's place, Mr. Van Kester. I'm sorry that there is nothing I could do in the office. I was in hopes I might be of service. I understand, of course, the situation. But would you kindly give me a reference? I must seek a new position, and a reference would help me to secure it.”

“To be sure, to be sure. With pleasure. I know how much Mr. Hawkins appreciated you, and I will make it just as strong as Mr. Hawkins would if he were writing it himself. I will write it this afternoon and mail it to you. I promise you shall have it by to-morrow morning.”

“Thank you, Mr. Van Kester,” answered Kitty as she rose.

Mr. Van Kester accompanied her to the door, which he gallantly opened as she passed out. Kitty did not

stop to say good-by to any one, and nobody paid the slightest attention to her exit.

Well, the worst had come. She had really expected it, but it plunged her into the deepest depths. She would go home and indulge in a good cry; she was a woman after all and tears were her privilege. So Kitty made straight for her room, threw herself on the bed as soon as she got there and indulged copiously in the bitter pleasure of a good cry. It did take the edge off her disappointment. She felt better afterwards, although it was not exactly business.

CHAPTER SIX

I

IT had happened! Kitty had a new job, the job in Claxville.

When Mrs. James Pettigrew heard of the demise of Hawkins, she was conscience stricken. She had wished that something might happen to the "brute," and it had happened with a vengeance. Of course her wishing it hadn't brought it about, but it made her feel a bit queasy at first. She didn't know that too much lobster had precipitated the catastrophe. Only we, dear reader, you and I, know that secret locked in the capacious bosom of Destiny.

Melly was too healthy a woman to indulge in morbid speculations, and Jimmy and the babies and her household kept her busy. She was sorry for Hawkins, especially after Kitty had told her that he wasn't such a terrible "brute" after all, and then here was Kitty back in Claxville with a good job at a good salary, better than she had ever received before, and happy. So Melly just put the Hawkins matter in the lap of Destiny and left it there with a placated conscience. Moreover, the shade of Hawkins did not come back to

haunt her. It would have been preposterous for the shade of a person like Hawkins to revisit the glimpses of the moon, whose taking off had been achieved by an overdose of so unromantic a thing as lobster. Death had simply caught him unawares and there would have been no poetic justice in his return. Indigestion resulting from an indiscreet appetite had unwound his mortal coil and sent his ghostly part surprised and likely enough unprepared into the unknown region we call eternity. Besides Hawkins had no psychic complex, and why should a person lacking in psychic energy try to come back or want to come back? It was simply unthinkable.

II

Kitty would never forget that first interview with Mr. George Temple Graves. Melly accompanied her. Aunt Beulah opened the door and surveyed the two women critically when they asked to see Mr. Graves. She couldn't quite comprehend what two ladies, and pretty women at that, wanted with Mistah Geowrge. Women she knew had always been a remote factor in her master's life and she assumed a maternal care over Mistah Geowrge, whom she had dandled on her knee.

"Yes'm," she answered almost hostilely to their query if Mr. Graves were in, and to their explanation that they had come in answer to Mr. Graves' advertisement.

"Two persons—" Aunt Beulah didn't deign to speak of them as of her own sex—she announced had come to see Mistah Geowrge about some sort of advertisement and were downstairs now in the dining room. And Aunt Beulah betook herself to the kitchen without more ado. She didn't like the affair at all, though she had no conception what it all meant.

Kitty had written a typed letter applying for the secretarial position, signed C. M. Peyton. The reference enclosed, gave no clew to her sex. It wasn't business to reveal sex in such matters, for in spite of the "new freedom," the male mind still harbored subconscious prejudices, especially when the application came in the shape of correspondence. She had received a reply to the effect that a personal interview would be necessary, the hour and day set.

Aunt Beulah showed them into the dining room, for the fact was the room, that had served as a parlor in bygone days, was empty of furnishings. Melly and Kitty looked askance at each other after Aunt Beulah, with suspicion in her heart, had departed to announce the visitors. The dining room was scantily furnished indeed, just a table, several chairs, and a side table with a modicum of glassware and china. The house was dilapidated and old. The occupant might have been a miser. It was not a propitious outlook. The atmosphere was depressing, and the two women lapsed into silence, wondering what sort of a person it was

who had advertised. Melly, as all Claxville did, knew only that he was a scientist, pursuing some sort of investigation in this remote and forbidding place, but that was all.

In a few moments Mr. Graves put in his appearance. He was in working garb. A drab gray blouse hung loosely from his shoulders. It was stained with chemicals, as were his hands. He bowed and began apologizing for his appearance and expressing his regret that he had no better room in which to receive them. The house was only a workshop, and he had not anticipated the pleasure of receiving ladies. His manner was very formal.

He was rather tall, with a slight stoop, his hair graying a bit at the temples, shaven face, eyes deep set over heavy brows, nose inclined to aquiline, fairly large mouth, chin squarish, forehead broad with a deep wrinkle just between the brows. He seemed about forty years of age, a bit formidable and severe person, Kitty thought. But she liked the face at once. It was open and frank and kindly and his voice was vibrant and modulated.

Kitty smiled to herself as she recalled his embarrassment, almost consternation, when he found that C. M. Peyton was a woman. It was out of the question, he averred; he expected a man who would take up his residence in the Peyton House, et cetera. A woman was impossible. Mr. Graves said it very decidedly, and

sincerely deprecated the misunderstanding, and indeed one could see he really hated to refuse Miss Peyton's application for the position.

To Kitty's amused surprise it was Melly who rose to the emergency. Melly expatiated with a good deal of heat on the superiority of women as secretaries and stenographers; they were so much more faithful and loyal and diligent than men, and as for her friend and old schoolmate, Miss Peyton, she was an expert par excellence, and as for the problem of residence, that could be easily settled. Miss Peyton could live with her, Mrs. Pettigrew, and come every day early; surely Mr. Graves would not demand Miss Peyton's services at night after hours? "What a hypocrite you are, Melly," Kitty thought as she listened to Melly who railed against women in business, the modern Moloch which was devouring her sex. Here she was espousing the woman's cause with the vehemence of a Feminist. Melly afterwards defended herself by alleging that this wasn't business, but a very decent and respectable occupation for a young woman who had to earn her own living. Besides it was out of the usual, away from the grinding machine of the City. Just the ideal thing for Kitty. No, it was not business, just common sense in the circumstances, and common sense was no respecter of persons, and Kitty had to have a job.

The shadow of a smile crept over Mr. Graves' features as Melly discoursed on woman's superiority in

such matters, and Kitty's particular fitness. He glanced at Kitty several times as Melly held forth. Kitty felt nervously awkward at his brief scrutiny. She was being given "the once over," as Tommy McGuire would have put it.

"Do give Miss Peyton a trial, Mr. Graves," pleaded Melly. "I am so anxious to have her out of the City. She broke down once there, and I know she would break down again."

The upshot was that Graves hesitated, and the man who hesitates is lost. It was an entirely new experience for him, a pretty woman pleading for another pretty woman, and he didn't know how to meet the situation. He was gallant by nature and science hadn't dried him out. He yielded, and Kitty was now his private secretary and stenographer, some three weeks old in her new position.

III

So far she had come along famously, and she was liking Mr. Graves more and more. He was very formal at first, but this was wearing off. If she came into the room—the left-hand front room, which had been fitted up as an office—when he was there, he would immediately rise and remain standing until she was seated, or if he came in when she was there, he would stand at the door as soon as he entered and bow

to her with a gracious courtesy, as if he were saluting some great lady.

It embarrassed her at first, but she was beginning to like it. It made her feel that she was indeed somebody besides a mere stenographer hired at so much per week. That was the old way in the City, where she had been simply a cog in the business machine, and this was such a contrast to the brusque and matter-of-course manner of the business male, to whom she had become perforce accustomed. She had come to recognize in Mr. Graves' manner an homage to her sex, and it was very pleasant. She was on a pedestal, she who had once thought that she had climbed up to the business level of the male species. She was now coming to understand that in the City she had really descended to a lower plane, where the male conducted business after his own fashion and where her sex met a merely tolerant equality. The new attitude flattered and soothed her immensely. Graves revered womanhood; he had got that old-fashioned notion from his mother and had not come enough into contact with modern woman in her emancipation mood to become disillusioned.

In the morning Kitty busied herself over her toilet with fastidious care and arranged her hair and her dress in the most becoming manner. It was a subtle process, of which she was scarcely aware. Male and female made He them, and although the tumble-down

Peyton mansion was not a Garden of Eden, human nature has remained as it was in the beginning, and the way of a man with a maid as a maid with a man, has not changed throughout the ages, and the new woman is after all the old woman in spite of all her pretense at being something else and her ludicrous endeavor to appear at home in trousers. She was growing more and more feminized, coming into her own as a woman, whom nature had made sweet and charming and gracious. And Kitty found herself subconsciously trying to be sweet, charming and gracious.

Melly sensed what was happening, and with true feminine sagacity encouraged the happy transformation in a thousand little hints casually thrown out. It was, "Kitty, how well you look this morning," or, "How becoming that frock is, Kitty," or, "I do like the way you have arranged your hair, dear; where did you learn it?" or, "Kitty, if Jimmy doesn't stop paying you compliments, I'll be getting jealous before long." For Mr. James Pettigrew in his clumsy masculine way had noticed Kitty's growing charm. Claxville also took note, and its swains began to find this City girl something to look at, though she gave them scant encouragement. They were much too young, and science was very absorbing.

This incense of flattery, or admiration rather, for such it really was, was very sweet. She never stopped to analyze it; it came so naturally and genuinely that she

accepted it without question. And she was happy; it was no longer a "job" that held her in its thrall and which she clung to with nervous energy in constant apprehension that she might lose it in the battle of life. Hers was what Melly had termed it on that day of her first interview with Mr. Graves, an occupation befitting a gentlewoman.

IV

Kitty lived at Melly's and insisted upon paying board. Melly insisted she wouldn't take any payment from Kitty. It came near degenerating into an open quarrel at first, but Melly finally acquiesced in the arrangement with the proviso that the money would be deposited to the account of Jimmy, junior, then aged four, in the Claxville Bank. Jimmy, senior, took Kitty's view, but wisely held his peace until he saw the deadlock would remain dead forever unless some masculine common sense came to the solution. It was he who had suggested this arrangement as a compromise when the breach threatened to become irreparable, and as Kitty just adored Jimmy, junior, and Melly had made up her mind that she was not going to let Kitty take her departure to Miss Brown's boarding house, as Kitty was on the eve of carrying out, Melly finally capitulated; not that she was willing, but she found that Kitty had an obstinate way of her own. It wasn't

often that Melly surrendered, as James, senior, could testify.

So destiny wove the threads. Hawkins had eaten too much lobster that lethal day and a disconsolate girl on top of a Fifth Avenue bus picked up a stray newspaper, which an impudent wind fluttered against her. Destiny has a way of its own in disposing the affairs of men. Women are also included, though modern women fancy that they are leading their own lives and making their own careers.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

AUNT BEULAH set down the tray on the little table provided for the purpose, in the recently improvised office in the Peyton mansion. It was Kitty's luncheon, which Mr. Graves insisted she should take in the office instead of tramping all the way back to Melly's, a good mile and more away.

Aunt Beulah, who had rather resented Kitty's intrusion at first, had finally surrendered and taken Kitty under her wing. Aunt Beulah was a motherly person. She looked upon Mistah Geowrge as her own and it was not long before she began to regard Kitty as another object requiring her maternal solicitude. Even Rastus came in the same category. Rastus made a pretense of not wanting to be fussed over, but Aunt Beulah's was a firm hand, and Rastus was, all said, a not unwilling victim. Indeed Rastus had become so used to being fussed over that he would have been a disconsolate darky if Aunt Beulah's pampering care had been withdrawn, which she had often threatened, but never intended to put into effect. It helped, however, to keep Rastus in line.

"Dere, Miss Kitty, dere's your lunch. Ah made it special to-day, 'cause yuh didn't seem t'eat much yister-day," and Aunt Beulah set down an array of succulent edibles sufficient to appease the appetite of a stevedore. Aunt Beulah's gauge of a living ration was Rastus' capacity.

"Goodness gracious, Aunt Beulah," exclaimed Kitty, "how do you suppose I can eat all that."

"Now, Honey, Ah b'lieves in feedin' people. Ef yuh doan eat how's yuh gwyne to libe, and de more yuh eat, de longer yuh goin' to libe. Dat's what Rastus says and he sure am a big eater and a long liber. Dat nigger is neber gwyne to die as far as Ah can see, and Ah's neber goin' to hab de chance of bein' a widder. An' dat am de reason, he says, dat he eats so much."

Kitty laughed at Aunt Beulah's exposition of the Rastian philosophy of longevity.

"Honey, yuh just pitch right in. Ah's gwine to sit right heah and see dat yuh does justice to yuhself and my cookin'," and Aunt Beulah seated her ample form on a chair nearby. Kitty fell to with a relish, for Aunt Beulah's cooking was excellent and Kitty's appetite by no means birdlike, even if she could not come up to Aunt Beulah's expectations.

"Mistah Geowrge doan eat half enuf," commented Aunt Beulah during the course of the repast. "He's down in de cellah now foolin' wif dem fixins ob hisn,

and when Ah knocks at de doah and tells him lunch was ready, he tells me jus' go away for he didn't want no lunch nohow. It ain't right, Miss Kitty, dat boy ob mine," for so Aunt Beulah regarded Mr. George Temple Graves, "is so beswitched wif dese heah scientific contrapshuns dat he clean forgets to eat half de time. It ain't right, Miss Kitty, and Ah's 'fraid he's gwine to die young. Ah argufies wif him but he jus' lafs at me. S'pose you try your hand, Honey, and mebbe he listen to yuh."

"Why, Aunt Beulah, if he won't heed you, why would he listen to me?"

"It's like ole close, dey wears out. Now Ah toddled Mistah Geowrge on mah knee, and he teks me as a mattah-ob-course. But yuh's new, Miss Kitty, and beside, Honey, Ah know he sets a heap ob store by yuh, for I hears him say so, mor'n once."

Kitty stopped eating and raised her eyes with a look of surprise in them. She felt the blood creeping to her cheeks. Aunt Beulah sat nodding her head vigorously to emphasize the point.

"Yes, Honey, dat's de truf. Ah hears him say dat yuh was a cleber girl and a treasure, and dat he was glad you was a woman and not a man, and dat he wouldn't part wif yuh fer nuffin'."

"Why, Aunt Beulah," protested Kitty, who felt herself getting redder and redder as Aunt Beulah went on.

It was dreadfully embarrassing, and what embarrassed her more, it was very pleasant to hear, for the only cloud upon her horizon in her new life was the uncertainty that she was not perhaps making good with Mr. Graves. He had never given sign one way or the other. He was always gracious, but reserved. She was trying with all her might and was very, very interested in her work, and now Aunt Beulah's words stirred a little flutter of apprehension that perhaps her interest took a wider range than gratification in learning that she was scoring a success as a good secretary. Sentiment she had always kept scrupulously out of business and had made it a rigorous rule to ignore the distinction between the sexes in all business relations. If women were ever to succeed in the business world, it was necessary to hold their own on an equal level with men, and sentiment would inevitably destroy the balance, for woman is always the weaker sex, when Cupid comes into the game.

"It's de gospel truf, Ah's tellin' yuh, Miss Kitty," continued Aunt Beulah as she gathered up the dishes on her tray. "Mistah Geowrge sure does think yuh a cleber girl and yuh helps him powful. Ah's sure he'd listen to yuh, ef yuh spek to him about dis eatin' business, Honey. Yuh doan want teh see him die young, does yuh?" and she shuffled out of the room with the tray balanced on one hand.

II

Kitty's feelings were decidedly mixed as Aunt Beulah departed. She was pleased and displeased in the same breath. Of course it was good news to know that she was pleasing Mr. Graves in her new job, or rather, new position; job was a vulgar City term, Mr. Graves would never use it.

On the other hand she felt herself flushing hotly at the bare suggestion that there was anything personal in the relationship between herself and her employer. It was entirely against her business creed and Aunt Beulah's declaration vaguely alarmed her. She was on a purely business basis; she rendered a service and was paid for it. Aunt Beulah presuming on the fact that she was an old servant and in her solicitude for "her boy" had no doubt stretched a point and exaggerated Mr. Graves' appreciation of his new secretary. Still it was flattering to know that she stood so high in his esteem, especially in view of her anxiety to please him. For the work was strange and puzzling at first. It was very technical and quite beyond her comprehension though of late she was beginning to understand better. He dictated at times very fast and she hated to confess that she was almost unequal in her effort to keep up.

In the midst of these conflicting thoughts, Mr. Graves came into the room. He bowed punctiliously to her

as usual. Mr. Graves harbored no such sentiment as Aunt Beulah had ascribed to him. That was simply the old lady's notion.

"Miss Peyton, will you please take some notes for me?" he asked. "I have just hit on what seems to me a valuable formula and would like to get it down while it is fresh in my mind."

Kitty took up her notebook. He dictated, pacing up and down, pausing now and then as he deliberated, carefully selecting his words. He was evidently placing great importance upon what he was saying. The matter was rather involved and abstruse and as far as Kitty's understanding went, almost purely mechanical. When he was finished, he asked her to kindly read her notes to him. Kitty stumbled over two or three words, which he corrected.

"I think that will do," talking more to himself than to her. "I believe I've hit on it at last." He sat down and taking out his pipe mechanically proceeded to fill it; then placed it on the desk without lighting it.

"I came near forgetting, Miss Peyton."

"Forgetting what, Mr. Graves?" asked Kitty, looking up.

"That I mustn't smoke in this room. A pipe, especially a rank old fellow like mine, can be very offensive." Kitty smiled.

"On my account?" she asked.

"Why, yes, of course."

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed. "Please don't stop on my account. Mr. Hawkins used to smoke the blackest kind of cigars all day. I'm used to it, and besides I like the odor of tobacco. You know I sometimes smoke a cigarette myself. Not often, however," she hastened to explain, for she thought she detected a look of disapproving surprise on his face.

He laughed genially.

"I don't disapprove, Miss Peyton. Why shouldn't a woman smoke if she likes it? I don't see what sex has to do with tobacco. If you want to smoke here, pray do so."

"I couldn't think of it," said Kitty emphatically. "I only smoke a cigarette once in a while, and then simply for the fun of it. I really don't believe in smoking women, those that make a habit of it. But you, please smoke. Really, I would like it."

He picked up his pipe and lighted it. She saw that he relished it greatly and that after one or two deep inhalations he relaxed. He had clearly been on a strain and tobacco relieved it. Kitty was pleased with herself. She had put him at his ease.

"Have you had your lunch?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, yes, Aunt Beulah cleared away the things just before you came in."

"Have you had yours?" she asked in return, looking up innocently.

"No, I don't want any; the pipe here," and he patted

it as he spoke, "is quite enough for me. You know we eat too much anyway. Eating, I believe, kills more people than drink. I'm a hundred per cent better when I eat lightly, and can do better work."

"Aunt Beulah was complaining that you were starving yourself to death. She's dreadfully afraid that you will die young if you don't eat more."

He laughed heartily. Kitty had never seen him in so light a mood before.

"That's Aunt Beulah's pet obsession, which she has imbibed from Rastus. That tough old darky would have been dead long ago if he didn't have a cast iron stomach. I firmly believe that he has inoculated Aunt Beulah with this idea so that she will feed him to his full capacity."

So they talked and chatted for a full half hour, during which Graves refilled his pipe several times, until the room was heavy with smoke. Kitty quite forgot her scruples about the strict business relations to be maintained between employee and employer, and entered into the spirit of camaraderie, which the situation had seemed quite naturally to evoke. Graves was taking it as a matter of course.

A pause coming in the conversation, Kitty rose and went to her typewriter to transcribe her notes.

"By the by, how do you like your work, Miss Peyton?" Graves asked, as she sat down.

"Oh, I love it, Mr. Graves, though I'm afraid I don't

half understand it. You use so many strange technical terms, that I'm often puzzled. I have to consult the dictionary and that makes me lose time in transcribing. I've sometimes wondered if you couldn't suggest some simple elementary book, which I might read and study up. I think it would help greatly."

"To be sure," he answered. "I never realized that before. It was stupid of me not to think of it. I hope that you will forgive me. There's a little book recently published, called 'A Primer of the Atom,' it will be just the thing. It is intended for the layman and will familiarize you somewhat with the nomenclature. I'll send for it at once. I'm glad you like your work here. I was afraid you might be disappointed," he added.

"And why should I be disappointed?"

"Well, I know it must be lonely for you in this isolated spot—you who have been so accustomed to the liveliness of the City. And this is a grim and musty old house, bare and forbidding. It's all right for me, who am absorbed in an intricate piece of work. I wanted an out-of-the-way place, where I wouldn't be open to interruption, and could conduct my experiments in peace. It's said to be haunted, and people shun haunted houses, you know." He looked interrogatively at Kitty.

"I assure you, Mr. Graves, I'm very contented here. It's very restful and peaceful. I never realized before how noisy and blary the City is. I'm really glad to

be out of it. As for the house being haunted, of course, that's all nonsense. Haunted houses are only in people's imagination."

"Not altogether, Miss Peyton. I'm here because this *is* a haunted house. I think I ought to tell you, asking you only to keep my confidence."

Kitty was startled. Surely he was joking. Yet he had made the statement with deliberation. There was no vestige of a smile on his face.

"Please don't be alarmed, Miss Peyton. I think it is due to you to explain. I'm not talking at random. I mean it. It is a haunted house, but not in the way people usually suppose."

Kitty looked at him in astonishment.

"I selected this house precisely because it had the reputation of being haunted. Its being haunted has to do with my experiment. I found the account of it in the Records of the Society for Psychical Research, which investigated the phenomena here a number of years ago. There is no doubt of strange happenings in this house, thoroughly authenticated, as far as human testimony can go. I have experienced some myself since my occupancy. I have a theory of haunted places, which I am testing out. I want you to know. It is only fair that you should know and if you feel that you don't want to stay after I have explained, all I ask is that you will keep it in strict confidence."

Kitty nodded dumbly. There could be no mistaking that he was serious.

A haunted house! Kitty felt a shiver go down her spine at the thought. The place as a place was depressing, but she had been so taken up with her new job and so happy at being in Claxville with Melly and her family, and felt in general so much better in every way, that she had paid little regard to the somber character of the Peyton House.

"I said I have a theory," went on Mr. Graves, "but it is not my theory. I stumbled on it several years ago in a magazine article called 'Phantasms of the Dead.' I jotted down some notes of it at the time. But it was only recently—some two years ago—that it came back to me. You know how wireless telegraphy and the radio have become a commonplace in our civilization. I have been making an intensive study of them. I have linked the theory of the magazine writer with another which our present scientific knowledge seems to warrant. It is so plausible, to my mind, that I have determined to give it a thorough try-out."

Kitty shifted in her chair.

"I won't be technical and I'll try to be brief. First, let me explain the theory of the magazine article. The author held that when a deed of violence, for instance a crime such as a murder, is enacted, say, in a certain room, an emotional storm of extraordinary intensity takes place, in which two persons are involved, the

criminal and the victim. Both personalities are at full stretch, the murderer in his malignity, and the victim in his terror. The author holds—and I believe that his assumption has a good deal of truth—that material objects can absorb, so to speak, something of the personalities that are in contact with them, especially when these are under an intense emotional strain. In such a nerve climax, as the enactment of a murder engenders, the supreme moment in the lives of the two people engaged in the tragedy, they throw off something of the fierce agony of body and soul, which they are undergoing. A stream of violent vibrations—we know now that the ultimate particles of matter are in constant vibration—passes from them to the objects around them and is absorbed in these objects. If the crime occurs in a room, the very walls and ceiling and floor and bedhangings and furniture receive a certain impression of horror. Why should they not retain it, storing it up as in a charged battery? Some highly receptive person, with a hypersensitive nervous system afterwards occupies this room, sleeps in it in an atmosphere charged to the highest possible extent with the fiercest possible human emotions. These emotions vibrating in this saturated atmosphere work upon him steadily and irresistibly. After a while, he too, becomes charged with them, and when his nervous tension is at full stretch, he awakes with a shock and sees what are usually called ghosts. He has become at-

tuned, like a radio instrument, to the wave-lengths of the dominant vibration emanating from his surroundings."

Graves paused, watching Kitty. She was entirely absorbed and fascinated.

"Go on," she exclaimed, "I want to hear."

"The man is awake then, shrilling, his nervous system in tune with the emotional but unintelligent vibrations round him. By nature he is of a receptive character, by his position during the last hour or two he has laid himself open to these particular vibrations. Is it so extraordinary that he should see the crime re-enacted—he should perceive, that is to say, not the souls of the two actors parading before him, but the stored-up emotions which the crime generated, presented to him in the very shape in which they were generated?"

Graves here shook out the ashes from his pipe, refilled and lighted it.

"That's my theory of haunted houses, Miss Peyton. I am here to see if I can prove it. You are here to help me, if after this confession of my gruesome undertaking you care to remain. When I advertised for a secretary, I expected to get a man, and you came. I took you because," he hesitated for the shade of a second, "because you prepossessed me. I trust that the situation doesn't frighten you. Perhaps I shouldn't have

engaged you in the beginning." He smiled in a half deprecatory way as he finished.

Kitty, who by this time had relaxed from the tension she was under at his announcement that the house was haunted, smiled at his evident apprehension that she might desert him.

"Why should I be frightened, Mr. Graves? On the contrary, I am intensely interested. I would like to see it through. And do you think I would desert you, even if I am a woman?" There was a tinge of resentment in her voice at his implied slur on her sex. He sensed it at once.

"No, no, I didn't mean that. It was *you*, simply you, I was concerned about; not your sex at all. If you were a man I would have said the same thing. I only want to be fair under singular circumstances, which call for unusual confidences and entail services greatly out of the ordinary."

"I am flattered to think that you believe I can come up to the mark," answered Kitty. "It was nice to know that you were prepossessed with me, for otherwise I might not have got the 'job,'" and Kitty laughed lightly, glancing up at him.

He took his pipe out of his mouth and leaned forward.

"I was indeed. I always like or dislike people when I first see them."

'So do I," she answered, "and I liked you the first time I saw you."

She said it impetuously without reflection. She could have bitten her tongue out the next instant. He gazed at her so intently for a moment, that Kitty hastily lowered her eyes and proceeded to busy herself with her typewriter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I

KITTY diligently conned the "Primer of the Atom," until she had a fair elementary idea of what it was all about. The more recondite and technical side, of course, escaped her, and the mathematical element she gave up in despair. But she at least familiarized herself with enough of the nomenclature to be able to transcribe her notes with some degree of facility. She learned that an atom wasn't an atom, that the indivisible particle she had been taught at school to believe it was, wasn't indivisible after all. In fact, the atom was a molecule and the molecule was a vast and complicated system with a center called a nucleus around which revolved in some molecules, as many as ninety-six electrons—whatever they were—at the rate of fourteen hundred miles a second, and the distances between them were relatively immensely greater than the distances in our own solar system! It made her giddy to think of it. She promptly imparted her freshly acquired knowledge to Melly, who scouted the notion as arrant nonsense.

Melly had a robust incredulity for what she called a lot of guesses.

"I don't believe a word of it. It's all guesswork anyhow. You don't mean to tell me," expostulated Melly, "that we are only a lot of thingamabubs, whatever you call them, like that. I tell you, Kitty, that I am something more than a lot of little bugs whirling around each other." Melly had germs and molecules somewhat confused. "The ME that's ME—well, it isn't these at any rate." Not all the science in the world could disabuse her of the first axiom of life, that ME is ME. Of that prime fact, Melly was positively certain.

"I'm telling you what science has discovered," urged Kitty. "It's wonderful, I think."

"Wonderful nonsense," retorted Melly. "Science has simply gone crazy these days. They're trying to cram down our throats a lot of theories, which they spin out of the cobwebs of their own ignorance. It isn't common sense," and Melly stood squarely on common sense.

Melly was a superbly healthy home body with babies to look after and entertained no better opinion of modern science than she did of modern business. Life, not speculation, was her strong point. They were trying nowadays, in the name of science, to make people stop having babies, and Melly poured vials of wrath on the heads of the guilty propagandists against the existence of babies.

Kitty related to Mr. Graves Melly's scornful repudiation of electrons. He laughed.

"Mrs. Pettigrew's is a pretty violent skepticism but has some basis. Our theory, only a working theory after all, may turn out in the end of no ultimate value. That's the fate of scientific theories. The painful road of science is strewn with their débris. The ME which Mrs. Pettigrew knows to be herself, electrons can never account for. There is something in us beyond the reach of all scientific instruments."

Kitty had become imbued with the electron idea since reading the "Primer of the Atom," and this concession to Melly's opinion somewhat took her aback. She had not, of course, thought it out for herself; simply accepted the say-so of the Primer. The ME had not entered into her consideration. The more she pondered it, the more she realized that electrons did not account for that intangible and ultimate something which Melly called ME. The sanity of common sense punctured the bladder of speculation.

II

She was very busy and very happy in her work. Mr. Graves was writing a book on electrons in connection with his present experiment, a highly scientific and technical work, sometimes dictating to her and some-

times writing it. This she was typing. Besides this he had considerable correspondence with other scientists. But above all she was interested in the haunted house and his experiment in testing his theory of vibrations as a solution of its mysterious phenomena.

He explained to her that he was seeking some way to get a picture of the crime, that was reputed to have occurred in the room above. If that picture could be visualized on the human retina, why could it not be impressed upon a properly sensitized film. In other words, why couldn't he get a motion picture of the scene enacted. The problem lay in attuning his camera to the vibrations and securing a film so highly and delicately sensitized as to receive and retain it.

So far he had succeeded in getting something, but it was indistinct and confused. One thing blended dimly into another. There were movements and shadows much blurred, and there were what at times seemed to be faces. It was only a question of attuning his camera to the wave-lengths emanating from the walls of Ghost House. While it was baffling and disconcerting, it was also encouraging, for something did register, which gave him faith in his theory. He had long ago discarded the usual commercial film and prepared his own film under a new chemical process. Its basis was an extremely delicate special fiber, a mere tissue in thickness, sensitized, not with silver nitrate,

but with a very delicate precipitate of platinum. It had taken him a long series of patient experiments to reach his present stage, and he was still striving to perfect it more and more. He had set up a laboratory in the cellar where he was working at the chemistry involved in the making of the new film, and he had a friend in the City working on the same lines. He had devised a camera with a series of special and delicate and high-powered lenses, which he had placed in the haunted room. It was this that he had shown to Kitty. It was the curious circular apparatus, which we saw him operating on the first night he was roused out of his sleep by the moaning and the footfalls; and from which, when it was operated, came the greenish glow, an intensified Roentgen ray penetrating not only flesh and blood but even bone and metal.

"You are the only one to whom I have shown this room, Miss Peyton," he explained to Kitty. "You and I," he added laughingly, "constitute a unique secret society with only two members. I am the exalted president and you are the exalted secretary.

"I have a great dream," he resumed after they had descended again to the office. "I have never confided it to anybody yet, but I am going to tell you."

Kitty had seated herself at the typewriter. Graves was standing by his desk. "It may be only a dream, but if it should come true, it would prove to be one of

the greatest discoveries the world has ever known. It would revolutionize history and unlock its most intimate secrets."

He spoke gravely with an emotional elation in his voice. Kitty held her breath as he went on.

"The experiment I am trying here is only a stepping-stone to something much vaster and much more momentous than any success this experiment may bring. Science tells us that there is a something, which it calls ether, for lack of another name, permeating the known universe. We don't know its nature, and indeed we don't know the ultimate nature of anything, for whenever we come up against the last, we stand on the edge of the abyss of mystery. But we do know that through the medium of the ether charged with electrical power, we can communicate through great distances of space. Through it the President of the United States speaking in Congress, may be heard by millions of people over the country, as clearly as if they were within ordinary range of his voice. I can tune that radio there," and he pointed to the instrument standing against the wall, "and focus wave-lengths now vibrating to us from distant points, from far out at sea, or from inland cities, so that we can hear their messages. It's an old idea that every movement in space is registered in the ether and transmitted through it by a series of constant vibrations. 'You cannot touch a flower without the trembling of a star,' says the modern poet. Now I believe

that every human act throughout history is thus registered in the ether, and is stored there forever, and just as we can at this moment catch the human voice, or the sound of musical instruments through the radio, so, if my theory holds good, we can with a properly devised instrument gather from the spaces around us, the story of mankind as it has been enacted through the ages. If I can gather the pictured story of the tragedy absorbed and retained in these walls, may we not hope to gather the mighty picture of human events as they have been absorbed and retained by the ether? A recent new theory of the universe affirms that space does not extend indefinitely outwardly but returns upon itself. A ray of light projected from any point in the universe does not travel in a straight line, but ultimately returns to that point, describing a vast curve. Whether or not this theory of a curved universe holds good, we think that radio waves travel parallel to the surface of the earth instead of going off at a tangent. May not the ethereal pictures of the human story be cycling around us, and become visible to us if we only have the right instrument to register them?"

Graves stood talking as if he were addressing an audience and not merely Kitty Peyton, his stenographer. His voice vibrated with emotion. Kitty sat spellbound. It was a big idea and held her. She had come to know enough of the subject to grasp the significance of what he was saying. His enthusiasm kin-

dled hers. Here was no dry-as-dust scientist, but a man of profound and far-reaching imagination.

"That's my dream, Miss Peyton. It may sound wild, even preposterous in the present state of our knowledge, but science has achieved in the past twenty-five years, what to the past generation would appear to be more marvelous than what I am proposing. It is well worth following up, and I believe that I am on the right track."

Kitty went home that night feeling that she was an important person among the millions on this swarming planet. She held a great secret in her breast, confided to her by a man of genius. Mr. Graves *was* a man of genius; there was no doubt of it, and he had made her his confidant! She was elated by the thought, and lay awake until the small hours, her imagination filled with the picture of Graves as he stood that afternoon by the desk in the office, unfolding to her his great dream, of which she felt that somehow she was now a part. What a humdrum and uninspiring grind had been her job with Hawkins and Hawkins, Realtors.

III

That same evening Graves spent in his den upstairs going over the notes he had dictated in the afternoon, and expanding them. He consumed many pipes-full

during the process. Never before had his work seemed so satisfactory, or gone so smoothly. By eleven o'clock he had finished, and stretched himself in the morris chair with a sense of mellow content. His idea had worked out perfectly.

He gathered up the scattered sheets and laid them aside, and then his mind went back to the events of the day. It was a very satisfactory day. Everything had fitted in without a single hitch.

He had hit upon a chemical combination which he believed would aid materially in perfecting the sensitive quality of his film, and so bring him one step nearer his goal. He would send the new formula to his confrère in New York and get him to work it out practically. He had confided to Miss Peyton the object of his work and the greater purpose that lay beyond. He had been planning to do this for some time, but had waited until he felt sure that she was dependable. To his great satisfaction he found her not only dependable, but sympathetic.

How much better, after all, was a woman than a man under the conditions in which he was working. Prior to her coming he had no idea that a woman could be so dependable or aid so materially in work of the kind he was pursuing. Her sympathy was stimulating and added color to the drabness of his present surroundings. She was intelligent, too, and appreciative. Up to this he had been working in isolation. Now, he had a com-

panion and even a comrade, who, though she might not be able to comprehend fully the scientific side of his undertaking, was very human, and the thought was exceedingly comforting.

CHAPTER NINE

I

SIX months had passed, four since Kitty's advent, without any definite result in Graves' efforts to secure a distinct picture of the Peyton House tragedy. The new formula had helped but it did not clarify as much as Graves had hoped. The phenomena of strange noises were repeated at longer and longer intervals, but Graves could make nothing of them. Each time they occurred, he at once set his camera machine in operation without any appreciable result. His hopes that during their manifestation he might obtain something tangible, on the theory that they were related in some way with the secret he was trying to bring to light, did not materialize. It was strange that they would invariably cease as soon as he set in motion the ethereal wave-lengths, by means of which he sought to tune his camera with the stored-up vibrations of the grim tragedy he believed held in those obdurate walls. There was evidently some conflict between the vague and obscure revelations of the camera and the phenomena. In time he divorced the two entirely and thrust aside the noise manifestations as having no con-

nection with the vibratory sources of the camera record. In fact he came to disregard the noises, except as a disagreeable and obtrusive annoyance to be eliminated in his scientific calculations toward his goal. They only occurred around midnight and he alone was aware of them.

Between himself and Kitty a delightfully intimate camaraderie had been established. He talked to her fully and freely of his plans and his hopes. She in turn had come to feel that his work was in part hers also, and threw herself into it with all a woman's devotion.

How different it was from the old business relation in the City, when she was with Hawkins and Hawkins. There, of course, she had always done her best, but her interest had been detached; she was merely serving her employers. Here she was really a part of the great quest, and with that intensity of feeling and loyalty which is peculiarly feminine, gave herself to the situation with an eagerness and zest that absorbed her every faculty.

She went to her work every morning in high-pitched anticipation that some tangible result would be achieved that very day, and left each evening with hopes high for the next day. She felt confident that success would come some day, for her faith in Graves was unbounded. Graves could not fail. His genius would triumph over all obstacles.

II

Graves meantime was working along with the plodding and careful patience of the trained scientist. He realized that he was blazing a way through a new region, which was necessarily slow and difficult. He had no idea of the wave-length he was seeking. It was largely a matter of groping and painful experimentation. The making of a film properly sensitized, was also a slow process. He smiled at Kitty's eagerness, explaining to her that scientific research was a slow accumulation of little things day by day, the doing and undoing of many things, like the old adage, "if at first you don't succeed, try and try again; it's all a matter of great care, repetition and patience."

"Yes, I know," answered Kitty, "but I sometimes wonder if we are on the right track."

By degrees she had fallen into a feeling of tacit partnership, which Graves had accepted with that sense of perfect understanding that had unconsciously grown up between them in the past four months. Hence, the "we" that came quite unconsciously to her, whether thinking or speaking of the work in hand.

"What do you mean by the right track?" Graves asked in surprise. Kitty hesitated a moment, then answered.

"I don't know exactly how to explain it, but I have a feeling—you know women are mostly guided by feel-

ing or what you call intuition—that somehow there has been a false start or turning somewhere. Please don't think me presumptuous, but sometimes I have a notion that you have set up the camera in the wrong room upstairs."

Graves gazed at her in perplexed inquiry.

"The wrong room! What makes you think that?" he asked.

Kitty hesitated for a moment and began to wonder—for Graves was staring at her in astonishment—if she were not perhaps presumptuous. But she must tell him, even if he didn't take it well. She honestly believed that the camera had been set up in the wrong room. Though feeling diffident, she determined to let Graves know what was in her mind.

"I want to tell you something that has recently happened to me," Kitty answered. "I have been waiting for the thing to become clearer and more definite before speaking to you about it, but even as it is, it may give some clew. It is really two different things."

They were in the office, Kitty at her typewriter, and Graves at his desk. He got up and came over to her, standing beside the typewriter.

"It was about a month ago, in the evening, when the days began to get shorter. It is dark now, you know, by five o'clock. I had finished my work and was about to go home. I was thinking of the people—what manner of people they might have been—who had lived

here. I had done this often in an idle moment, painting pictures of them to myself in a sort of brown study, dreaming as it were."

Graves was all interest, his eyes riveted on Kitty. He sensed that there was something of great moment in Kitty's mind. She was very serious and anxious.

"Then one evening," Kitty continued, "there suddenly came to me a murmur of voices, like people talking in subdued tones. I couldn't make out anything, except that some one was speaking. It startled me and at first, I thought it was an hallucination or some one talking in the hall or outside on the portico. I went into the hall and then out on the portico. But there was no one in either place. When I came back the voices persisted. They sounded like a woman's voice, a young woman's, and a man's. And then I heard the ripple of piano keys, as if a hand were straying over them lightly. A moment after I heard singing, a song I didn't know, but somehow it seemed familiar. It was all very faint. At first I thought I was dreaming. I pinched myself and stood up. I was really awake. I felt frightened. There was no mistaking. Again there was a soft rippling of piano keys and the murmur of voices. All this was in hushed tones, rather indistinct and at times dying away. Indeed, it seemed to me as if the people talking were speaking in subdued tones. And I also felt as if some one were looking at me intently. It was very uncanny and I was immensely

frightened, but very much interested in spite of my fright."

"Did this ever happen again?" asked Graves.

"Yes, a number of times. Always when it is dark. Indeed, I can hear the voices and the song now almost any time I try. Not in the daytime, but always after dark. But that's not all. It is this last thing I am about to tell you that makes me doubt that the camera is placed in the right room. One evening, I don't know why, I felt impelled to go upstairs. It came to me suddenly and as if some one were urging me in some mysterious way. It seemed as if I couldn't resist. At the moment I heard nothing and saw nothing, but felt as if some one were going in front of me leading the way. I was terrified, but was drawn on by an uncanny fascination. It seemed to me as if some one were pleading with me. When I got to the top of the stairs I thought I heard light footsteps in front of me. They seemed to enter the right-hand front room, and . . ."

"The right-hand front room?" interrupted Graves.

Kitty nodded. "Yes, the right-hand front room, as I stood when I got to the top of the stairs. Not the room where the camera machine is. I pushed open the door. The room was bare, as you know. The electric arcs from the road below gave just enough light to make the interior dimly visible. I didn't want to go in, but the sense of being pleaded with redoubled. I stepped over the threshold and stopped, for I was

seized with a terrible dread and a feeling of cold. I thought I heard confused whisperings and then there came over me the feeling that there was a desperate struggle going on somewhere in the room. I gripped myself hard and tried to go in farther. I couldn't. I was all atremble, and thought I should faint. It was too horrible, and I turned back in a panic and fled downstairs."

"Did you ever venture upstairs again?"

"No. I was too much afraid. I know I'm an awful coward, but I just couldn't. I tried to reason it out, saying to myself that there was nothing really ghostly in it at all; that it was only the vibrations working on my nerves, which I believe have become attuned to them. You see, I made myself subject to their influence by trying to picture to myself what the people were like who once lived here. If I could only reason it out, instead of feeling it, I believe I could overcome my repugnance."

"Yes, I know," said Graves. "But it happens that we are not merely rational creatures. We are flesh and blood, and have emotions as well, and these we can't get rid of at will. I think that you are a tremendously brave girl," and Graves gazed at Kitty with admiration in his eyes.

"I am afraid not," answered Kitty. "If I were, I'd have gone up again. That's the reason I never told you

before. I didn't want to let you know what a coward I really am. I'm ashamed of myself."

"Not a bit of it, my dear." He did not seem to realize that he had addressed her in a term of endearment, though she noticed it and felt herself flushing. "Nerves are nerves," he went on, "and I do not wonder at your repugnance. But let us apply a bit of science. This is something worth while. You are giving me a better clew than all my experiments have. You have made yourself sympathetically subject to the vibratory influences stored up in this house. You say that you were led to the right-hand front room. The records of the Psychical Research Society stated that the left-hand front room was the center of the manifestations. The testimony of the witnesses taken at the time of the investigation was unanimous on that point. But you say that you were led to the right-hand front room. I don't understand, for I am positive that the records testified to the left-hand front room. Yet your experience led you to the room on the opposite side of the hall, and you are evidently in sympathetic correspondence with the latent influence stored up there. I am puzzled, for your experience goes contrary to the explicit evidence of the records."

"But which is the left-hand front room?" interrupted Kitty.

"Why, the one above this, where the camera is installed," he answered.

"Yes, as you enter the house," responded Kitty. "But reverse your position. As you face the front of the house from the inside, the right-hand front room is on this side, above the office. The left-hand front room is the one on the other side, the one I was led to."

"My Lord," Graves exclaimed after a moment's reflection. "What an astounding idiot I have been!"

It was like a thunderbolt from the blue.

George Temple Graves, scientist, whose reputation for accurate and careful research work had already crossed the ocean, sank in a heap in a chair. If his scientific colleagues knew of it, how they would laugh over it, and how his reputation for accuracy would shrink! What a colossal and palpable blunder on the very threshold of his great experiment! After six months of patient work, comes along a little stenographer to set him right, a very clever and sweet little girl it was true, but utterly untrained in observation, and only a girl, who knew no more about science, save the dribble she had absorbed from him, than he knew about fashions. All this ran through his mind in a flash. No wonder his attempts had proved so feeble. He had all along been out of focus, on the outer edge of the center of the manifestations.

"Oh, my, oh, my," he groaned, as he buried his head in his hands, "I ought to be put back in the nursery. I don't seem to know right from left. How could I have done such a thing, such a crude, obvious blunder!"

His distress was very genuine and surprising to Kitty. She could not understand how grievous was the hurt to scientific pride, or what seemed to her feminine way of looking at things, a very natural and easily corrected mistake, especially in a man who was undertaking such big things. It was disconcerting to see his distress. And Kitty began to think herself very guilty for her presumption. It hurt her, she should have been more tactful. He was very much hurt, and Kitty felt very much like crying.

"What an old fool you must think me," he said, looking up at her.

"Please, Mr. Graves," she answered quite simply, "I don't think anything of the sort."

"You know," he went on, "what I was just thinking? Something I ought to be ashamed of, and I am heartily ashamed. I was thinking how I, a scientist with some reputation—forgive the vanity—have been corrected in an inexcusable blunder by a simple girl. It was an unworthy thought. I ought to be grateful to you and I am grateful. Forgive me for thinking of you in that small way. It was unworthy of me and unjust to you."

He came over to her, and, taking her hand, lifted it to his lips.

"You will forgive me, won't you?" he said as he bent over it. He was so contrite and so humble that Kitty was greatly moved. It takes a big man to do a thing like that, she thought to herself.

"Do you know what I am really thinking, Mr. Graves?" she answered. "I am thinking that you are just splendid and that I am exactly what you thought, only a simple girl, who is very proud to be able to help you at all in my small way."

"You are a wonderful woman and I a foolish man who has made an egregious blunder, that has cost me a lot of time. How stupid of me, how very stupid! The left-hand room, as one goes out of the building, of course. Isn't it strange how sometimes we overlook the most obvious thing in the world."

He was still holding her hand. She quietly withdrew it.

Wasn't he still overlooking one of the most obvious things in the world, or dared she admit it to herself?

CHAPTER TEN

I

THE next day, with the assistance of Rastus, Graves transferred the camera machine to the room across the hall. Rastus went about the work in solemn silence and with obvious perturbation. Great beads of perspiration stood out over his face, his eyes bulged out and suppressed groans escaped from his lips as he went about the task under Graves' directions, who was too absorbed in making the transfer to heed Rastus' consternation. As Aunt Beulah said, he was a "skeart nigger" whenever he came into the main building. When the task was finished, Rastus departed downstairs in haste to the kitchen. It was the only place in the house where he consented to linger for any time. He sat down in lugubrious silence as he watched Aunt Beulah busy with her cooking.

"What yuh doin' here, Rastus, lookin' at meh in dat solemnkely way?" Aunt Beulah asked turning on him.

"Mammy," for so he always addressed her, "Ah jus' had a pow'ful bad expurience upstairs dere with Mistah Geowrge. He done moved dat debil lookin' contrapshun ob his'n to de room across de hall, an' Ah helps

him. When Ah goes into dat room, Ah was all shibery like. It's de wustest place in de whole house. Ah neber was in dere befo' an' Ah doan wan' ter go in dere again. Ah jus' feels de debil was in dere shuh," and Rastus rolled his eyes as he glanced uneasily at the door leading upstairs. Aunt Beulah stood with her arms akimbo, while Rastus sat solemnly blinking at her.

"Doan yuh be comin' in heah with your botherations in dis way," she querulously expostulated. "Ain't Ah got troubles of mah own without'n your'n? Dis heah kitchin am de mos' uncomfortable place Ah eber cooked in without luggin' in yore ole debil."

"Ah knows, Mammy. We's been heah fur six months now, an' Ah neber could mak out why Mistah Geowrge come heah nohow. Ef et wan't for Mistah Geowrge, Ah wouldn't stick anuder day, and ef Ah had to sleep in dis spooky ole buildin', Ah'd jess clean out like a skeart rabbit. Et sartinly am de mos' debilish place Ah eber seed," and Rastus shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Rastus, yuh shet up yore fool mouf. We's heah, ain't we? An' heah we stays, as long as Mistah Geowrge says so. Ah wouldn't run away from Mistah Geowrge for all de debils in de bad place, where dey natchally belongs."

"Of course, Mammy, we's got ter stick by Mistah

Geowrge, Ah ain't disputin' dat, an' dat's de only reason we does stick. But it sartinly am onpleasant. Dat room, I was jus' in, am de mos' turrible place I eber seen. It gabe me de creeps all de way to de soles of mah feet. It was all Ah could do to stay dere at all. Ah jus' feel de debil grabben me by de neck all de time. If I eber has to go dere again, Ah's sure to shake mahself to def. Ah doan see why de good Lawd lets de debil out ob de bad place nohow."

Aunt Beulah turned again to her cooking without deigning to reply. Rastus lapsed into silence and slumped, hunched in his chair.

Just then the knob of the kitchen door turned. Rastus rose abruptly, staring at the opening door, when to his evident relief, Kitty entered.

"Aunt Beulah," Kitty exclaimed, smiling, "I thought I would pay you a little visit and get another lesson in cooking. I've finished my work upstairs and have a little time left."

Aunt Beulah had confided to Kitty the spooky feeling that came over her now and again as she went about her cooking in the kitchen, so the latter came down occasionally to give the old lady the comfort of her companionship. Kitty had by this time become almost of as much concern to Aunt Beulah as Mistah Geowrge himself. Indeed, Aunt Beulah had begun to vision Miss Kitty as mistress of the Graves mansion in

old Virginia, just as soon as Mistah Geowrge had finished his foolish researches in the Peyton House. She had expressed some of her dreams on this score to Rastus, who had grinned a ready acquiescence.

"Bless yore heart, Honey, but Ah's sure glad ter see yuh," welcomed Aunt Beulah. "Rastus has been shootin' off his mouf about de debil upstairs tell he almos' gibs meh de willies," and Aunt Beulah scowled at Rastus, gesticulating at him with the big cooking spoon she held in her hand.

Rastus had proffered Kitty his chair.

"Et's bad enuf down heah," Aunt Beulah went on, "without Rastus's fool conbershashun. He ain't got no sense nohow, to come down heah when Ah's busy, an' talk all dat debil stuff, an' disturbin' mah eliquilibrium."

"Nonsense," laughed Kitty, turning to Rastus, "there's no devil upstairs or downstairs. Go over to the outhouse and stop disturbing Aunt Beulah with your foolishness. I want Aunt Beulah to give me a cooking lesson."

"Yaas, Miss Kitty, Ah's gwyne. But Ah tells yuh, Miss Kitty, dat room where Ah puts de machine dis afternoon with Mistah Geowrge am sure one spooky place. All de time Ah was in dere, Ah felt de debil was alookin' at meh, an' ef et wasn't fer dis rabbit foot," here Rastus fetched the potent talisman out of

his trousers' pocket, "he would a-kitched meh, sure as Ah's libbin."

"Go on out o' heah," cried Aunt Beulah. "Ah's done tired hearin' about yore debil. Does yuh hear me, yuh fool pusson? An leab meh dat rabbit foot, Rastus, Yuh won't hab no need ob him in de outhouse."

Rastus meekly surrendered the rabbit foot to Aunt Beulah's keeping and made toward the kitchen door leading outside, shaking his head and muttering to himself. Aunt Beulah deposited the charm against the "debil" in her capacious bosom with an air of security. Kitty suppressed a smile. How like children they were after all.

"Ah's sure glad to hab yuh, Miss Kitty. Rastus does mak meh fidgetty and nerbous with his spooky talkin' an Ah ain't any too comftable heah, specially when it begins ter get dark, like et's doin' now, an' Ah's all alone in de kitchin."

It was a cloudy day and growing dark earlier than usual, and the wind blowing in heavy gusts whistling and wailing heavily through the many cracks and crevices of the ramshackle building. Rastus' laments over the "debil" upstairs, the growing darkness, and the moaning wind were more than enough to make Aunt Beulah nervous. Aunt Beulah turned on the electric light with evident comfort.

"I didn't know it was so late," said Kitty going to

the window and gazing out. The landscape was already growing indistinct in the gathering shadows, and a storm seemed to be brewing outside.

"I'm afraid I won't be able to stay after all, Aunt Beulah. I'm sorry, but I want to get home before it gets entirely dark," said Kitty turning from the window. "We'll have to put off the cooking lesson until to-morrow," and she turned to go.

"Miss Kitty," asked Aunt Beulah, "befo' yuh goes, would yuh mind jess fer a minute, ef Ah asks yuh somethin'?"

"Why, of course, Aunt Beulah, what is it?"

Aunt Beulah paused for a moment and then answered:

"Et's jess dis way, Miss Kitty. Yuh knows as Ah has already tole yuh befo', how Ah's been 'fected by a feelin' down heah like some one is alookin' at meh sometimes, an' when Ah turns roun' dey ain't no one dere. It's suttently am most onpleasant. Well, Miss Kitty, ets gettin' wus and wus de las two weeks, till Ah's gettin' real jumpy. Et's dat way mos' ebery day now. Et's makin' meh turrible nerbous, et shuh is. An' Rastus dere is broodin' and broodin' about dat ole debil ob his'n, eben out in de outhouse, an' talkin' ahbout quittin' tell Ah ain't got no nerbes left. Now Ah asks yuh, Miss Kitty, what Ah's gwyne ter do under de conditions dat set meh 'round? Ah wouldn't

leab Mistah Geowrge noway, but it am most distressin'."

Kitty was taken aback. She knew only too well that any defection on the part of these old servants would prove a serious handicap to Graves' plan. They were both old family servants and devoted to him, but fear was evidently eating into their loyalty, till they were approaching the verge of panic. He had brought them, believing that he could count upon their faithfulness. How long would they remain stanch under the pressure of the fear, that was rapidly undermining their courage? They were billeted in the outhouse that they might be removed from any manifestations that might occur in the main building. The negro character was easily influenced by anything uncanny, and Kitty realized that there was now more than enough in the atmosphere of the Peyton House to shake the complacency of people much less superstitious than Rastus and Aunt Beulah. Except for Aunt Beulah, Rastus would have deserted long ago. From the very start he had been fearful. He had learned that the house was haunted and the dismal and somber character of the place weighed upon him like a pall.

Kitty herself, who had accepted Graves' vibratory theory of the "hauntings" and fortified as she was with the scientific explanation, had been harrowed by the experience she had narrated to Graves. She was more-

over intensely interested in the outcome of the experiment, not to speak of her admiration and profound regard for Graves himself. Rastus and Aunt Beulah were deeply rooted in all the superstitions of the Southern plantation negro and emotional to the *nth* degree.

All this came to her mind as she listened to Aunt Beulah. It would never do to admit that there was any foundation for the slightest apprehension on their part. She must allay Aunt Beulah's fears as best she could.

"I quite understand, Aunt Beulah," she said sympathetically, for she knew that it would be useless to try to argue or laugh the old woman out of her fears. Fear is impervious to reason or ridicule. "I know just how you feel. It's very natural, Aunt Beulah; it's just loneliness. I'm that way myself at times. People who are much alone always feel that way, especially in an old house like this."

"Yuh does, Honey?"

"Yes, Aunt Beulah, but I know that it is only my imagination. Imagination plays tricks on us, if we let it run away with us. We think we see or hear things when we don't. It's like dreaming. It's nothing at all when we wake up. So, when I feel that way, I hum a little tune to myself and get down to work again and don't allow myself to look around. If you look around you simply give away to your imagination and your

imagination can play all sorts of tricks on you, as I just said."

"Yas'm, Ah sees," said Aunt Beulah meditatively. "Ef Ah doan look aroun' Ah jess bests dat ole imagina-shun?"

"That's it, Aunt Beulah."

"But dere's Rastus with his debil talk—how's Ah gwine ter best dat? Rastus is a turrible lugubrious pusson when he gets goin' dat way."

"Make Rastus stay out of the house as much as possible, and feed him up well," laughed Kitty. "But, I must be hurrying, it's getting darker every minute. Good night, Aunt Beulah."

II

Kitty found Graves in the office seated at his desk smoking. He rose as she entered.

"I thought you had gone," he said.

"Well, you're nothing of a Sherlock Holmes," said Kitty laughing. "There are my hat and coat in full view on the rack."

"I'm afraid not," he smiled back at her. "But I'm glad you haven't gone. I wonder if you would try an experiment for me, if you are not in any hurry to get away. Do you think you could put yourself in tune with the vibrations that you have experienced in this room before?"

"I'll be glad to try," answered Kitty, "though sometimes it doesn't seem to work, and I haven't tried lately. Please open the door into the hall. The door was open the first time it happened, and I have always kept it open whenever I tried."

She took her place at her typewriter, fingering the keys noiselessly. After several minutes she stopped, her hands resting idly on the keyboard. It was in this attitude, she afterwards explained to Graves, that she first heard the voices and the rippling of the piano keys.

A somber silence brooded, broken only by the tick of the clock on Graves' desk, and the sighing of the wind outside. In the hall the shadows were black and ominous beyond the edge of the light from the room.

Graves watched her intently. He had laid his pipe on the desk. She sat waiting. She finally looked up, shaking her head.

"It doesn't come to me now for some reason. Maybe I'm not in the proper mood."

"Perhaps my being here makes the difference," said Graves. "I may be an antipathetic personality, a discord. Let me go out into the hall."

Kitty nodded, and Graves left the room.

He had scarcely got into the hall when the thud, thud of his own previous experience sounded in his ears. It was the first time it had occurred in the past two months or more. With a smothered imprecation, he rushed back into the office. It was the last thing in

the world he wanted to happen under such circumstances. It had never occurred before at this hour, only around midnight when he was alone. It was now not more than six o'clock with Miss Peyton in the house, and Aunt Beulah downstairs.

Kitty, too, had heard the thud, thud, and started up. This was something entirely new to her.

"Don't be alarmed," cried Graves, "I know all about it. I've had this experience before, though never so early in the evening."

The thuddings ceased and then the low moanings came from the floor above. Kitty's flesh began to creep and she felt her heart pounding. Graves came over to her and laid his hand reassuringly on her arm.

Then suddenly and appallingly came the shriek, which drove the blood back into Kitty's heart and left her white as a sheet, and trembling in every limb. Graves threw his arm around her, and Kitty shrank up against him, limp and shuddering. It was like the shriek of a lost soul in hell, and seemed to tear the very air asunder. It seemed as if her eardrums might split with the appalling intensity of its dreadful blast.

"Don't mind, Miss Peyton," he said reassuringly. "It isn't as bad as it sounds. It's only ear-splitting after all. That is generally the finale of these singular manifestations. They usually come in that order, the thud, the moans and last the shriek. I confess they puzzle me.

They don't fit in with the psychology of the case. I mean they don't seem in keeping with the whole situation here. They seem crude and artificial to me, though I am not able to explain them."

Kitty, somewhat reassured, though her nerves were shrilling with the sudden onset of the horrible shriek, still ringing in her ears, looked up at him. He was perfectly self-possessed, which went to restore her confidence. Graves held her close. In her trepidation, it seemed perfectly proper. She clung to him instinctively. She would have fallen without his support. "Really there is no cause for alarm," he went on. "These manifestations gave me a terrible shock at first, but after two or three repetitions, I learned to appraise them as of no value for my purpose. They seem to me too mechanical to fit my theory of the real hauntings of this old house. They are a foreign element injected here in some way I haven't been able to explain yet, but they really don't belong, and I have never taken the trouble to investigate them further."

Kitty became suddenly conscious that she was in Graves' arms, and even acquiescent. He on his part seemed oblivious of the fact other than that he was protecting her in man-fashion under most distressing circumstances. Kitty realized this on the instant. It wouldn't do to break away abruptly; that would confess consciousness on her part and embarrass him.

With delicate tact she put up her free hand to her hair, exclaiming, "Oh, what a sight I must be. My hair is all disheveled, and what a goose I am to be so frightened."

Graves relaxed his hold. With a dexterous move, she slipped quietly from his embrace, putting her hands to her hair and going to the mirror on the wall alongside her typewriter, where she busied herself straightening out the disarray. She delayed over it purposely, first to compose herself, for she had been dreadfully startled, and secondly, so as to save Graves from any possible inkling that she had realized she had been held in his arms.

"I am sorry it startled you so much," said Graves. His voice conveyed great solicitude.

"Frightened me to death," responded Kitty, with her back to him. She was still wobbly.

Kitty suddenly turned to him. She had put the last touch to her readjusted locks. There was horror in her eyes. Graves stared at her in surprise.

"Aunt Beulah!" she cried.

"Good Lord," he exclaimed, "she must have heard." He rushed downstairs, followed by Kitty.

The kitchen was empty. A saucepan lay on the floor, its contents scattered. The kettle on the stove was boiling furiously, while the lid rattled with the pressure of escaping steam. The door leading outside stood

open. It was only too evident that Aunt Beulah had fled in terror.

"Poor old soul," said Kitty, "it must have been dreadful for her."

"Yes," assented Graves, "and how in the world will we ever induce her to come back after this?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I

IT took much persuasion and cajoling to get Aunt Beulah back into the kitchen, and then only on Kitty's promise to stay with her after dark. Rastus was even harder to move. He wouldn't consent to go into the house again, excepting in broad daylight, and then for as brief a time as possible, a bare minimum in which to clean up, and utterly refused to go into the camera room at all. Graves did not insist and did what cleaning was necessary there himself. The two old servants had been frightened into complete demoralization.

It had happened that Rastus was just returning to the kitchen in anticipation of getting his dinner, when the appalling shriek resounded through the house. He turned tail instantly in abject terror, and fled headlong to the outhouse. Aunt Beulah was standing over her stove. She was paralyzed with sheer fright, and became as nearly white as her dusky skin allowed. As soon as she recovered command of her shaking limbs, she too turned and fled in consternation, with an alacrity simply astounding in her almost two hundred and fifty pounds.

Kitty and Graves found the pair upstairs in the out-house in their bedroom. Rastus under the bed, and Aunt Beulah on her knees beside it with the coverlet over her head. Both were shaking like aspens and in speechless terror. It took some little time to bring them around to coherent utterance. When they did recover sufficiently to find their voices, it was only to protest violently against going again into the main building and to implore "Mistah Geowrge for Gawd's sake to leab dis debil's place." Rastus was the more vehement of the two, but Aunt Beulah wasn't far behind in picturesque protestations.

Kitty came persuasively to the rescue by promising Aunt Beulah to share the kitchen with her after dark. Rastus, too, came around in due course under the stipulation that he would have to be in the main building only when the sun was well up and never after dark, even for his dinner. It was arranged that Aunt Beulah would give him his dinner at midday instead of at night, as had been the custom. It was Kitty who suggested this and it helped considerably to allay Rastus' worst apprehensions. With this compromise, the household was put on a running basis again.

Meantime Graves had started his experiments again in the room to which he had transferred his camera machine. Kitty could not abide the room. Whenever she entered it, a terrible feeling of oppression came over her, and she began to tremble with nervous apprehen-

sion in spite of her efforts to control herself. Twice, at Graves' request, she made the attempt, but always with the same result of sheer horror. She wanted to persist until she had mastered herself, but Graves refused to let her go on with the experiment. It was too much of a strain and he was apprehensive of the result. He himself was immune to any kind of sensation whatever. This, he explained to Kitty, was because his nervous system was in no way in tune with the stored-up vibrations of the environment. It was well he was, or he could never go on with the experiment.

"But you heard the noises," declared Kitty.

"Yes, I did," he answered. "But so did Rastus and Aunt Beulah. I heard what all the rest heard, but only what they heard. And the fact that all of us in common heard the noises, makes me all the more suspicious of them, for I don't believe that all of us are in tune with the haunted environment. Aunt Beulah and Rastus I do not believe are. They are just naturally frightened. They believe the house is haunted and are superstitious to the bottom of their souls anyhow. I feel that there is some other explanation of the noises not connected with the purpose of my search here. How this happens I frankly can't explain. But your susceptibility, which is evidently of very acute tension, is due, no doubt, to some affinity with your surroundings. I haven't the remotest idea why or how. All I know is that you are keyed in some way to the wave-

lengths that come from these old walls, as the radio is keyed to the wave-lengths through the ether to catch the message being sent."

"I have to give up to a sense of fear," remonstrated Kitty. "Let me try again this evening."

"I think it would be better not to," answered Graves, shaking his head. "The horror you feel can only come from something evil there. You should not submit yourself in that way to a malignant influence." And Graves steadily refused to accede to Kitty's reiterated request to visit the room again.

"Wait until we hear from the laboratory," he urged, "on that last thousand feet of film I took in that room. It is the most highly sensitized film I have yet used, and I have made a new adjustment of the camera. When I ran the machine the other night, it worked more perfectly than I have ever seen it before. I could almost feel something myself, and you know what an unsympathetic subject I am. I sent it to New York yesterday for development. If nothing comes of it, we will perhaps think of letting you try again, though I much prefer you wouldn't."

With this much of a shadowy promise, Kitty had to rest satisfied.

II

On the third morning after, Graves received word from the laboratory that some of the new film had de-

veloped satisfactorily. Would he come to New York to see for himself?

He was highly elated, for this was the first time that he had succeeded in getting anything definite. Hitherto his film had shown up so blurred and indistinct, and save for the occasional glimpse of what seemed a shadowy form and the faint image of what seemed a human face, he was completely baffled. Now at last word had come from the laboratory that there was something worth the while. He was in a state of great expectation and Kitty was wrought up to a high pitch of excitement. It had been a long and laborious road, and here at last was more than a promise of fulfillment.

Graves arranged to start for the City the next day. Kitty he charged to stay away from the Peyton House during his absence. It would be a chance for a little vacation, and do her good. She was looking a little pale recently, and he thought she ought to take care of herself. In his own mind, which he kept to himself, he did not want her to subject herself to the influences of the haunted house during his absence.

His tone was solicitous and even a bit proprietary. At first Kitty half resented this assumption of looking after her, but found herself acquiescing the next moment. It seemed quite natural after all. They had become so closely associated in the last few months, and Graves was always so courteous and sincere that it was impossible to stand upon any formal dignity. Besides,

her interest in the great experiment had become a fixed idea; she was now a part of it and couldn't imagine anything different. Her association with Graves had grown to seem just as permanent.

III

All this time she had kept the great secret to herself. Melly and her husband knew nothing more than that Mr. Graves was working out some scientific experiment in radio activity, and as neither had any interest in science and research work, their curiosity was not in the least whetted. What Graves was aiming at, Kitty locked religiously in her own bosom, a solemn confidence in her sole keeping. She was proud to be the repository of the great secret, which wild horses could not have dragged from her.

Melly suspected many things, but these were purely feminine, not the least scientific in their bearings. She was convinced that Kitty liked—laying a special emphasis on the word—Graves immensely, and she hoped that Kitty was about to find, or had found, *the* man. This was of more concern to her than all the science in the universe. This surmise, which soon became a fact in Melly's ready imagination, she confided to James, Sr., who in masculine fashion, accepted it as a feminine fancy to be largely discounted, and let it go at that.

Kitty, as was natural, had talked a lot to Melly about Graves, and Melly, as was natural, drew conclusions that lay nearest to her wishes. Melly hinted much to Kitty, but Kitty declined the suggested confidence, for Kitty had never so much as dared to admit to herself that her interest in Mr. Graves was other than purely business and scientific. Indeed Kitty kept her heart hidden from her own scrutiny. She was afraid to look into it. To discern it would have seemed to her a betrayal of her duty to Mr. Graves, and a violation of that business code, which she had fashioned for herself ever since she had set out to be an independent woman.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I

THE second day after Graves' departure, Kitty received a telegram from him.

"Come to New York to-morrow. Take ten-thirty train. Will meet you at the Grand Central. Important."

It set her all aflutter. She surmised that the important matter had to do with the development of the new film. But why should Graves want her to come to New York? It must be important, or Graves would not have sent it. He was not the sort of man to do useless things.

She showed the message to Melly, who immediately drew her own conclusions in keeping with her pet idea that Kitty and Graves were on the way to the house beautiful, which, of course, was the matrimonial mansion, wherein she and James dwelt in such happy content. Not that the event was imminent, but that things were pointing that way. Melly's mood was altogether domestic and she linked everything with it. She

wouldn't be surprised, so she said to herself, that the telegram whose burden was important, related to the one thing that was the most important of all things.

Kitty herself felt that the telegram was altogether about the film. But what had that especially to do with her? She was greatly pleased to think that Graves wanted her to share in his triumph, if that indeed were the meaning of his telegram. But she couldn't altogether spell out its significance, and kept puzzling and puzzling over it all the way to the City.

By the time she arrived at the Grand Central, she was tense with curiosity. All the way up the ramp—for her train had come in on the lower level—the slow-moving crowd retarded her progress, for she was all eagerness to learn why Graves had sent for her. Graves was awaiting her just outside the gate. His face lighted up when he saw her, but after he greeted her, she observed that he became very solemn. Her spirits sank. Had the picture, after all, proved disappointing, and what in the world could he want with her in the City?

"I have a taxi waiting," he said. "We will go straight to the laboratory, but I want to talk to you before I show you the result."

His words only mystified Kitty the more. He was so very serious. He in turn, after the way of his sex,

took it for granted that it was not necessary to explain what he knew very well, but what was blank ignorance in the mind of his companion, who was on pins and needles waiting. Not a word did he utter as they threaded their way through the crowds to the street. It was tantalizing.

"Well, Mr. Sober-Sides," Kitty ventured playfully, out of sheer desire to relieve the tension, after they were seated in the taxi, "what in the world is the matter? I am on needles and pins to know what has happened and you don't tell me a word. You don't seem a bit happy. Has anything gone wrong?"

"Nothing at all," answered Graves. "The film has turned out astonishingly well. I am very well satisfied."

"But you don't seem a bit pleased. You should be dancing a hornpipe at your success, and here you are as glum as if you were going to a funeral."

Graves did not immediately respond. He gazed out of the window in an abstracted way. Kitty began to feel acutely distressed. Something was amiss after all. She had never seen Graves in this sort of a mood before. Her spirits fell. She waited in silence.

"Did it ever strike you, Miss Peyton," he said, turning to her, "that your name and that of the Peyton House are the same?"

Kitty sat staring at him. What in the world could he mean, and why was he so serious?

"Why, yes, it did occur to me, but merely as a coincidence. I never gave it a second thought. Why do you ask?"

"I believe it is more than a coincidence," said Graves. "A very strange thing has happened. But before I explain, let me ask you a question; did any of your family ever live in Claxville?"

"Why, not that I know, I never heard so from anybody. My father and mother both died when I was very young. I don't remember my father at all, and my mother only vaguely. I can only recall that she was an invalid and kept to her bed most of the time. I lived with an aunt, my father's sister. She never spoke to me about the family, and she, too, died when I was a child, and I was at boarding school since about my tenth year."

Graves paused for a moment, and then laid his hand upon hers and said: "I want to prepare you for a great surprise, and save you from a possible shock when you see the picture projected. First, let me tell you that the film has developed even beyond my expectations. I have the secret and it is an ugly one. Second, imagine my astonishment to see you in it, or what seemed to be you, in it. That's the reason I sent for you."

Kitty was too astonished to reply at first.

"But I don't understand," she managed to say at last, "how could I be in the picture?"

"Not you, but some one so like you that I could scarcely believe my own eyes. I never saw a stronger likeness between two people. You are in some way, I feel sure, connected with the people whose tragedy—for it is a dreadful tragedy—we have been able to visualize. I understand now why you were so sympathetic with the vibrations in the old house. You must be of the same blood as the people of whose grim story we have managed to secure a fragment."

Kitty was greatly agitated at this revelation.

"Perhaps you'd better not look at it," Graves suggested.

"No," she answered decisively, "I must see it. All the more, if I seem concerned in it."

II

They had now arrived at the laboratory, a private institution built and maintained by Graves and his scientific confrère named Archibald Allison. Graves had made money out of scientific patents and Allison had inherited money. Both had been at college together and were of scientific temperament. They were deeply interested in radio activity and devoted their time and their means to its zealous pursuit. Graves

had hit on the theory he had been working out in the Peyton House and Allison was enthusiastically seconding him in the City laboratory. It was Allison who had practically worked out the chemistry of the right sort of film.

Graves introduced Kitty to Allison.

"The resemblance is astonishing," the latter remarked as he gazed at Kitty.

"Your resemblance to the lady in the picture," explained Graves.

They proceeded at once to the projecting room. The electric light was switched off, Allison had already loaded the projector with the film, and he proceeded to operate the machine. Graves drew his chair alongside Kitty's.

"All right, Allison," he said.

Kitty felt her heart beating fast. She reached over and put her hand on Graves' arm with a tense grip.

"Remember, it's only a picture after all," he murmured.

The motor whirred and the light was flashed on the screen. For the first few moments what seemed to be a suffused mist was visible, then indistinct shapes began to form slowly on an empty background. It was at first like an ordinary picture against a black drop, with the difference that the figures did not stand out so strongly as in silhouette. Their outlines were blurred and only gradually became sharper.

Two men, both young, sat at a table opposite each other talking excitedly. On the table was a kerosene lamp beyond the circle of whose light was a vaguely illumined shadow, which shaded away into an indistinct gloom. One man was heavily built, the other slender. The picture showed rather faintly, but fairly distinct. As it went on, it came out stronger and clearer.

The slender man suddenly rose with clenched hands. He leaned over to the other, his face contorted with anger. He was speaking with furious emphasis, and shaking his fist as if threatening. The other rose also, his face set, and shook his head as if refusing something.

Each then moved around the table toward the other. The heavy-set man laughed derisively. He was much the cooler of the two. This seemed to infuriate the other more than ever. Suddenly, he struck at the heavier man, who parried the blow and closed in on his opponent, throwing his arms around him and pinioning him.

The slender man struggled furiously and finally succeeded in freeing himself. He drew back panting for a moment, rage convulsing his features, and then launched himself against the other with a spring like a tiger's. The latter staggered back with the sudden impact. The slender man had managed to seize his

opponent by the throat with a vise-like grip. As they struggled they swayed against the table, which tipped dangerously, the lamp on it almost toppling over. The heavy man was endeavoring desperately to break the strangling hold. The veins stood out on his forehead like whipcords.

He was being pushed back over the table. To save himself he put one arm down on it. In an instant the arm was raised, a long, slender knife gleaming in his hand, which he had evidently picked up from the table. With a swift downward thrust he drove the knife to the hilt in the back of the slender man, who instantly crumpled up and fell to the floor. The other stood over the fallen man, a look of surprise on his face and then of consternation. He shuddered and gazed around the room and threw the knife on the table with a gesture of abhorrence. A copious stream of blood was trickling from the prostrate body, and formed a dark pool on the floor.

The victor stood for a moment as if dazed, and then looked up with a start as a woman entered upon the scene from the direction on the right, beyond the circle of the lamp rays. It might be surmised that she had just entered the room.

Kitty gasped, for the woman might have been herself, with the exception that her dress was old-fashioned now, such as was worn over a generation ago.

The woman's face bore an expression of tragic horror, her eyes staring and her lips apart. She gazed down at the body and then at the man, who had lifted his hands to his eyes as if to shut out the scene.

The woman advanced slowly until she came to the crumpled-up body, when she sank on her knees beside it. Presently she swayed and fell prostrate across it as if in a swoon, her white dress staining slowly with blood.

Roused by her fall, the man withdrew his hands from before his eyes, and looked down upon the two forms at his feet. He was trembling violently and his face twitched. Stooping, he picked up the woman in his arms and carried her out of the room, stumbling as he went.

The lamp on the table began to dim as if the oil in it were giving out. The light flickered and flared up several times and then gradually died out, leaving the room in complete darkness.

Allison shut off the motor and switched on the electric lights.

III

Kitty was in a state of nerves after viewing the picture. She was shaking as if she had an ague and it was several minutes before she was able to compose

herself in some degree. Her own seeming appearance in the terrible scene as a participant had startled her beyond measure, but more than that she felt an acutely sympathetic familiarity with the tragedy enacted in the shadows on the screen. She was groping about vainly striving to get hold of some thread or clew to the horrible nightmare she had just witnessed. It was like a recurrent dream which one remembers to have seen enacted in sleep, but vainly tries to recall in waking moments. It was a tantalizing and baffling feeling; she seemed to know and yet she did not know.

As soon as her agitation had subsided and she was sufficiently herself, she explained all this to Graves. Allison had unloaded the projecting machine and left the room.

"I understand it perfectly," Graves said. "And it leads me more than ever to the conclusion that you have some connection with the people who lived in the Peyton House. You personally know nothing of what occurred, but your heredity, which I am assuming, disposes you to respond readily to any impression transmitted to you from your forbears, especially under violent circumstances, such as the picture has revealed to us. The fact that you do so instantly and fully respond confirms my supposition. Your relation to what we have seen puts a personal equation in my problem and gives me great anxiety."

Kitty looked up in surprise.

"I mean," he answered, interpreting her silent question, "that I must solve the problem of your relation to the tragedy and clear it up."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I

KITTY returned to Claxville that same afternoon, fagged out and with a raging headache.

Graves went back to the laboratory after he had seen her off at the station. Allison was jubilant over the success of the experiment. Graves, too, was in high spirits, dashed, however, by the thought of Kitty's possible relation to the tragedy he had dragged to light as the result of his experiment. To Allison, Kitty's likeness to the woman in the picture was a mere coincidence. He was a matter-of-fact gentleman, to whom romance was sheer nonsense. Graves' interest in Kitty awakened no response in his purely scientific soul which was entirely lost upon the latter, who sat with corrugated brow, as he pulled viciously at his pipe.

"I don't believe it is a mere coincidence. The same name, the startling likeness, and other things that come under my observation, as I look back upon the past four months, point to a connection, which I am convinced can be traced, if proper steps are taken. I think

it's up to me, under the circumstances, to ferret it out. At any rate, I'm going to make a try." Allison said nothing. "Isn't it strange how things in life work out?" Graves went on reflectively, gazing up at the smoke cloud from his pipe, that hung over his head. "Here I select that old ramshackle house in Claxville because it is said to be haunted, and this young woman comes along, out of a clear sky as it were, to act as private secretary for me, and we find her bound up in some way with that gruesome thing we have made those old walls tell to us."

Allison shrugged his shoulders. "It may seem strange, but it isn't scientific; it is sheer romance. How do you get that way anyhow? I never discovered any romance in your make-up before." There was a tinge of banter in Allison's voice.

"That's just where you are all wrong, Archy. Science is half romance. It's one-half imagination and the other half, hard digging into hypotheses. A man without imagination isn't worth a tuppence in scientific work. The man who worked out that hypothesis of the stored up vibrations was a romanticist to the *nth* degree. He was a novelist who wrote a dozen or more romances. It was his romantic theory which gave us our clew. And with apologies to you, if you please, you and I were romantic enough to stake our efforts on his imaginary foundation."

"All right, if you will have it so," laughed Allison,

"but we are getting away from the question which so concerns you just now. What do you propose to do about Miss Peyton and her problem, as you call it? You will find romance a much more elusive problem than science. Too many human elements in it beyond accurate calculation."

Graves puffed at his pipe for a moment.

"Well, I'm determined to get to the bottom of it. I'll never rest satisfied until I do. Given some data to build on, and we can then form an hypothesis. After all, that's just what we do in science. What I propose to do is first to get the data. I propose to start some inquiries into her history and that of the Peyton House. That will be the beginning. First of all, I'm going to get some good detective agency."

"Bunglers all," declared Allison. "Clever detectives figure only in fiction, where the ground is all plotted out for them in the writer's imagination. Your detective in actual life is generally a thick-headed guesser, who goes stupidly nosing around for trivial clues, but mostly misses the obvious things under his nose. Even your clever man in the game finds life so complex and at such cross purposes that he becomes like a kitten with a ball of yarn. He mixes things worse than they were. Frankly, I have no faith in detective agencies."

"Phew!" retorted Graves, "but you are a thorough-going skeptic, Archy. At any rate I have to make a beginning. When we are sick, we consult a doctor,

when we want a legal opinion we go to a lawyer. Why not go to a professional detective when you want to trace up some hidden event? That's his business. Have you any alternative to suggest?"

"Look here, George, are you really set upon this quest?"

"Yes, I am in dead earnest," replied Graves.

"Then I have a suggestion to make. I believe it is a better bet than any detective agency. Do you remember how Tommy Agnew at college was so bitten by the Sherlock Holmes stories that we used to poke fun at him? We nicknamed him Sherly-Ho. If you remember, he even wrote a thesis on the Sherlock Holmes method and submitted it for his A.B. examination. Professor Gilkin refused to accept it because it was too frivolous a subject, much to Tommy's chagrin and undying contempt for old Gilkin. Well, after Tommy left college he went 'detecting,' not in a professional way, but as an amateur. I understand that he really did some clever work at the time in a quiet way. When the War broke out he enlisted and succeeded in getting into the Secret Service. After the War was over he went to Russia as a secret-service man for the Government. He posed as an English newspaper correspondent and actually wrote for a London paper. But the Soviet got on to him and duly clapped him in jail. The British Government brought pressure to bear and the Soviet

released him as they were anxious for British recognition. Tommy returned to this country some two months ago, and is now in New York. I have seen a good deal of him lately. He has been telling me some wonderful tales of his experiences, and I really believe he knows his job. He has a good head on his shoulders, though to look at him you wouldn't suspect it. He is still in Government service and is on a six months' leave. Why not get him on this job of yours? He loves sleuthing as much as ever. What do you say?"

"All right," exclaimed Graves. "I remember Tommy very well, though I never took much stock in his detective theories. This is much better than placing the affair in the hands of a total stranger. We will take Tommy into our confidence and put him under the bond of friendship. When can you reach him?"

"Right away. He's staying at the Olympic Club. I'll phone him."

"Come over right away," was Tommy's response. "I will sure be glad to see old Graves again—that's what we used to call him at college—you remember, and how is the old duffer anyway? I have heard of him now and then, and understand he's a distinguished scientist now. Always thought he'd make something out of himself. I'll have a little something on the side, when you get here, in which to toast auld lang syne."

II

Inside of a half hour Graves and Allison were closeted with Tommy Agnew in the latter's room at the Olympic Club. Tommy was a short, rather stockily built man with a cherubic countenance, his upper lip adorned with a caterpillar mustache which made him look even more innocent than the bland physiognomy that nature had bestowed on him. "My face is my fortune," Tommy was wont to say. He was the very opposite of the Sherlock Holmes type.

"You see," Tommy was saying to his two visitors after they had broached the object of their errand, "nobody in the Lord's world would take me for a sleuth. Ostensibly I am just a good-natured sort of chap who picks up friends easily and chatters a lot. That's part of my method. I give myself away constantly and they always take me from my front," and Tommy grinned. "It's the most valuable asset in my kit. My innocence and my talkativeness have saved me in many a tight place, both in the War and in Russia. When occasion demands it, I can play the boob to perfection."

Graves looked critically at Tommy and believed him. He was the last man in the world whose appearance would indicate seriousness or shrewdness.

Tommy sensed Graves' scrutinizing glance and laughed.

"Yes, George, old boy, you are thinking just right. Everybody sizes me up just as you are doing. I have a jolly, but negative exterior. It took me a long time to convince the Government people that I was worth a tinker's dam in the game. General Allan, my Chief, used to say to me: 'Agnew, you certainly look the goldarndest fool I ever laid my eyes on. I suppose that's the reason you get by so often!' And I would chuckle with great satisfaction, for old Allan looked just like a Sherlock Holmes and really believed himself one. When I was a youngster, I thought Sherlock Holmes a wonder. Now I wonder why I thought so. Any one who would see Sherlock Holmes on the street, would say, there goes a sleuth. It's the conventional idea, and gives the whole works away. And that's the trouble with the ilk. They look and try to look their job. Now the first principle in real sleuthing is to look anything but a sleuth. I'll wager you a dollar that I can walk along the street and point out to you every plainclothes man we meet, or go into any hotel and point out to you every house detective they have. Detectives might just as well wear red caps like the porters in the railroad stations."

Graves and Allison laughed at Tommy's facetious indictment of professional sleuthing.

"And now what is precisely the affair in which you wish to enlist the services of yours truly?" asked Tommy.

"It's of a very confidential nature," said Graves.

"Naturally," answered Tommy dryly. "Detection must be about secret matters; otherwise you would advertise and make a better job of it."

"But it involves much more than the objective which I have in view," said Graves. "It's an intricate affair and goes back a considerable time."

"Well, there must be a beginning. Let's have it."

"Just a moment," injected Allison. "I think the best way to introduce the subject to Tommy would be to show him the picture at the laboratory. I think that showing him the picture first might save a lot of preliminary explanation and start him off on the right foot at once." Graves thought for a moment and then assented. "Very well, let us adjourn to the laboratory." Tommy made no comment. He was too experienced in the sleuthing game to interfere at the very start with a client's way of introducing his own affair.

III

Arrived at the laboratory, they proceeded at once to the projecting room. Tommy asked no questions. He naturally wondered what in the world a motion picture could have to do with it all, and what Graves and Allison had to do with motion pictures, but kept his mind open. Curiosity was an element he had long

thrown out of his kit as it might prejudice conclusions, and lead off on a wrong scent.

He and Graves took chairs as Allison loaded and adjusted the machine. The picture was duly run off. Tommy was interested, but remained reticent. Its gruesome character was unpleasant but absorbing.

After the picture had been run off and the lights switched on again, Tommy turned to Graves.

"That was a wonderfully acted picture. I never saw more perfect acting in my life. But the lighting was rotten, simply rotten."

"It wasn't acted at all, Tommy. It wasn't even lighted. It was taken from the actual life, or rather it was taken by a scientific process which Allison and I have worked out, from a stored-up picture of the actual occurrence over thirty years ago."

Tommy looked at Graves and then at Allison with as much of an incredulous stare as Tommy ever suffered his cherubic countenance to assume.

"Look here, boys," he said, "I've run up against some funny things in my checkered career. But frankly, Graves, your statement might be worthy of a lunatic asylum if I hadn't supreme faith in your sanity."

"I quite understand your incredulity, Tommy. But what you have seen is the actual result of a scientific process which, as I have just said, Allison and I have been working out for a year past. Let me explain,"

and Graves proceeded to narrate to Tommy, step by step, all that led up to the taking of the picture of the Peyton House tragedy; the theory of the magazine writer, namely, the idea that violent psychic emotions are stored up in the environment in which they are given off, and held there as in a charged battery, and his complementary idea, now that radio activity had made such enormous advances in recent years, that a motion picture might be made of what had occurred by devising a camera, which could be attuned to the original wave-lengths; his selection of the Peyton House for his experiment, and finally, how Miss Peyton had become his private secretary. Allison thought Miss Peyton's relation to the affair was mere coincidence. But to him, Graves, it was more than that. It was up to him to investigate and find out. He wanted Tommy to undertake the task.

Tommy's imperturbability was for once shaken. He listened like a man in a trance.

"That's the uncanniest tale I ever heard," he exclaimed when Graves had finished. "Uncanny and yet scientific, ghosts and yet no ghosts, and Miss Peyton's likeness to the woman in the picture! The radio is wonderful and this beats it all hollow."

"It's only the extension of the radio principle," said Graves.

"I understand," said Tommy in a tone of wonder, "and where is this thing going to stop? After a while

you fellows will tune in one of your instruments and snatch our most secret thoughts out of our brains."

"Perhaps," remarked Allison. "Science is on the way to that feat. We have only begun."

"Good-by then to sleuthing. Othello's occupation will be gone," grinned Tommy. "But let's get down to business. What you want, Graves, is to run this story to its roots and find out if possible what connection remotely this young lady, who so resembles the woman in the picture, has to the actors in the tragedy?"

Graves nodded.

"You have taken no steps yet?" Tommy inquired.

"Nothing at all. It was Allison's suggestion that we should place the affair entirely in your hands."

"Good," ejaculated Tommy. "Do you know anything of the history of the Peyton House?"

"Only what I have told you."

"And the young lady, Miss Peyton?"

"I have told you everything I know. She knows no more than we do. She is just as puzzled as we are and quite upset. She shows marked psychic affinities with the influences active in the Peyton House. It is these that lead me to believe—beside her astonishing likeness to the woman in the picture—that she has some remote relation to the tragedy you have just witnessed on the screen." Tommy appeared entirely indifferent to this last statement. The psychic was entirely out of his line.

"Who owns the house?"

"A man by the name of Tetherington. He lives in Claxville, but spends most of his time in New York, I understand."

"Know anything about him?" asked Tommy.

"No, I don't," answered Graves, "except that he is said to be a rich man."

"How long has he owned the property?"

"I don't know."

"I see," said Tommy. "Your knowledge amounts to practical ignorance. So much the better. I like to start with a clean sheet. There are no suggested clues to clutter up the prospect. Clews are more than often false scents. Frankly, I'd rather gather my own threads than have them suggested to me."

Tommy sat reflecting for a while.

"Here's the program," he said, coming out of his reverie. "I'll be in Claxville in a day or two to nose around. Remember, you are not to know me, George, nor I you, should we meet in public. I'll see you under cover at night, for I want to go over the Peyton House. But should we meet under other circumstances, we are strangers. If you should hear that I have maligned you," and Tommy grinned, "bear up under the calumny, my boy. Anything can happen in the romantic game of sleuthing. But your scientific stunt beats romance all hollow. Before I go I want to say, you have knocked Tommy Agnew clean out of his

bearings with that picture and its amazing story. I'm going back to my room for a little private consultation with myself." And Tommy took his departure.

"You know, Tommy inspires me with great confidence," said Graves, "in spite of his flippant manner, he impresses me as having considerable reserve force. At first his appearance disappointed me, but after this talk I believe he has great capabilities. What does Uncle Sam think of him?"

"One of the best ever," answered Allison. "The Department, so Johnson, the Chief, told me, classes him Super A1. You can rest assured that if anything can be ferreted out, Tommy will do it. That's the way they speak of him."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I

THAT same evening Kitty returned to Claxville tired out and with a splitting headache. Melly was devoured with curiosity to know what had happened in New York. What did the telegram mean? Why had Mr. Graves sent for Kitty?, etc., etc. Kitty evaded as best she could. Mr. Graves had succeeded in perfecting an experiment which he wanted to show her demonstrated in the laboratory. Scientists, you know, were a bit vain over their successes, and it was natural for Mr. Graves to want Kitty to know the result of his labors, in which she, Kitty, was also naturally interested, since she had in her small way helped to further the work along.

"Umph!" ejaculated Melly, with a latent skepticism in her voice. "So that was it. Well, I don't see that that was much to make such a fuss about. What sort of an experiment was it, Kitty?" Melly searched Kitty's countenance with inquisitorial scrutiny.

"Oh, just a demonstration of a new method of applying wave-lengths in radio activity. It would be hard

to explain, unless one were something of a scientist, which I am not," answered Kitty in as casual a tone as she could muster. "But I'm awfully tired, Melly, and have a bad headache. Bed is the best place for me just now."

"You poor dear," said Melly. "I don't mean to pump you. You do look wretchedly tired and white. Go right to bed and I will bring your dinner up to you." And Kitty dragged herself to bed, feeling very wretched indeed.

II

Kitty was thankful that Melly did not pursue her questioning further, and Melly perforce had to remain satisfied with Kitty's vague answers. Though consumed with curiosity, she had sense enough to realize that Kitty was in no condition for confidences. Melly knew just as well as if she had been told that there was something besides a scientific interest in Kitty's trip to the City, and which Kitty was glad to let rest at that. Kitty was evading and Melly sensed it plainly enough, but was willing to bide her time. James, Sr., was not an inquisitive person and as Melly vouchsafed no information, he asked no questions. He greatly respected a woman who could keep a secret, and it wasn't any of his business anyway, and what

wasn't his business, James Sr., never bothered about. So a discreet reticence was maintained about Kitty's sudden trip in response to Graves' telegram. James Sr., didn't ask and Melly, not knowing, had no information to give.

A night message to Kitty from Graves came the next morning to the effect that Graves would be detained in the City; he was finishing some important experiments with Allison; meantime Kitty was free to take a good rest. Indeed, he was very urgent upon this point. The message also said that steps had been taken to begin the investigation of which he had spoken.

But Kitty was in no mood for idling. She was too much upset to sit holding her hands and brooding. She would go up to the Peyton House and finish some transcribing from the latest notes she had taken on Graves' book. The work would be something of a surcease from the agitated thoughts, which had kept running through her mind ever since the startling revelation of the picture in the laboratory. The horrible tragedy she had witnessed on the screen, and in which she seemed concerned, kept recurring and recurring to her mind's eye until she felt obsessed by it. She could not rest with that hanging over her. Better get to work and get rid of the nightmare.

Up to this her days had gone on a fairly even tenor

with the ordinary minor ups and downs of a young woman in her position in life, and now, thrust upon her without warning, was a sudden and strange problem. She stood face to face with a terrible mystery and complicated with this, though not definitely and clearly formulated in her own consciousness was a new relation which she had never experienced before, that relation which had gradually grown up between Graves and herself. It was vague to her, for she never so much as directly faced it; nevertheless it stood out in the background to the effect that Graves had become an integral part of her world.

It was in this disturbed frame of mind that she set out to go up to the Peyton House the second day after her return from the City. It was a crystal bright day. The sky was without a cloud. The air was sharp with a keen northwest wind and the winter sun, though not high, in a dazzling blue sky was as brilliant as if it were midsummer. It was an exhilarating atmosphere, but Kitty was too busy with her own thoughts to heed externals.

It was only when she was within a hundred feet of the House that she awakened from her absorbed introspection to the conscious realization of her surroundings. Although the day was unusually bright, and she was still a good hundred feet away in full sunshine, it seemed as if she felt even there the chill and the

gloom of the old building enfolding her. It was like a sinister aura emanating from its decayed walls. Never before had the old house stood out so vividly to her in its forlornness. It rose bleak and gaunt before her, a square building unrelieved in the severity of its lines save for the great portico thrown across its front, with its uncompromising row of austere pillars rising to the top of the building and supporting a severe pediment bare of ornament. Pillars and pediment were deeply weather-stained and with only a reminiscence of paint. The windows of the three stories stared blankly out from the shadowed recess of the heavily projecting portico. The broad flight of crumbling stone steps leading up some five or six feet from the ground level were as dilapidated as the rest of the front. Time and weather had made havoc everywhere. The old mansion stood out in the bright sunlight bleak and bare, a blot of desolation and neglect in the landscape.

Kitty paused and shuddered at its aspect. For the first time, as she approached it, she became aware of its sinister appearance. It seemed in the fetid grip of decay and uncanny mystery, a fitting symbol of the hidden horror whose secret it housed. The bright sunshine, which bathed it, seemed to make it all the more desolate and forbidding. It was a symbol, not of life, but of death.

When she reached the front door, she paused again. There was a chill in the shadow of the portico, though the sunlight poured down in a brilliant flood just beyond. A heavy silence brooded around, broken only by the creaking hinges as the door swung inward to her push. As the door closed behind her, a somber gloom enveloped her, for the hall was lighted only from a remote skylight at the top of the house, whose distant illumination dimly penetrated to the main floor. Kitty stood irresolute, for though the scene was perfectly familiar to her, a sense of strangeness and remoteness came over her. It seemed as if she had never been here before. The very silence was full of whispers and every angle and turn, alive with shadows. She shut her eyes and argued with herself.

"Silly, silly, I won't allow myself to be frightened. I'm as foolish as Aunt Beulah; it's just my own imagination." She would just best that old imagination, as Aunt Beulah put it.

She deliberately took off her gloves and folding them, put them in her hand bag. That helped; it brought her back to the commonplace and her nerves relaxed a bit. She walked with deliberate slowness over to the office door and pushed it open. A flood of light came into the hall, for the sun was streaming brightly through the two office windows.

Closing the door she gave a sigh of relief. The

office was radiant with the inpouring sunshine and even cozy with the familiar furnishings, her desk and Graves' desk, the file cases, the pictures on the walls—for Graves had placed on the walls some rather good prints and several excellent copies of good paintings, one a Sistine Madonna, and the other a cozy Dutch interior by Memling. The cozy Memling—the interior of a Dutch kitchen—soothed her nerves, and the Sistine Madonna with her sublimely serene countenance and the face of the Christ Child with its grave innocence and supernal wisdom, seemed to shed down peace and tranquillity. On Graves' desk was his tobacco jar, and beside it one of his pipes. It was all vastly soothing and Kitty felt that she was herself again. Taking off her wraps and hat she hung them on the rack, and then went to the mirror to adjust her hair. What a goose she had been, out in the hall. Everything was so homelike here. She felt peaceful and content. The perturbation of the last forty-eight hours subsided and her mind was easier. And now to work!

She sat down to her desk and opened the top drawer for her notebook. She put her hand mechanically in the drawer, feeling around for her notes where she usually kept them. She turned the entire contents out. The notes were not there. Then the contents of the second drawer, and finally the third drawer. They were in neither.

That was strange. Where could she have placed them? Could Mr. Graves have taken them? But that was absurd; he had no knowledge of shorthand. Nevertheless she searched through his desk to no avail. Could he have possibly taken them to the City? That also seemed a foolish supposition. She became perplexed and worried. The notes were most important, as they were from his dictation of the new method of his discovery. Who could have taken them, and why? Nobody besides herself, Graves and Allison knew of the experiment being made in the Peyton House. She looked carefully around the room. There was no evidence of anything having been disturbed. Everything was just as she had left it. The windows were bolted. She had let herself into the house with her latchkey and the front door, too, had been locked.

With feverish anxiety she searched the files. The notes were not there. Her distress now became panic. She ran into the hall and examined the lock of the front door. There was no evidence of its having been tampered with. She went around to every window on the first floor. They were all securely locked. She then went outside and circled around the house to see if there was any evidence of an entrance forced by the way of the basement. Everything was intact. She then went to the outhouse and knocked on the door, thinking to interrogate Rastus and Aunt Beulah, but

no one responded. The two old servants were no doubt taking advantage of Graves' and her absence to take a holiday.

She went back to the office and searched again with no result. The notes were gone. It was exasperating and mysterious. In her anxiety she had lost the sense of oppression and fear that had assailed her on coming into the house.

There was but one thing to do and that was to communicate with Graves at once. Hastily putting on her coat and hat she set out for home. She would phone the laboratory from there, as there was no phone in the Peyton House. Graves would not tolerate a phone. It only led to interruption.

As Kitty hurried down the road from the house, a face from behind one of the windows of the third floor was looking down on her retreating form. The same face had been peering out at her when she came up to the house. All the time she was in the house a silent figure was standing at the top of the stairs on the third floor listening and waiting. When the front door closed, as she went out, the figure went to the window and watched her until she reached the road below. It then came back and cautiously and slowly descended the stairs, opened the front door and went out. But instead of following Kitty's footsteps sidled cautiously to the edge of the portico, jumped

the four or five feet to the ground and hurried to the sheltering cover of the shrubbery, and disappeared.

III

It was a very agitated Kitty who out of breath at last reached home, for it seemed an eternity before she arrived, and hastened to call the laboratory in the City. It was Allison who answered. She asked for Mr. Graves. She heard Allison calling Graves, "some one in a hurry."

In a few minutes Graves was on the phone. Kitty fairly moaned out her story of the discovery of the loss of the notes.

"Yes, yes," Graves' voice kept saying over the phone, as she rehearsed her story. "I'm glad you phoned me right away," when she had finished. "But first of all stop worrying over it. That won't do any good. It may not be so bad after all. Just remember that my formulæ are not in your notes. I always put them in myself after you have transcribed the notes, and they are the real key to the process. I can't imagine who would steal them, and while whoever has taken them could find out what we are doing from the notes, without the formulæ they will not know how to do what we have done. It is not such a serious matter as you imagine, and please don't be over-concerned. I

will take immediate steps to see what may be done to find out who may have purloined them, and why. Meanwhile, don't go back to the office until I return. I will be up this evening."

It was some relief to Kitty to learn that the notes without the formulæ would minimize their value to the thief, but it puzzled her immensely that any one should seek possession of them. Some one must have got an inkling of what was going on at the Peyton House, and some one must have an interest in the work—for what reason? She kept trying to conjecture in vain, and was on the verge of tears.

Fortunately no one was around to overhear while she was phoning, as Melly was out. Though Graves' statement that the formulæ were not in the notes had helped to reassure her somewhat, she was still greatly distressed.

Her own possible connection with the Peyton mystery had come like a thunderbolt from the blue, and now the discovery of the loss of the notes on top of the terrible revelation of the picture sucked from the musty walls of the old mansion weighed upon her spirits. Never before in her life had the world taken on so serious an aspect. The loss of her position in the City by the death of Hawkins, had for the time being plunged her into the depths. How trivial that seemed now! That was an occurrence amid the vicis-

situdes of a business experience, and might happen to anybody. But after it had come what seemed a brighter and happier existence in the feeling of security in her new position as Graves' private secretary, where she had been very happy. It gave her a sense of confidence and permanence in Graves' friendship, and the pleasant camaraderie that had come with it, had filled her days with a happiness she had never experienced before.

But life had now taken a sudden and dark turn. The road that had been running so straight suddenly branched off to unknown vistas full of strange shapes and confused prospects. Whither was it leading? Graves' notion that she was in some way antecedently involved in the Peyton mystery, and his determination to run it to earth, somehow filled her with vague apprehension and now the loss of the notes added to her fears. It was like a hideous nightmare. Her heart sank within her. If Graves were only here now. How she missed his quiet confidence!

There was some strange mystery in it all that she could not understand. She intensely longed for Graves' return. She would persuade him to drop the investigation into her possible connection with the Peyton mystery. She could not formulate to herself the reason of her dread but it terrified her. It foreboded some evil thing which the theft of the notes magnified tenfold in her imagination.

When Kitty's phone message came to Graves, he and Allison were together in the laboratory office. After Kitty had finished, Graves told Allison the story of the purloining of the notes. Both were startled and rather upset by the strange news.

"But who in thunder would know of the notes, and who would want them anyway?" was Allison's immediate comment.

Their first surmise that perhaps a scientific rival had in some way learned the nature of their investigations, and wanted to find out their secret, was possible, but highly improbable.

"I don't think so," argued Graves. "There is not the remotest chance of any one getting an inkling of our purpose, or our methods. Not a soul knows anything of what is going on but ourselves and Miss Peyton. Rastus and Aunt Beulah have no more idea of the character of my work than they have of the Einstein Theory of Relativity, and could no more impart it than they could demonstrate the sum of the square of the hypotenuse. They are both faithful and loyal. I would trust them as I would myself. No, the notes have not been stolen for any scientific value there may be in them."

"Well, for what then?" queried Allison.

"I don't know, unless—" answered Graves ponderingly, as he paused between puffs of his inevitable pipe.

"Unless what?" thrust in Allison, who of the two seemed the more concerned.

"Unless," went on Graves, "unless some one has an interest other than scientific in finding out."

"Good Lord, Graves, but that is an even flimsier conjecture. Some more romance which your apt imagination has conjured up. Who in the world would care a tuppence about it all unless some scientific chap trying to steal our thunder?"

"I don't know, I don't know," Graves reiterated meditatively. "My notion is a mere conjecture, I admit, but some one is interested, that is evident, and whoever it is, steals the one thing that could possibly give him any clew to the nature of my work. I am blessed if I can fathom it, but I have got a hunch that it has something to do with the tragedy we have managed to wrest from those old walls."

"I don't quite understand you—you surely haven't any absurd notion that there is anything preternatural in this last occurrence?"

Graves laughed. "Not a bit, Archy. My hunch is simply that some one has a perfectly human curiosity—a flesh and blood interest—to know what I am about in the Peyton House."

"That is just as far-fetched as your first conjecture."

"Take it for what it is worth," said Graves.

"I'd like to have a talk with Tommy Agnew about

it; I'll phone him. Tommy is level-headed and practical."

Graves reached for the phone and called up Tommy at the Club. The answer came back that Mr. Agnew had departed and left no address.

"I'll go back to Claxville this evening," said Graves.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I

IT was noon when Kitty telephoned the laboratory. Melly came in shortly after and found Kitty in the sitting room so absorbed in her thoughts that she scarcely noticed Melly's entrance.

"Why, Kitty, you are back early," Melly remarked.

"Yes," Kitty responded laconically and lapsed into silence. Melly looked sharply at her.

"A penny for your thoughts. What are you dreaming about?" Kitty roused herself.

"Oh, just thinking a bit about things in general."

"See here, Kitty," said Melly, squaring herself in front of Kitty seated dejectedly on a sofa and looking very forlorn indeed, "what's the matter? You're pale and upset! Ever since your trip to the City you haven't been yourself."

"I'm horribly worried, though I suppose I'm silly about it. Some notes that Mr. Graves dictated to me are missing. They are important and I know he will be very upset about it. Oh, dear, how could it have happened?" and Kitty dejectedly flung herself on the sofa and began to cry.

"You're a goose, Kitty, to worry yourself. They are no doubt mislaid and will turn up again. Stop worrying about it. We will have luncheon in a few minutes and you can go back to the office and make another search."

Kitty outwardly assented to Melly's suggestion, and was glad Melly did not pursue the subject further and evidently laid little stress upon the incident. It was a happy way out of what might have proved embarrassing if Melly had persisted in her inquiry. If Melly had known what was in Kitty's mind she would not have passed over the matter so lightly, and Kitty could not tell her. All through lunch Kitty was absorbed and merely nibbled at her food. Melly sought to distract her but unsuccessfully.

"Stop brooding, Kitty," urged Melly. "It's perfectly silly. The notes will turn up."

"Yes," answered Kitty vacantly.

Melly gave up.

After luncheon Kitty went back to the office. It might be just possible that another more thorough search would bring the missing notes to light. She again went through the drawers of both her own and Graves' desk, and carefully through every folder in the files. She went upstairs to Graves' den and searched through all his papers in the vain hope that perhaps Graves in a fit of absent-mindedness, to which he was very prone, might have brought the notes there.

During the search she was in a state of feverish anxiety, and when the effort proved fruitless, she returned to the office and threw herself in a chair, bitterly disappointed. The house was filled with a brooding silence. Outside was the brilliant sunshine.

At first she was entirely oblivious to her surroundings, so occupied was she with her own thoughts, but in time the silence worked into her consciousness and she awakened to a sense of intense loneliness. She began to imagine things. There seemed to be vague stirrings around her, now in the office and then in the hall. She got the notion that some one was just outside the door in the hall listening. She imagined she heard a shuffling of feet as of some one stealthily moving about. She shivered and roused herself. It would never do to get into a state of panic, as she was doing. She would go back home. She shuddered as she closed the front door and withdrew the latchkey. She had not dared to look around as she passed through the hall. Shadows lurked everywhere and the very silence seemed to whisper sinister things.

To step out into the sunshine was a relief, and she almost raced down the hill. As she reached the roadway she saw an automobile standing just in front of the gateway leading from the Peyton grounds. The hood of the engine was lifted and a man, a chauffeur

apparently, was bending over making some adjustment. As Kitty stepped through the gate and started along the road in the direction of Claxville, he closed the hood and accosted her, touching his cap.

"Going to town, Miss?" he asked. Kitty was taken aback by the blunt question. "I'll give you a lift, Miss, if you care to come," he added with a smirk.

"Thank you," answered Kitty, "but I think I'd rather walk."

"All right, Miss, no offense," he said apologetically, "but I'm going that way and thought maybe you'd like a lift. You had better jump in," he urged. "It will save you considerable time."

Kitty declined again and proceeded to walk on. The man stood eyeing her for a moment and then climbed into his car and started off slowly. When the car came abreast of her she drew back to let it pass. The chauffeur stopped the car. "You'd better change your mind," he said, leaning out. Kitty was standing at the extreme edge of the road with her back to a high hedge. The man's persistence annoyed her, and vaguely alarmed her. It was impudence and she resented it.

"Thank you, no." She answered with some asperity. The man laughed; then she felt herself suddenly seized from behind. The chauffeur reached back and threw open the door, and Kitty felt herself lifted bodily into the car, to find herself between two men

who held her forcibly in the seat and quickly bound a handkerchief about her eyes. She was too astonished to cry out or struggle. The blinds were pulled down and the car started off, increasing its speed as it went.

The suddenness of the whole thing at first dazed Kitty, and then came a sharp reaction of violent indignation. It was impossible to struggle as she was forcibly pinioned by the brutal arms of the men on either side. She demanded that she be immediately released and let out of the car. No answer was vouchsafed her, and the men, whom she could not see, maintained a stolid silence. She called out to the chauffeur, but he, too, remained unheeding. Finding her expostulations and her repeated demands futile, Kitty settled back into silence, while her thoughts were busy conjecturing what it all could mean. It seemed absurd to be abducted in broad daylight, on a common highway. She could scarcely believe her senses. Was she really awake, or was it all a bad dream, or was it a silly comedy?

She went over the events in her mind. She had just come out of the Peyton gate. The car was standing as if awaiting her. She declined the chauffeur's invitation, and then had been suddenly seized and thrust forcibly into the car. It was all planned, she quickly realized now. Had she accepted the invitation to ride, she would have walked right into the trap. But her captors had anticipated that and pre-

pared to take her by force. Yes, it was a plot, but why and what for?

Her mind went back to the missing notes, the Peyton tragedy, her strange resemblance to the woman of the picture. Things began to shape themselves in her mind. She grew alarmed. Then her common sense began to assert itself. It was too nonsensical, and yet here she was a captive in a swiftly moving automobile, going whither?

"Where are you taking me, what do you want with me?" she insistently asked her captors, but her question was always met with the same stolid silence. Realizing that her efforts to extract the slightest information from her captors was useless, Kitty settled back at last, not with resignation but with temporary acquiescence in her present plight.

After what seemed to Kitty to be about an hour's riding, the automobile slowed up and came to a standstill. Kitty made an effort to free her hands, and tear off the bandage from her eyes, but her arms were held in a vise-like grip. She was lifted from the car and hurried up a short flight of steps. There was a moment's pause. She could detect the opening of a door, and then its closing behind her as she was forced into what she surmised to be a hallway. She was then conducted up two flights of stairs between her captors and thrust through a door which shut behind her with a sharp click.

II

When Kitty did not return for dinner, Melly became alarmed. It was long after dark, and Kitty was always home by that time. Melly knew that Mr. Graves was away and that Kitty was alone in the Peyton House that afternoon. This heightened her fears, and by the time dinner was finished she had roused James Sr., usually a very steady and even phlegmatic person, who reduced every situation to a practical masculine basis, into sharing her alarm.

"I don't like it, James dear. Kitty never did this before. It isn't like her at all. I just feel something dreadful has happened." Melly paused at her own terrible implication. She had no definite idea, but it loomed all the more portentous because it was vague and formless. The unknown and indefinite is always more formidable in imagination than precise knowledge. Her husband realized that she was greatly distressed, and he himself, owing to Melly's insistence that something was wrong, and the fact that it was most unusual for Kitty to fail to put in an appearance at this hour, was becoming apprehensive; although slow to move, he had caught the infection of Melly's fears.

"All right, Melly," he said, as soon as they finished dinner, which Melly had only nibbled at, "we will go right over to the Peyton House. I'll get the car out."

In ten minutes they were in front of the Peyton House. There was a light from the office window. Melly breathed easier. Kitty had become absorbed in her work and had forgotten the time. She had, no doubt, discovered the missing notes, and was making up for lost time.

With this reassurance, Melly rang the bell. In a moment the door was opened and there stood Graves confronting them. He took his pipe from his mouth and looked at them with surprise. It was the first time Mr. and Mrs. Pettigrew together had ever come to the Peyton House. It was all the more strange at that time of night.

"Why, Mr. Graves, I thought you were in the City!" exclaimed Melly. Graves stared at them not fully comprehending. After a moment's pause, he answered.

"I was, but I returned late this afternoon."

"I'm so relieved," said Melly.

Graves was wondering about what, when James sensing Graves' perplexity, followed up Melly's remark.

"We are alarmed about Miss Peyton. She did not come back for dinner and we knew that she had been here early this afternoon, and—"

A startled exclamation from Graves interrupted him. Graves sensed that something serious had happened. He knew what they did not, that Kitty was in some way involved with the Peyton tragedy, that the notes

were missing, and that there was a menace in the air. He was visibly disturbed.

"Come in, please," he said abruptly and led the way into the office.

"Why, isn't Kitty here?" asked Melly, anxiously as she took the chair proffered by Graves, who remained standing and facing Melly and her husband.

Graves was not easily thrown off his balance; his nerves were steady and disciplined, but his voice was now husky and his manner showed evidence of deep distress. In fact, he was controlling himself with effort.

"I've been here since five-thirty. Miss Peyton wasn't here when I came, and I haven't seen her since my return. I supposed that she was with you at home. What you say greatly alarms me."

Melly's worst fears were confirmed. James Sr. looked serious, but said nothing. Graves was standing facing them, his brow deeply corrugated, his lips compressed.

"I can't understand," said Melly. "What in the world could have happened to her?"

Graves took a stride or two, turned and came back facing them.

"I have some notion, but it is very vague and imperfect. I only wish I did know definitely," he said. "Let me explain. What I am about to tell you must be in the strictest confidence. Miss Peyton, as my private secretary, is the confidant of a most important

scientific discovery. Strange to say, Miss Peyton is herself in some way, involved in this discovery. I myself don't know how and neither does she. Her connection with the mystery of this old house has worried and upset me more than I can tell you, ever since I found out that she seemed connected with it. It is mere conjecture on my part, but I am fearful that there is some menace hanging over Miss Peyton's head, and I am all the more distressed because I feel more or less responsible." Graves looked his acute distress.

Melly's eyes were wide open with curiosity and alarm. James Sr. looked up at Graves with an air of serious expectation. Imperturbable as he usually was, Graves' evident agitation had shaken him.

Graves then briefly explained to them the nature of his investigation and its results. Melly's astonishment was beyond measure, and James Sr. sat like one stupefied, as Graves narrated the story of the progress of his work in the Peyton House. It seemed as marvelous as a fairy tale, and yet all based on a strictly scientific hypothesis. James Sr. was an everyday matter-of-fact man, and the tale Graves unfolded to him burdened his imagination to the breaking point. It seemed incredible, yet here was Graves, a scientist of repute, soberly narrating to them as of his own experience, an impossible story.

But much more important than that was the immediate problem of Kitty's whereabouts. Graves put be-

fore them his fear that some one was seeking, for some ulterior purpose, to ferret out the secret of what was going on in the Peyton House. The missing notes, and Kitty's absence confirmed his fears. There was just one possible chance, namely, that Kitty had returned to the City supposing Graves to still be there.

"But surely she would have let me know," said Melly. "Kitty is not the kind that easily loses her head."

"You are right, Mrs. Pettigrew," said Graves. "Nevertheless I will phone the laboratory. She would have gone there if she did go to the City. I have no phone here. Will you kindly let me use yours? First, however, I will find out from Aunt Beulah if she or Rastus may know anything. I will go round to the outhouse and ask them."

Melly and James Sr. waited while Graves went on his errand to the outhouse. Presently he returned. Neither had seen her that afternoon. They had not come into the house during the day, thinking that Mr. Graves would not return and that there would be no reason for their services. The fact was the two old servants could not have been dragged into the deserted house with no one there for love or money. They had supposed that Miss Kitty would not be there either.

Without further delay they jumped into the Pettigrews' car and drove at top speed to the house. Graves went at once to the phone and called the laboratory.

Allison answered. Miss Peyton had not been there. He had been in the laboratory all the time since Graves' departure. Nor had any one telephoned or sent a message.

"Allison," went on Graves at the phone, "do you think you could reach Tommy Agnew? Try, it's most important. Yes, a very serious development here. I'm most anxious. If you reach Tommy tell him to come up at once."

Melly was by this time on the verge of hysteria, James Sr. completely stumped and grimly silent. Graves, wrought up to a tense nervous strain, but under a disciplined control, showed it only in his set jaw and a slight dilation of the nostrils.

"We ought to call up the police and send out a general alarm," Melly suggested excitedly.

"No, no," interjected Graves. "That's just the thing I don't want to do. I'm in communication with a private agency already. It's the man I referred to over the phone when I talked to Allison at the laboratory. Allison is getting in touch with him now. He'll be here by to-morrow. I have the greatest confidence in him."

"Oh, but it's dreadful," wailed Melly. "Something ought to be done right away."

"I wish to God we could," exclaimed Graves vehemently, "but I do not want publicity. It might do

more harm than good. What do you think, Mr. Pettigrew?" turning to James.

"I understand that your man is already at work on the job?"

"Yes," answered Graves. "He's already investigating Miss Peyton's possible connection with the Peyton tragedy. He doesn't know yet about her disappearance. But I feel sure that he has some information by this time which will help us materially in tracing her."

"I think Mr. Graves is right, Melly," said her husband, addressing his wife. "Compose yourself, my dear. We must have patience. I feel confident that Mr. Graves' plan is the better way."

Melly hysterically insisted upon calling up the police right away, and instantly dissolved into tears. It took the two some time and much persuasion to calm her down. She was for rousing the whole countryside and sending out an alarm far and wide.

With the weight of the opinion of the two men against her, Melly was perforce obliged to yield, though in her own heart she rebelled at what seemed to her a wasteful delay.

"I'll get back to the Peyton House," said Graves. "I'm sure I'll have some news by morning if not before. If Allison gets in touch with Agnew he'll be here without delay."

James Sr. drove Graves back to the Peyton House.

"I'll let you know just as soon as I hear anything,"

said Graves, as he alighted from the car. "Assure Mrs. Pettigrew that nothing will be left undone. Agnew is the best man in the Government's Secret Service, with the best sources at his command."

James drove off and Graves opened the front door and went into the office.

Seated in the chair at Graves' desk was Tommy Agnew, his feet cocked up and calmly puffing at a big black cigar.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I

TOMMY met Graves' surprised stare with a broad smile.

"Don't ask me how I got in, George, for I just walked in. The door was wide open and the light on in this room."

"Thank God you are here, Tommy," Graves exclaimed quite overlooking Tommy's explanation. Graves' manner and the tone of voice showed Tommy at once that Graves was laboring under some acute excitement.

"What is eating you up?" Tommy asked. There was but one thought in Graves' mind.

"Miss Peyton has disappeared."

Tommy who had been sitting back leisurely, took his feet off the desk, but did not seem in the least flurried over Graves' news.

"I am not surprised—anything else?" he asked.

Tommy's coolness and his apparently irrelevant question took Graves aback for an instant. But Tommy had faced too many unexpected situations in his career to be surprised. He was perfectly cool and collected, somewhat to Graves' irritation.

"Yes, there is," answered Graves. "Some important notes I dictated to Miss Peyton have been stolen. They tell the story of my work here. No one knew of the notes except Miss Peyton and myself." Tommy reflected for a moment.

"Give me the whole story," he said.

Graves proceeded to narrate the circumstances, as far as he could surmise them, of the loss of the notes and Kitty's disappearance. He felt sure that some one was trying to get at his secret, not for its scientific value, but for some other reason and had included Miss Peyton in his purpose. Graves made a clean breast of his anxiety and his responsibility in the premises.

"I see," commented Tommy. "Quicker work than I expected."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not surprised, George. I can't tell you much now, for my information so far is based partly upon some knowledge and coupled with much surmise. I think I am headed in the right direction. It seems things are coming to a head rapidly."

"What do you know?" Graves asked eagerly.

"Only enough to lead me to believe that the some one, who is poking into your affair here, is not doing it, as you say, out of scientific interest, but for another motive which is gradually establishing itself in my own mind. I have dug up a little ancient history connected with this old house. Piecing this with what I learned

from you recently in the City and what you have just told me, I believe I have sufficient grounds to follow the lead. You have made these old walls give out a gruesome secret. My guess is that some one does not want that secret known, and whoever it is, is anxious to find out what you are doing here and whether you have found out anything that may possibly injure him. Miss Peyton's presence here, her name being the same as that of the house itself, has made that person doubly anxious. I've found out that inquiries from an unknown source have recently been made into Miss Peyton's history. Miss Peyton and the stolen notes are the key and the lock to the situation and the party interested is after the combination. Now don't get alarmed. I have laid a trap, but I can't spring it until I'm sure it will work effectively. Miss Peyton's abduction—it is an abduction you may rest assured—” for Graves had started at the word, which he had not dared to formulate to himself, “fits perfectly into my theory. The missing notes also piece in. The notes and Miss Peyton together are to give the desired information to the abductor. He is vitally interested in some way I haven't been altogether able to dope out yet. But I am beginning to see a light.”

Graves listened with avid interest.

“I am very anxious, Tommy. Some action ought to be taken at once. Miss Peyton may be in danger.”

“Not immediate danger, I believe. Pressure has not

yet been brought to bear upon her. Her abductor will want to get from her the story of what has been going on here. He will seek to persuade her. She will refuse and persist in her refusal. It will be only when her abductor's patience is worn out that he will attempt to use forcible methods."

Graves winced at the word.

"I shan't go to sleep, George. I'm not alone on the job. Working under my directions are three of the best people in the Service. They are right now on the trail under my instructions, and are working rapidly, I assure you. But there are several important factors I am still searching for. I came here to see if I could find anything that might help. What you have just told me, does help. I have come to the conclusion that this old house hides an additional secret beside the one you discovered by means of the motion picture stunt. My picture puzzle is being put together to my entire satisfaction, and what you have told me to-night is fitting in perfectly. In fact, I have the picture completed in my mind's eye. Take my word for it, old boy, it's coming out all right and sooner than I expected." Tommy's words helped somewhat to allay Graves' anxiety and afforded him considerable comfort. "Outside of what you have told me has anything else come under your observation here?"

Graves reflected for a few moments, nervously filling and lighting his pipe as he did so.

"Let me see, let me see. I can't recall anything especially."

"It needn't be especially," injected Tommy. "Don't rummage around in the dark abysm of the unconscious. I'm not in the psychoanalysis business, which is the greatest bunk that was ever put over on a gullible public to the tune of dollars. It's really the obvious things in life that we are in the habit of overlooking, simply because they are obvious. They tell more than all the subcellar reptiles that ever were turned up under Freudian torture. Outside of getting the picture, has there been any . . ."

Graves interrupted him abruptly.

"Yes, there has. Of course the most obvious thing in the world, as you say. I really lost sight of them, although they disturbed me considerably at first. The rapping, the thuds, moaning and shrieks." And Graves explained the various strange noises with which he had been assailed in the beginning; how these manifestations had grown less frequent, and how out of keeping they were with his now proved theory by which he had been enabled to get the picture.

"In other words," concluded Graves, "they were so out of gear with my theory of the true manifestations, the real haunting, that I have disregarded them altogether. They seemed to me to be artificial, even mechanical, though I could not account for them, and

never took the trouble to pursue them. I felt their solution would be of no use to me."

"Artificial, mechanical," repeated Tommy. "That looks like something worth thinking over. See here, George, why shouldn't they have been mechanical, as you label them? Noises such as you describe are mechanical and must have a like cause."

"That's logical," assented Graves. "But really I never gave any thought to them after the first two or three manifestations. They were so obviously inconsistent with the line of my work and the theory I was going on, that I just simply ignored them."

"I see," said Tommy half-smiling. "The obvious again, just thrust aside as of no value simply because it was so obvious. I understand your neglect of the mechanical phenomena in your absorbed pursuit of the other thing. But doesn't it strike you now, that mechanical effects must have a mechanical cause?"

"Certainly," responded Graves, "but I was too busy working out my own theory and besides the noises gradually ceased altogether."

"Exactly," said Tommy, "they were found ineffective."

"What do you mean?" asked Graves looking in a puzzled way at Tommy.

"I mean this. They were artificially contrived for the purpose of driving you out, as they had no doubt driven others out before you. They didn't and so they

stopped. This leads to the obvious conclusion that some one has planted these artificial manifestations in this house. Some one has all along wanted this old house to remain untenanted. So he has artificially haunted it and has done it effectively, save in your case. That some one is afraid that you may discover the secret he is desirous of keeping from the world. Failing in your case and fearing that you have unearthed it, he has taken this desperate way to find, *viz.* to steal your notes and abduct Miss Peyton. I would like to establish this point and find out how it was done. It's easy to haunt a house by secret electrical devices. I am convinced of this but I want to make assurance doubly sure. I want to find out how the noises worked. My guess is that it was done by some such means, and worked from the outside. Let's take a look in the cellar. Electric wiring usually comes in that way."

Graves readily fell in with Tommy's suggestion.

As the two men descended to the cellar Graves switched on the electric light at the entrance of the cellar stairs.

Graves pointed out the meter and fuse cabinet to Tommy. Tommy shook his head.

"Not there. Too easily discovered there. Somewhere else."

Tommy, armed with an electric torch with which they had provided themselves, carefully scrutinized the walls which were made of rough stone masonry. The

cellar was divided into four sections. The masonry of the first three, after a careful scrutiny, gave no evidence of having been disturbed. In the fourth, at the rear of the house, Tommy paused before a slight crevice below one of the stone blocks, showing a slight sag. Tommy scanned the place carefully.

"See, George, the masonry above that crack is perfectly solid and the masonry below seems intact. Let's have a try."

Tommy pushed against the block just below the crack. It yielded slightly. Tommy then took a knife from his pocket and with the larger blade began to work loose the mortar above and around the stone which had yielded to his pressure. In a few minutes he had displaced enough mortar to enable him to insert his fingers. Gradually he worked the block until it was pried partly out. Under Tommy's direction, Graves took one end and Tommy the other, and together they soon had the block displaced. In another few moments two adjacent blocks were removed.

Tommy flashed his electric torch into the aperture made.

"We've hit it, George," he exclaimed.

At the back of the opening were four insulated wires running up into the wall. Tommy inserted his hand into the openings and felt of the wiring below and above.

"Dollars to doughnuts, George, this is the pathway

of the noise manifestations. They come from the outside, but that's of no moment just now. I'm satisfied. It is all linking up with my chain very nicely indeed."

The two men made their way back to the office.

"I'm going now, George. Sufficient for the day is a good job finished. I've had a full and busy day and am ready to hit the hay. You do the same. Nothing like a good sound sleep to clear the cobwebs and stiffen the backbone. I'm staying at the Grape Vine Inn in Claxville, a satiric name in these dry days, but I have a little moisture on the side," and Tommy grinned at his little joke.

"I'm going to sleep the sleep of the just and I need it," he went on. "You do the same and let the soothing hand of sleep smooth out those wrinkles from your brow, old man. Rest satisfied that everything that can be done has been done up to the present moment. I feel confident that I am on the right road. I am ready to stake my reputation on the result. Good night." And Tommy took his departure.

Graves followed his retreating form until it was swallowed up in the night.

"You're a clever one, Tommy," he said to himself as he turned in.

Tommy had helped somewhat to allay his anxiety about Kitty. It was Kitty that filled his entire thoughts now. He realized it and gave himself up to it. The notes didn't matter. It was Kitty alone that counted.

It took him a long time before he finally dozed off, and when he did sleep, his slumber was restless with dreams of Kitty. It was the first time in his life that a woman had come into it.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I

WHEN the door clicked behind Kitty, she tore the bandage from her eyes. She was in a fairly good sized room. A hurried glance showed that it was comfortably furnished, a double poster bed, a dressing table, chiffonier, writing table and several rugs on a hardwood floor. There were comfortable chairs and a couch. Two windows faced the West, for the lower rim of a blood-red sun was just tipping the top of a distant hill. On the score of comfort it was all that could be desired; nevertheless a prison.

Kitty rushed over to one of the windows and threw open the sash. It was a sheer thirty feet to the ground. She surveyed the landscape. There was nothing visible except trees and hills. Immediately below was a lawn with shrubbery and flower beds, extending to a stone wall, beyond which a grove of trees screened off further view, except the distant prospect of the series of hills just below which the sun was sinking in a flood of crimson. She then went to the door and tried it.

Locked, of course; she might have known. She tried a second door in the wall to the right. It opened into a bathroom, from which there was no exit. It was the usual tiled bathroom with a porcelain tub and a full length mirror in the door.

Abducted and prisoner in a strange house! It seemed too absurd and yet a fact. A silly fact, most exasperating and indeed alarming; an inescapable fact, which she was facing. She must face it bravely.

She sat down on the side of the bed and thought hard. What was wanted of her? Something no doubt relating to the Peyton House and its secret. That was the only conclusion she could come to.

II

Kitty was a modern young woman living in the twentieth century. She knew the world and its ways, and the twentieth century, especially since the War, had shown itself wonderfully akin to the Dark Ages in spite of its boasted civilization. Violence, murder, abduction had been scoring on the calendar of time in recent years with a staggering frequency, the aftermath of the World War. The beast in man was on the rampage.

Kitty had read of these happenings almost daily in the newspapers with the detached interest of a mere

spectator. They were remote to her and of course entirely outside any possible experience of her own. So she had always thought. And now, here she was caught up in the net of a strange sequence of sinister circumstances, an abducted maiden with Heaven knows what dreadful menace hanging over her.

For a moment she gave way to terrifying alarm. She rushed again to the door and beat upon it with clenched fists crying out to be let out at once. The physical effort soon exhausted her. In a few minutes her agitation subsided and she began to get hold of herself again. That sort of thing wouldn't do; she must control herself. Whatever the threat was she had to face, she must face it resolutely. It would never do to give way and unstring herself in this fashion. She resolved that she would be calm no matter what happened.

She had scarcely composed herself, when there was a knock at the door, and immediately after it was thrown open. A masked man entered carrying a tray, which he placed on the writing table. As much of his face, the lower part of it, as she could see, was coarse and heavy. His clothes were cheap and ordinary. This Kitty took in at a glance. A hired ruffian, evidently.

"What does this mean? Who are you?" She demanded imperiously.

The man did not reply, turned and left the room, shutting the door behind him with the same sharp click Kitty had heard when she was first thrust into it.

Kitty lifted the cloth with which the tray was covered. There was an ample array of dishes. On the edge of the tray was an envelope addressed in typewriting to "Miss Peyton." She opened it and read:

Dear Miss Peyton:

I trust that you will enjoy your dinner, and find everything comfortable. I believe everything has been provided. I hope that you will rest well during the night, and assure you that you will not be disturbed. To-morrow I shall have the pleasure of an interview with you.

Cordially,
Your Host.

The note was typewritten, as was the signature. Kitty read the note several times, as if she might glean something from it. But all she gathered was the knowledge of the machine it was written on. Its savor was too unctuous for her liking. It boded ill and she threw it disdainfully in the waste paper basket, and then picked it out again to preserve. It might be of use later on, she thought.

III

In spite of the brutal and inescapable fact that she was here and now an actual prisoner Kitty could not help smiling to herself. It seemed too ridiculous. She might have read this in a piece of melodramatic fiction, but that such a situation should come to her did seem incredulous. The plot was running true to the old conventional lines, an abducted maiden, an unctuous villain and the maiden all forlorn in his power. Too funny for words she thought to herself, and yet stubbornly true. She did not feel a bit like a heroine. If this were being a heroine, she preferred the humdrum of everyday existence. It was much more comfortable and sensible, and held no threat or menace.

"Well, I'll make the best of it for the present," she said to herself. "I'll eat. They say that a soldier is a better fighter on a full stomach and I'm in for a fight to-morrow, that's certain."

She drew up a chair before the tray and set to, though not in the least hungry. The food was good and she managed to eat very fairly and felt the better for it. It was Napoleon the Great who said that battles are won by the Commissary. Kitty was not thinking of the Great Commander's military apothegm, but she acted upon it.

When she had finished she went to the writing table where she found pen and ink, and wrote a note ad-

dressed to Graves at the laboratory in the City. She gave a brief account of her adventure, but was unable to surmise her present location. She tried to calculate its distance from Claxville. An hour by auto at a speed—so she surmised—of fifty miles. The direction was West, she thought; at least that was the way the auto was headed when they started. But blindfolded as she was, she had lost all sense of direction during the journey. She described the landscape as it stretched out from the windows looking West. She took a survey from both windows, leaning out as far as she could to glimpse anything that might serve as a distinctive landmark, but there was nothing but hills and woods; not a house of any kind within range of her vision. It was a wild chance she was taking that the note would ever reach Graves, or that it would be of any value if it did come to his hands, but the god of chance sometimes brought about strange things. It was the god of chance that had brought her to Claxville as Graves' secretary. At any rate she might as well occupy herself by trying. She went to the window and flung the note out. It fell on the lawn below, a very conspicuous object in the semi-twilight that was fast melting away into darkness.

There were several magazines on the writing table. She tried to read some of the stories, but failed to keep her mind upon them. She was herself a living story

and fiction staled on her. She constantly came back to her own precarious situation. It was exasperating, for she had determined to put her present trouble out of her thoughts. If she could divert herself, it would relieve the nervous tension, which was tugging at her in spite of her resolution to rid herself of the obvious menace hanging over her. Graves naturally came into her thoughts. She pictured to herself his alarm at her disappearance.

It was pleasant to think of his concern. He was a great and wonderful man. And to think that he loved her, for she was certain of that. It almost made her feel like a heroine. How thankful she was to think that she had won the love of such a man! She went over in her mind all the various little incidents of their past four months' relationship, little revelations which told the story of his love—yes, she admitted to herself the precious word—for her. It sent the blood to her cheeks, and she was glad of it. In Melly's words, he was *the* man.

She would not allow herself to be worried. She needed all her strength to defy the archvillain who had brought her here to force her to betray the great secret entrusted to her, to betray the man she loved. Not even torture could wring it from her!

By bedtime Kitty had wrought herself up to the melodramatic pitch, which fitted her surroundings.

She would sleep in spite of it all. Sleep was nature's great restorer, she remembered some poet had written. She would need all her vigor and strength to face her captor on the morrow and she resolved to sleep soundly in preparation for the coming struggle. And Kitty did manage to get some sleep during the night, but it was not sound slumber, fitful dozings off with intervals of wakefulness, and disturbed by constantly recurring bad dreams. She seemed to see Graves at a great distance, and she was constantly struggling to go to him, but something always held her back. Once she saw a man creeping up behind him with a drawn dagger. She cried out but her voice died in her throat. Suddenly the man turned out to be Rastus with Aunt Beulah. Rastus dropped the dagger and fled headlong into the outhouse, and Kitty laughed. At one time the Peyton House was afire, and she was trapped in it.

IV

When Tommy Agnew got back to the Grape Vine Inn after he had left Graves, he found a note informing him that a telephone call awaited him. The number was Kellog 5959. Tommy hastened to the phone booth. In less than a minute—it was a quick connection—a voice came over the wire.

“Is this O.D.O.?”

"Is this M.N.R.?" he asked in response.

"Right," came the answer.

"Good," said Tommy. "Let's have the dope."

Tommy listened with a cherubic smile on his countenance.

"Yes, yes, yes," he kept saying into the mouthpiece, as the voice at the other end in cryptic sentences, which had a meaning only for the ear at the receiver, came over the wire. If anybody had been listening in they would have been as puzzled as a Chinaman trying to understand the gibber of a Hottentot in the middle of Africa. It was a conversation virtually in code.

"Good, good work, M.N.R. Right you are. Selim, Dite," said Tommy, and hung up the receiver, the latter part of which cryptic utterance meant, "Go right ahead. Work fast."

Tommy was in great good humor. Not only was his face a seraphic smile, but his whole person seemed to be chuckling.

"M.N.R. is a sure fast worker. I couldn't have picked out a better man. That chauffeur was scared out of his seven wits. The bracelets on his wrists and State Prison staring him in the face, made him cough up like a frightened kid. And now M.N.R. has the paper in his possession. It is panning out as if made to order. 'O Tommy Agnew, Tommy Agnew O,' Tommy crooned to himself in a half singsong, 'hug yourself on as good a piece of work as you ever did.'

And now for some sleep. I'll have all the ends together inside of forty-eight hours. 'Tommy Agnew enjoy yourself,' and Tommy chuckled to himself as he turned in.

He was asleep in ten seconds after he struck the pillow, slumbering like a babe.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I

IT was only toward morning that Kitty fell into a real slumber. She was exhausted by that time from the strain of the day before and with her restless tossings during the night. She slept heavily and dreamlessly.

She was suddenly awakened by a knock at the door, which immediately opened, and by the entrance of the same man, masked as before, carrying a tray. This he deposited on the table, taking up the other tray which had remained there all night. Without a word he turned and went out of the room again, while Kitty silently watched the proceeding.

"Silly mummary," she muttered to herself in half defiance as the door clicked behind him. "Do they think they can intimidate me by such foolish masquerading?"

Nevertheless, she was by no means as brave as her words might imply, and when she lifted the napkin from the dishes on the tray, she was startled to find the note she had thrown out of the window the night be-

fore, on the top of a plate. Her captors were evidently keeping close espionage. It was aggravating, but she determined she would not let it get the better of her. She ate the breakfast brought to her with deliberation and resolution, though without appetite. The returned note on the tray had dashed her spirits considerably. She went over to the window and looked out. The sunlight flooded the hills beyond in dazzling brilliance and the lawn and shrubbery below as far as the stone wall, lay in shadows. There was no sign of life anywhere. Kitty stood watching for a while, and turning dejectedly back, flung herself on the couch.

II

Half an hour after there was another knock at the door, followed immediately by the entrance of another masked man, quite a different type in appearance from her servitor of the tray. The mask concealed the upper part of the face completely, the lower half from the base of the nose was uncovered. The mouth was thin-lipped and straight across, lip and chin shaven. The sagged muscles and shriveled skin of the neck and throat, his shuffling gait and stoop of the shoulders that accompanies age, showed Kitty at a glance the man was well advanced in years, anywhere around seventy or more, she guessed. His hair was quite gray and thinned out, a mere fringe below a bald pate. He wore

a cutaway suit of excellent material and stylishly cut. His bearing was refined; what one at first glance would call a gentleman. All this Kitty took in as he closed the door behind him and came toward her.

"Good morning, Miss Peyton," he addressed her, with a deferential bow. "I trust that you had a good night's rest." The voice was cultivated with a bit of unction in it, and the eyes gazed at her expressionless through the mask. It made her feel creepy.

Kitty did not rise from her chair, and stared steadily at him without replying.

"This is a fine place for sleeping," he went on in the same unctuous voice, "fresh air, perfect quiet. You see we are in a remote place, with few neighbors and they at a most convenient distance. I always come here when I want an absolute rest." And the lips drew back in an ironical smile over a set of perfect white teeth, too white and too regular, Kitty thought, to be anything but artificial in a man of his age. It seemed to her that hypocrisy fairly oozed from the repugnant figure before her.

"What does this outrageous farce mean?" Kitty asked indignantly.

"Farce, my dear young lady. Not at all, I assure you."

"Come to the point, if you please," said Kitty with sharp emphasis. Her indignation was flaming up. The fact that the man in front of her had the appear-

ance of a gentleman and was evidently a cultivated man roused her resentment much more than if he had been crude and rough-looking like the man who had brought the tray.

"You are a very spirited young lady, I see," and his eyes looked at her through the mask, with the same inscrutable stare. "But I beg you to take the situation calmly. Nothing is to be gained by indignant tantrums. I have brought you here for a purpose. I believe we can come to an understanding if you will only look at things calmly and suppress any sense of outrage you may feel. I regret that the manner of your coming here should seem to be unusual. I deprecate the necessity, believe me. But every consideration shall be shown you, if you will only listen to reason." This with a mincing gesture of the hands.

Kitty had risen and was confronting him with flaming cheeks. His manner and his voice, in which she more and more sensed a horrible hypocrisy, stirred her to an angry loathing.

"What do you mean by reason? What is it you want?"

"A very simple thing, Miss Peyton. You would greatly oblige me if you would transcribe some stenographic notes I happen to have in my possession. They are your own notes, I understand," and again the white and regular teeth were displayed in an ironical smile.

"So you are the thief." Kitty flashed abruptly at him.

"Not at all, my dear young lady. That word does not fit the situation at all. I have simply borrowed them temporarily. When you have transcribed them, I will return them to you with pleasure, and release you from this enforced durance which I deplore as much as you do."

"I will not transcribe them," Kitty snapped back. "I demand my immediate release. I warn you that you will pay dearly for this."

The thin lips compressed into an ugly line, then relaxed again into a half smile.

"My dear young lady, there is no reason for this agitation on your part. I would make it quite worth your while to perform this very simple task. I will have a typewriter brought here with the notes. You may change your mind after a little reflection. You can name any reasonable price you please."

"Will you please leave, Sir? I tell you that I will not transcribe the notes. Your presence is obnoxious." Kitty turned abruptly from him and marched indignantly over to the window and stood there looking out.

The man crossed over to her.

"It is a beautiful prospect," he said waving his hand toward the landscape. "Nature is at her best here. It is a very remote situation. Nobody around for miles." He laid emphasis on the last words. Kitty said nothing, ignoring him completely.

"I will have the typewriter and the notes sent up in

a few moments. I hope to see the notes transcribed by noon. I am sure that you will be amenable to reason."

Kitty still stood gazing out of the window.

She heard him shuffle across the room and the door close behind him. She turned with clenched hands and utter contempt in her voice as she shouted through the door, "You scoundrel."

III

Kitty threw herself into a chair thinking hard. She was face to face with what she began to realize was a very ugly situation. The man repelled her; he seemed reptilian and she shuddered at the remembrance of his manner. It was the secret of the Peyton House, as she first surmised, that this man was after. But what exactly was his interest, scientific, or was it connected with the tragedy in some way? Whatever the motive, he would never obtain from her the information he was seeking.

Kitty turned at the sudden opening of the door—this time there was no knock—and the man who had brought the meals to her, came in carrying a typewriter which he deposited on the table. On the top of the typewriter was her book containing the missing notes. The man left in silence, closing the door with the same ominous click.

Kitty drew up a chair in front of the typewriter and

turned over the pages of the notebook. They were intact, just as she had left them. A sudden thought leaped into her mind. She seized some sheets of typewriting paper, which had been supplied to her with the machine, and feverishly began to copy the notes in shorthand as minutely as possible to save space. She worked fast and finished inside a half hour.

The copied notes she folded up into as small and compact a package as she could, and taking down her hair, which was long and luxuriant—for she had never succumbed to the bob craze—she concealed it there, carefully and completely coiling her locks around her head. Standing before the mirror she shook her head vigorously to test the security of the hidden copy. She smiled and nodded complacently at the success of her ruse. She then deliberately pulled the pages containing the original notes out of the book, tore them into shreds and scattered them over the floor in every direction. It was with a feeling of positive exaltation that she contemplated the strewn bits. They looked like a miniature snowstorm. The old man would no longer indulge in his ironical smile.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

I

IT was exactly at noon when the door opened again and the old gentleman in the mask presented himself. He stopped and frowned when he saw the fragments of paper strewn the floor, the thin line of his lips tightening still more over the artificial teeth. He looked at Kitty. She forestalled the question on his lips.

"There are my notes on the floor torn into bits," and Kitty laughed at his apparent consternation.

For a moment he seemed nonplused. Then an ugly little laugh escaped his lips. He strode over to her menacingly.

"You are an obstinate and foolish young woman," he said harshly. "Don't imagine that you can foil me this way. You know what has been going on in the Peyton House and what these notes contained. I'll force you to tell me yet, notes or no notes. You have a tongue in your head and I have ways to make it wag." He went over to the door and throwing it open called out "Simpson."

In a moment the same man appeared with the tray laden with dishes.

"Take that back to the kitchen," he ordered peremptorily, "and see that the water is turned off from this bathroom."

Simpson turned and disappeared.

The old man was in a rage and fairly snarled at Kitty.

"A little starvation and thirst may conduce to a more complacent mood in you. I am not going to be balked by your obstinacy." His voice rose stridently and angrily.

Kitty said nothing. Her whole attitude was one of defiance. But she realized very well what was impending.

"Look here, young woman," as he strode over to her and shook a furious fist in her face, "I'm going to get that information out of you, or, by God, you'll take the consequences, if I have to—" He turned abruptly without finishing the sentence. The door slammed behind him. No food, no water—so that was the plan to coerce her into submission? Kitty did not relish the prospect, and her gorge rose at the cruelty of it, and her defiance hardened.

II

The next morning Tommy came over to the Peyton House again. Graves showed he was under a heavy

strain. He smoked incessantly lighting and relighting his pipe. Tommy noticed signs of a restless night.

"Look here, George," he said, "remember the Irishman's advice, 'If you can't be aisy, be aisy as you can.' A lot in that, if people could only be as philosophic over their own affairs, as easily as they can over the other fellow's. I know that's cold consolation to the fellow on the rack, but honestly, I mean it. I promise you to have the whole thing rounded up in forty-eight hours. I'm better than a comforter. I'm speaking from a sure knowledge."

Tommy spoke with decided assurance. Graves was pacing up and down. He stopped in front of Tommy who was seated in a chair beside Graves' desk.

"I have confidence in you, Tommy, but I'm horribly worried about Miss Peyton. I cannot help feeling that she is in serious danger. I could never forgive myself if any harm came to her. Can't you hurry things along?"

"We're in high speed already," answered Tommy. "In fact, three high speeds, three machines converging to a definite point, with every ounce of power on. To explain the parable, I have three different main leads, which will have been worked out to a conclusion in less than forty-eight hours. Have confidence, dear boy. I know how you feel about it all. It's tough to be in suspense, I know."

Graves looked at Tommy inquiringly, as much as to

say what do you mean by that? Tommy ignored the implication. He had gathered enough to understand that Graves' anxiety carried something more than a general interest in the situation. He had sensed this from the beginning.

"I feel responsible for Miss Peyton's plight more than I can tell you," said Graves. "If it hadn't been for me and my work here she would never have been mixed up in this miserable business."

"Naturally," responded Tommy, "if you hadn't been born and she hadn't been born, and both of you had never been born, you would never have met. That's perfectly obvious. And if this old world hadn't juggled you together, just as it has juggled a lot of other mortals together, a great many things would never have happened. If a murder had never been committed in this old house, and you had never heard of it and if it hadn't been haunted and you hadn't been keen on finding out why haunted houses are haunted, with another lot of ifs strung together in the curious sequence we call life, all of us concerned here might have been just a lot of might-have-beens. Life is made up of a lot of contingencies that really happen. It's things that have happened, not the things that might have happened that count in mundane affairs."

Tommy's facetious philosophy of life stirred the faintest little smile on Graves' anxious countenance.

"But since we are all together in this mix-up," went

on Tommy, "there is something I want you to do for me. It concerns the *dénouement* of our little drama, and every drama has to have its dramatic finale. It may end in comedy or tragedy. I'm a dramatist, George, to my finger tips, or I wouldn't be in this sleuthing game. Every real sleuth is a dramatist. His business is the unraveling of plots, piecing together the elements of a series of dramatic situations, directing them and focusing them in sequence to a logical conclusion, and then the curtain. That's the joy I get out of the work. The difference between me and the playwright is that I deal with life in the making, he with life in imagination. The drama which I have in hand just now and in which you are one of the principals, is fast coming to a conclusion, and that conclusion is going to be stunning. In fact a sensational melodramatic curtain in real life."

Graves nodded with wakening interest.

"What is it you want me to do, Tommy?"

"Get me a projecting machine up here, a screen, and your picture of the tragedy. You see our tragedy comes in the beginning. I am aiming at a happy ending. Set up your paraphernalia in the room across the hall there. It's a good room for a little private showing, about forty feet long. I investigated it yesterday while I was waiting for you. I want everything ready by tomorrow night. Don't ask me any questions. I'm the director in this story and you must let me work it out

in my own way. And now I'm going, for I have a little part to play myself. To-morrow I'll call for you to take your part in the last act. So long." And Tommy departed in his usual abrupt way, leaving Graves wondering what Tommy had up his dramatic sleeve. He could not help smiling at Tommy's way, in spite of his own worry and anxiety. He tried to do some work, but gave up after five minutes effort. His thoughts kept flying back to Kitty. For the first time the old house got on his nerves. It seemed utterly desolate to him, and lonely without her.

CHAPTER TWENTY

I

THE afternoon of the day in which Kitty had the menacing interview with the old man with the mask, passed off fairly comfortable for her.

She was too wrought up to feel the lack of food as she had eaten a fair breakfast. But she did begin to feel thirsty. She tried the spigots in the bathroom, but the suction of the air into the empty pipes was the only result of her effort. The water had been turned off as he threatened. The mere fact of trying made her thirstier than ever. She waited a little while and tried again. Not a drop out of the drained spigots. Never in her life had she known what it was to be without water and her throat felt horribly dry and she had to make an effort to swallow.

She resorted to the magazines again, but her thoughts kept running away from the reading matter. Her mind was too occupied with her own dilemma, and her physical discomfort was making itself acutely felt. Why did this man want to know the secret of the Pey-

ton House? Who was he? What could his interest be? He was evidently intent upon wresting it from her. Well, he would never, never get it from her, no matter what he tried. She was just as firmly resolved never to surrender as he seemed determined to make her divulge the information.

And then she would picture to herself the alarm of Graves and Melly at her disappearance. They were no doubt searching for her and must before very long come to her rescue. She built her hope and resolution on the prospect. Her imprisonment couldn't last longer than a couple of days at the most. Graves would surely leave no stone unturned.

The afternoon dragged on wretchedly. She felt her tongue getting too big for her mouth and her throat began to pain her. She tried the spigots again and again out of a desperate notion that she might squeeze a little fluid from them. It was terribly tantalizing to know that water was so near and yet so utterly out of her reach. She went repeatedly to the window out of sheer weariness and looked out at the hills beyond and at the forest of trees that bordered the wall. It was dreadfully tiresome and monotonous. Finally, to relieve the tedium, she sat down at the typewriter and wrote off the story of her experience since the time of her abduction. She also described the location as far as she could from the prospect from the window. The

doing of it relieved the strain somewhat and served to shorten the dragging hours.

By the time she had finished it was growing dark. She searched for something heavy with which to weigh the several pages of typed matter she had written. She at last hit upon a cake of soap in the bathroom, and wrapping her screed around it flung it as far as she could out of the window. She had the satisfaction of seeing it light in some shrubbery, which hid it from sight, so that her captors would not see it. But then again, nobody else would. She laughed painfully at herself at the utter futility of it. At any rate it had given her something to do, and there was just one chance in ten million that some one other than her jailers might find it.

II

It was almost dark now and she noticed that the sky was completely overcast and a wind had sprung up swaying the branches in the trees beyond the wall. Her mouth was parched and her thirst growing acuter every minute. She had had no water since morning. She tried the spigots in the bathroom again and putting her mouth to one of them in a desperate hope that she might be able to suck a few drops out, but without success.

A sudden gust of wind rattled the window sashes and a patter of rain tattooed on the panes. With a choked cry she rushed over to the window and flung it wide open. The rain beat in on her. She reached her arms out as if to embrace it, opened her mouth to it, trying to catch some drops. Then a sudden inspiration came to her. She took out her handkerchief and held it out into the rain. In a little time—oh, how slowly—it became wet. She pressed it to her lips and eagerly sucked in some little water from it. This she repeated several times. It was refreshing but maddening because there was so little of it.

Then a second happy inspiration seized her. She must have something larger than her handkerchief. Yes, a pillowcase, that would do. She rushed over to the bed, tore off a pillowcase and spread it out on the window sill. Meantime she kept holding out her handkerchief and sucking what water she could gather in that way until the pillowcase should have become wet. As it was not raining hard it took some time before the pillowcase had become sufficiently saturated.

Finally she gathered it up and repeated the process she had with the handkerchief. It was like heaven as her parched lips and tongue gathered the beneficent liquid. It relieved her greatly, though by no means assuaged her thirst. She must have more, more. She

spread out the pillowcase a second time, and could hardly wait for it to become saturated again. Then the rain suddenly ceased. It had only been a shower. She could cry in her chagrin. But she had been greatly relieved and was thankful for that much.

The clouds were breaking and scudding away before the breeze. After thoroughly wringing out the pillowcase in a tumbler and squeezing out a scant inch or two of water, which she greedily gulped down, she spread the pillowcase again on the sill. If another shower came up she would get another taste of the precious fluid. But the skies cleared. She finally flung herself on the bed. She was very tired and in spite of her aching throat, fell into a blessed sleep. She roused once in the night, stirred uneasily, put her hand to her throat and happily passed into oblivion again.

III

It was broad daylight when she woke. She sat up on the edge of the bed. Her throat hurt her and her tongue was swollen. It was with difficulty she swallowed, feeling as if it were too big for her mouth, and now to add to her distress, she felt dreadfully hungry and weak. She had no idea of the time. Her wrist watch had run down. How long was this to last? It

had become a veritable agony, and it seemed as if she could endure no more. But she would not give up, she would not give up, she kept saying to herself in a paroxysm of anger as she thought of the dreadful cruelty of her persecutor.

It was only a few moments when her door opened and the old man in the mask entered. His mouth was set grimly. He addressed her curtly.

"Have you come to your senses? Are you ready to give me the information I want?"

"No," she answered with great effort, for her throat hurt her to talk.

"Stubborn yet," he said. "Well, we'll see."

He was still standing by the door, which stood open. He called out:

"Simpson."

The other man came in.

"Tie her up."

Simpson came over to Kitty. He carried a lot of rope, the thickness of a clothesline, with which he bound Kitty's wrists, ankles and knees, winding the rope around a number of times and making several hard knots. She felt too weak to make resistance and realized that it was hopeless. He then flung her brutally on the bed and passed the rope several times around her body, pinioning her arms so that she could not move them.

"To-morrow morning, you'll be of a different mind,"
snarled the old man.

Kitty heard the door close. She lay staring at the
ceiling.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

I

THAT evening, just after darkness had fallen, two automobiles drove up slowly in low speed, as noiselessly as possible, and stopped within a hundred yards of the house where Kitty lay imprisoned. Their headlights were out. Three men stepped out of the first car and two out of the second. They grouped together, talking in undertones and surveyed the house just beyond, wrapped in darkness. One of them addressed the others in a subdued voice.

"Mack, you and Smith go around to the rear. Don't let any one leave the house. Come," he turned to the others, "we'll go to the front."

The party divided, the two men addressed as Smith and Mack, pushing their way through the hedge at the side of the road, the three others walking up cautiously to the gate just in front of the main entrance. They pushed the gate open stealthily, and closed it behind them noiselessly. There was no light visible in the house save from the windows of one room on the left in the second story. A porch some three feet above the ground ran across the house. In a few moments

the three men stood before the front door. One of them took a bunch of keys from his pocket, and turned a flashlight for a second on the lock.

"Yale," he muttered to himself.

Using his flashlight for a moment he selected a key from the bunch and with extreme caution inserted it into the lock and slowly turned it.

"All right," he muttered under his breath, as the door slowly turned on its hinges to his careful touch.

The hall was dark. He stood listening for a moment, flashed on his electric torch and beckoned the others to follow.

"Upstairs," he whispered, and led the way. "Go carefully and don't let a step creak under your feet."

They reached the landing of the second floor and paused. A light shone from under a door to the right. Just then came a hubbub from the rear, the crash of a heavy door and shouts. The door on the right was flung open. A man stepped hurriedly over the threshold into the hall. He was met by the glare of an electric torch full in his face. He stepped back instantly and slammed the door to. The three men in the hall hurled themselves against it and burst into the room.

II

Kitty had suffered most acutely during the day, more from thirst than anything, though her cramped condi-

tion sorely tried her. By squirming and wriggling she managed to give a little play to her bonds. This afforded her some relief. Any alleviation from her torture was a blessed relief. During the afternoon every now and then she would fall away into a semi-stupor, a merciful respite from what had become an almost intolerable anguish.

It had become dark, when she was roused by the bang of a door suddenly shut, shouts and the sound of voices from below, then the hurrying of feet and in a few minutes her own door was flung open. All this she heard as if far away, for her head was swimming. The electric light was flashed on and she heard some one say—it was a man's voice.

"Quick here, a knife."

Then she slipped away into darkness. When she came to, she was in a man's arms, who was holding a glass of water to her lips.

"Not so fast, Kitty dear," the voice was saying, "slowly, slowly, please," and the glass was taken from her eager lips. "There, that's better."

"More, more," she muttered. It was only sip by sip that she was allowed to drink. It was slow and tantalizing, but finally the entire glass was consumed. She was still terribly thirsty, but the extreme edge of the agony had been taken off. She turned and looked in the face of the man who was holding her up. It was Graves. She gave a wan smile and sighed and

dropped her head on his shoulder. He held her close.

"Thank God," came fervently from his lips.

"She'll be all right in a little time now," she heard another voice say. "Don't give her any more water for another two minutes, George. I'm going downstairs to arrange things. I'll leave the second car for you and Miss Peyton, when she is sufficiently recovered to move. Don't gorge her with water, and let her have some food, but sparingly. I'm off. You can follow at your leisure."

"Who's that?" faintly asked Kitty as the man took his departure.

"A very good friend of mine, to whom we are greatly indebted. It was he who discovered your whereabouts," answered Graves.

Kitty lifted her head and smiled into his eyes contentedly.

"George," it was the first time she had ever used his Christian name, "please, please! Can't I have a little more water now?"

III

Two men sat handcuffed on the rear seat of the first automobile which now stood in front of the main entrance. Three other men were in the car, one alongside the prisoners, the other two seated opposite.

Tommy came out of the house.

"Mack," he said addressing the man alongside the two handcuffed men, "you remain behind and come on with Mr. Graves and Miss Peyton when they are ready."

Mack jumped out of the car and Tommy took his place.

"All right, let's move," he said to the chauffeur.

"I have a wonderful surprise party for you," he said turning to the man next to him. Tommy chuckled. "It's going to be the most unique show that was ever pulled off in this queer little world of ours."

IV

Graves had assumed complete proprietorship of Kitty as a matter of course, and Kitty accepted the situation without demur. It seemed perfectly natural. They belonged to each other. Spoken words were not necessary. Their love had been growing from the beginning and circumstances had brought it to this happy climax. Kitty was still suffering from her ordeal, but happy. Graves had gradually given her more water, and sparingly of food, and her strength was coming back.

"I saved the notes, George," she said to him, her head still contentedly nestling on his shoulder. She looked up at him. "They are in my hair. See!" And disengaging her hands she uncoiled the long tresses, which

fell luxuriantly over her shoulders. Graves looked at her in astonishment. Was she a bit out of her head after her terrible experience? She laughed at his expression of bewilderment.

"No, you dear silly, I'm perfectly all right. Here they are," and she handed him the package concealed in her hair, and told him how she had made a copy of the original notes and then torn them to shreds.

"You wonderful girl," he exclaimed, his eyes shining with admiration as he gazed down on her uplifted face.

"George," she said with a little catch in her voice.

"Yes, my dear," he answered.

"George, do you love me?"

"Do I love you!" and he drew her closer.

"Well, then, say so, dear goose. That's what every woman wants to hear."

And George said it a dozen times and more, and repeated it over and over again as they sped homeward to Claxville.

Mack had discreetly taken a front seat alongside the chauffeur. He caught one brief glimpse of the occupants of the rear seat out of the tail of his eye and didn't look back again.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

I

WITHIN an hour the first automobile containing Tommy Agnew and his party drew up in front of the Peyton House. Save for a light from the office window the old house was shrouded in darkness. The night was overcast and still, without a breath of air stirring. Clouds hung low in the heavens, and the air was raw and dank. A heavy moisture had gathered on the pillars of the portico and the front of the house. It gleamed like sweat in the light from the office windows.

Tommy Agnew descended from the car.

"Wait until I give you the word," he ordered.

He found Allison waiting in the office, who looked up inquiringly at him.

The latter nodded. "I have my man. Is everything set?"

"Yes, all ready to shoot as soon as you say so."

Tommy went out on the portico.

"All right; bring him in. Smith, you wait with Simpson in the car."

The prisoner handcuffed and blindfolded was assisted from the car and guided up the steps between

two men. As he crossed the portico he lifted his head as if trying to see where he was. The lines in his face were drawn and his mouth set rigidly.

He was conducted into the room opposite the office. Save for the light from Tommy's electric torch the room was in darkness. The prisoner was thrust into a chair. Not a word was spoken. Tommy standing back of the chair signaled with his electric torch and then extinguished it.

Instantly a low hum filled the room like the droning of a beehive and a beam of light shot to the far end of the room to the wall opposite. Tommy undid the bandage over the man's eyes.

A picture was forming on a screen at the far end of the room. First cloudy and indistinct, and then gradually taking shape. It showed two men seated at a table in violent altercation. The man in the chair started violently and gasped. His hands clutched the arms of the chair in a convulsive grip. As the picture reeled off his breathing grew hard and stertorous. Drops of sweat stood out on his forehead. "Oh, God, God!" he muttered to himself and started to rise. Hands gripped him on the shoulders and held him in his seat. The hands could feel his whole frame shaken with convulsive shudders. He began to moan piteously and writhed his body as if in excruciating pain.

"Let me go, let me go. It's devil's work," he shrieked frenziedly as he struggled to rise again. The same

hands on his shoulders held him inexorably until the picture faded out.

"Switch on the light," said Tommy. "Bring him into the office."

The man in the chair was shaking like an aspen, his whole body bent and huddled. Supported, almost carried, he was brought into the office and deposited in the chair at Graves' desk.

• Allison was visibly affected and the two men who had brought the prisoner in mopped their faces with their handkerchiefs. It had been a nerve-racking experience. Tommy alone was composed, though a trifle pale.

"Mr. Tetherington," said Tommy, standing on the opposite side of the desk. "Now you know what has been going on in this old house. What you saw in there was an exact reproduction of the murder you committed within these walls thirty-five years ago. It was no devil's work, but the result of a scientific process worked out here by the genius of Mr. Graves."

Tetherington, whose face was shrunk and shriveled by the agony he had just undergone like that of a dying man, stared up at Tommy with glazed eyes.

"Mr. Graves," Tommy continued, "had no idea that he was wresting *your* secret from these old walls. He was simply experimenting on a purely scientific hypothesis to see if he could get these dumb walls to tell whatever tale they held stored up. You thought to

keep the house tenantless by your device of wiring it and making weird noises, so that it might be known as a haunted house. You succeeded until Graves came along. Your noises did not scare him away as they did other tenants in the past. Then by a strange coincidence, Miss Peyton, your grandniece, became Mr. Graves' private secretary. You saw Miss Peyton, and her startling resemblance to her grandmother, your sister, alarmed you. You became convinced that there was a conspiracy to discover your secret, not the grim secret revealed by the picture Mr. Graves secured, but what you have all along feared might be discovered, the missing will."

Tetherington's jaw dropped and he muttered indistinctly at Tommy's last words.

"You thought the missing will was secreted somewhere in this house. You searched and searched in vain. The will of the man you killed was never here. I have it now in my hand."

Tommy drew from an inside pocket a long envelope and took from it a document yellowed by age. He turned over several pages and held the last page containing the signature before Tetherington.

"Where did you get it?" hoarsely asked Tetherington, as he stared at the signature.

"It was in Miss Peyton's possession all the time, though she never knew it," answered Tommy. "It was among her mother's effects, in an old trunk put

in storage with other things by Miss Peyton's aunt, who was just as ignorant of its existence as Miss Peyton herself. And now, Mr. Tetherington, I have a paper here I want you to sign. It is simply a confession of your part in the tragedy you saw reënacted in the picture to-night, and a release on your part to any right, title or claim to the property which belongs to Miss Peyton, and of which you have held possession these past thirty-five years."

Tommy placed the paper on the desk in front of Tetherington. The old man sat staring at it.

"If you don't sign it," said Tommy, "I'll turn you over at once to the law under charge of murder and abduction. If you sign, I'll leave the decision to Miss Peyton. She knows nothing as yet about the will or your part in the murder of her grandfather. She's a woman, and although greatly wronged, she may be merciful to an old and broken man, whose years are numbered."

Tommy handed a fountain pen to Tetherington. The latter hesitated for a moment and then traced with a shaking hand his signature to the paper in front of him. Tommy took the paper and put it in his pocket.

"Take off his handcuffs, and take him to his own house," Tommy said to the two Secret Service men.

"Good work, boys," said Tommy to the men as they went out with Tetherington. "I'll remember you."

II

"Tommy, you're a wonder," said Allison after Tetherington and his escort went out. "How in the name of heaven did you get it all?"

Tommy grinned.

"Great drama, Archy. Fine curtain, wasn't it? I do love a melodramatic *dénouement*. Life is just one big melodrama after all. The novelist and the motion picture people haven't a monopoly on it. The fact is, Archy, truth is stranger than fiction."

"So it seems," said Allison, whose experience had never before touched on the melodramatic and who had been absorbed in the slow and digging processes of science. "But tell me, Tommy, how in thunder did you fish out all this stuff?"

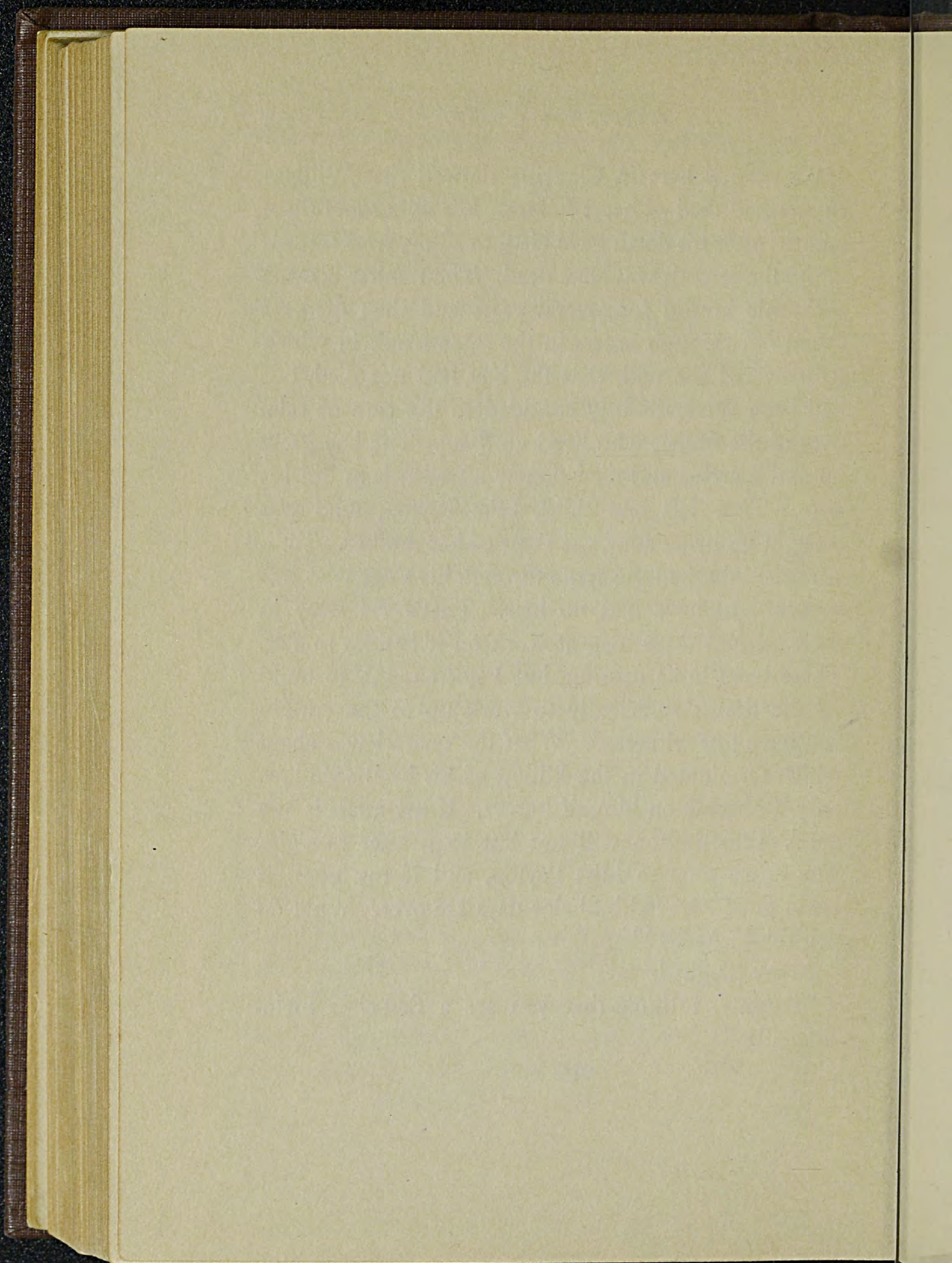
"Well, after you showed me that wonderful picture and I learned who was the owner of this decayed and haunted old mansion, I had a hunch that he had something to do with the present situation. Miss Peyton's striking resemblance to the woman in the picture also set me thinking hard. I traced up Tetherington's record and Miss Peyton's. To cut the story short I learned that Tetherington was the brother-in-law of the murdered man, and the woman in the picture his sister, and that Miss Peyton was the granddaughter of the woman. The murder never came to light. There was no record of it in the newspapers of the time. The

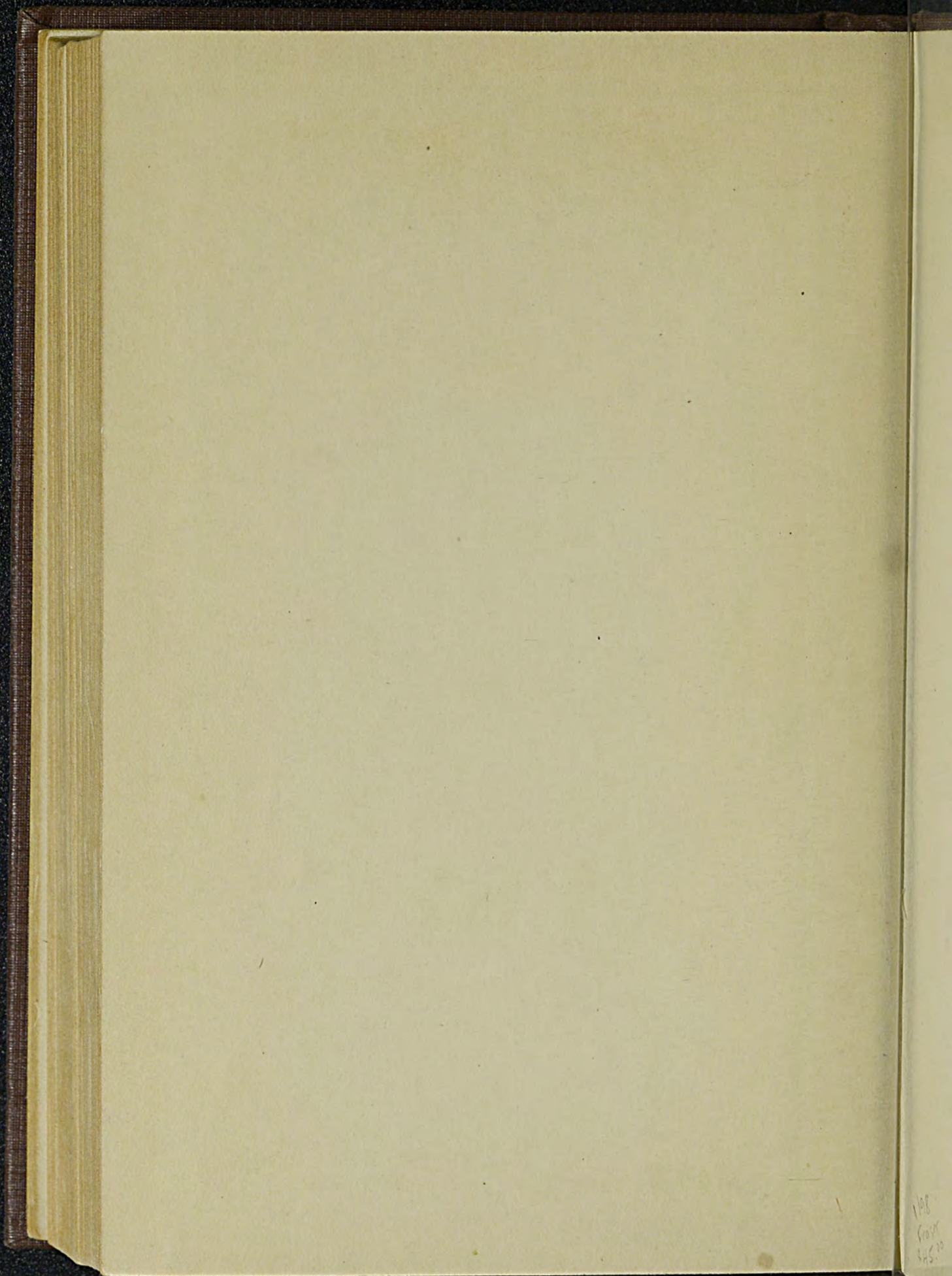
death records here in Claxville showed that William Peyton had died of heart failure. His wife some three months after his death gave birth to a boy, who according to the records was born dead. The mother became a chronic invalid for several years and then died. I found out through letters in the same trunk in which I discovered the will, that the boy had not died, but had been surreptitiously confided to the care of relatives of the father, who lived up State. The boy grew up and married and died shortly afterwards as did his wife. They left one child, Miss Peyton, who was brought up by an aunt, the sister of her mother. Tetherington inherited the estate through his sister who was supposed to have had no heir. That's the story in short. I had three men at work on it besides myself. There were links missing, but I got enough to build up the drama sufficiently to work up to the curtain you have just witnessed. What the quarrel was about which terminated in the killing of his brother-in-law, only Tetherington himself knows. If my guess is any good, Tetherington will not last long after to-night. The estate goes to Miss Peyton, and if my guess is again good, Graves' bachelor days are over. What do you think, Archy?"

Archy laughed.

"Tommy, I think that you are a first-class melodramatist."

THE END





198
From
H.S. 70

1/98
Crater
\$45.00

