

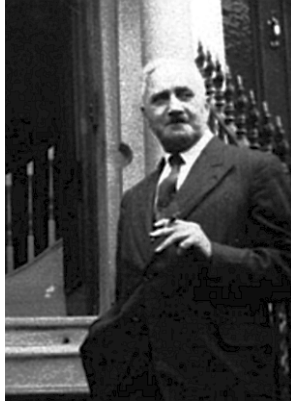


THE GLASS TOO MANY

Jack Mann
[Charles Henry Cannell (1882-1947)]

Erstausgabe Wright & Brown, London 1940

Das Titelbild zeigt das Cover der Erstausgabe bei Wright & Brown, London 1940.



Charles Henry Cannell

Jack Mann was one of the many pseudonyms of Charles Henry Cannell (1882–1947), a British editor and writer of fantasy and supernatural, detective novels and stories.

Prior to becoming a writer, Cannell was a former soldier in the Boer War and journalist for *THE DAILY TELEGRAPH*. Cannell began writing novels under his mostly used pen-name “Evelyn Charles Henry Vivian” in 1907. Cannell started writing fantastic stories for the arts magazine *COLOUR* and the aviation journal *FLYING* (which Cannell edited after leaving the *TELEGRAPH*) in 1917–18, sometimes publishing them under the pseudonym “A.K. Walton”.

Today, Vivian is best known for his Lost World fantasy novels such as “*City of Wonder*” and his series of novels featuring supernatural detective Gregory George Gordon Green or “Gees” which he wrote under his “Jack Mann” pseudonym. Vivian also wrote several science-fiction stories, including the novel “*Star Dust*” about a scientist who can create gold. Critic Jack Adrian has praised Cannell’s lost-world stories as »bursting with ideas and colour and pace«, and »superb examples of a fascinating breed«. Influences on Vivian’s work included Rider Haggard, H.G. Wells, Arthur Machen and the American novelist Arthur O. Friel. Vivian also published fiction under several other pseudonyms, including Westerns as “Barry Lynd”. J. Adrian has noted that some of the pseudonyms Cannell used »will never now be identified«. For younger readers, Vivian wrote “*Robin Hood and his Merry Men*”, a retelling of the Robin Hood legend.

Vivian also edited three British pulp magazines. From 1918 to 1922 Vivian edited *THE NOVEL MAGAZINE*, and later, for the publisher Walter Hutchinson (1887–1950), *HUTCHINSON’S ADVENTURE-STORY MAGAZINE* (which serialised three of Vivian’s novels) and *HUTCHINSON’S MYSTERY-STORY MAGAZINE*. In addition to UK writers, Vivian often reprinted fiction from American pulp magazines such as *ADVENTURE* and *WEIRD TALES* in the Hutchinson publications.

Outside the field of fiction, Vivian was noted for the non-fiction book “*A History of Aeronautics*”.

List of all Novels of the Gees-Series:

- Gees First Case (1936)
- Grey Shapes (1937)
- Nightmare Farm (1937)
- The Kleinert Case (1938)
- Maker of Shadows (1938)
- The Ninth Life (1939)
- The Glass Too Many (1940)
- Her Ways Are Death (1940)

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E._C._Vivian

Chapter 1

The Squire of Nortonsweir-Ferring

At varying intervals on the northward journey Gregory George Gordon Green (known to his intimates as “Gees”, for the most obvious reason) had stopped and got out from the Rolls-Bentley to clear the windscreen of snow which clogged the tandem wipers. Fine, powdery snow, for the most part: stuff which swirled and smoked in the bitter wind, drifted to white banks in the still shelter of walls and hedgerows, and drove off from the tarred metalling of the highway, wind-thrust, to leave the wide, blackish line along which the car advanced.

So on, until the winter afternoon dimmed a little. Not to darkness or even to dusk, but there was a change, a threat of night’s imminence. In the very first faint beginning of that change, Gees drove through a village where the whitewashed walls of old cottages appeared almost dun against the whiteness of the new-fallen snow, piled steeply against wall and hedge alike where twists of the road made a lee side. Driving slowly, glancing to either side, he came to a shed or barn of tarred weatherboarding and thatch, and saw, against the snow-scarred blackness of the boards, a yellow plaque. That is, it had been all yellow, but the driven snow had adhered to all but the upper edge. Patient enough not even to think an oath, Gees stopped, got out from the car, and went to the shed to wipe the plaque clear with his ungloved hand. He wiped just so far as to uncover the name—“NORTONSWEIR-FERRING” and the statement—“LONDON—183 MILES,” and then desisted.

He said to himself—“Yes, but—” and went back to the car. Then he saw, through the thinly-driven curtain of snow, an ancient man who approached and, each time his left foot made contact with the snow,

leaned heavily on a cudgel, rather than stick, that he carried. He was about to pass the car when Gees stepped toward him.

"I want to find Nortonsweir-Ferring Hall," he said. "Can you direct me?"

Halting, the ancient leaned on his cudgel, and looked at his questioner, and then at the car, which he saw as a mere vehicle—the grace of its lines was lost on him. He had rheumy eyes and a purple nose, and a hangman's fringe framed his more-or-less-shaven chin. He shook his head and said—"Eh, it's nobbut helpless," in a tone of despair.

"The Hall is, you mean?" Gees inquired politely.

The ancient lifted his cudgel and pointed vaguely along the way he had come—the way toward which the car radiator faced. "The rud," he explained. "Nobbut helpless f'r a moty-car. Snow. Deep."

"That way?" Gees inquired, as politely as ever.

"Aye. Ha'f a mile—less'n ha'f a mile, an' ye turn left off the main. First turnin', tis—ye can't mistake it. But helpless—nobbut helpless f'r a moty-car. Snow. Deep."

"So you remarked before, I believe," Gees said, even more politely.

"Aye. Druv by the wind. Snow. Deep. But yon's Master Gates. He'll tell ye. Nobbut helpless. Snow. Deep. Hi! Master Gates?"

A middle-sized, middle-aged man, clean-shaven, wearing a bowler hat and a black waterproof over his very respectable clothing—as Gees was to discover it later—had come over a stile from a footpath beyond the weatherboarded shed, and was about to go along the road in the direction to which Gees' car pointed—that is, northward. At the call he turned about, and after a pause approached the other two.

"Yes, Collins?" he asked, and his voice was steady and tuneful—the sort of voice that would have fitted a toastmaster or the compère of a half-hour of radio drivel—"what is it?"

"Gen'l'man want the Hall," the ancient explained.

"Not all of it," Gees amended, rather wearily: he had driven far and, out of the car, was growing chilled. "A Mr. Reed—a Mr. Sydnor Reed. I have come from London to see him. You can keep the Hall."

"Well, sir—I don't know—" Gates looked at the car, and then turned momentarily to gaze along the road—"I don't know—"

"I do," Gees said. "Nobbut helpless. Snow. Deep."

The ancient gave him a look of utter disgust, and went off, thudding his cudgel down and leaning heavily on it with every other step.

"The car might just do it," Gates said doubtfully.

“I am employed at the Hall, sir,” he added in explanation. “I was just going back.”

“Just so,” Gees assented. “Then, if you care to just get in—and heaven forgive me the split infinitive!—you might just direct me, and I’ll just try it. If we just make it, I’ll be just tickled to death.”

There was a slight flavour of offended dignity in the way in which Gates opened and held the driving side door for Gees to get back to his seat. Then he went round to the other side and, when Gees depressed the handle of the near-side door, took it and opened the door with “Allow me, sir!” as an even more dignified remonstrance.

The Rolls-Bentley moved on. The first of the dusk dimmed the whitened landscape, now. Gates sat stiff-backed, as if unwilling to demean the pneumatic upholstery of the seat by yielding to its comfort: a glance at his still profile revealed him to Gees as the perfect serving man—a little too perfect, perhaps. So in silence they made the half-mile that the ancient had specified, and then Gates said—“You turn left here, sir.” Said it most respectfully, and with chill correctness.

Gees turned left. Turned into a tree-bordered, fenceless lane, of which the first thirty yards or so was athwart the wind. Despite the lack of bordering fences of any kind, the trees made enough of lee from the wind for snow to pile and lie, a white counterpane three feet or more in thickness. But Gees noted how eddies of the wind reached down, and as they struck the dry stuff whirled up, smokily, to settle again elsewhere. He could see some thirty yards of whiteness, and then the lane curved, so that what was beyond sight was yet to challenge. He said—“Perhaps it’s Waterloo—without Blucher,” and, dropping to second gear, revved up and charged the whiteness.

Once, in the minute that followed, Gates said—“Oomph!” as the rigidity of his backbone failed and his head made contact with the pillar of the near-side door—and his bowler hat, after the impact, was no more than a wreck. The driving wheels spun and bit as they dug down to solidity under the powdery snow—spun and bit, spun and bit, and a whiteness piled along the bonnet, with the front of the car lifted while the back sank down, and the rocking progress was like that of a light skiff in a choppy sea. Slithering, canted to a dangerous angle, Gees managed to miss a tree trunk by an inch or two, straightened—and darted to the other side of the lane to miss another tree and regain the centre of the way. His large, sinewy hands whitened at the knuckles as, gloveless, he gripped the steering wheel and slanted his long body against the crazy cants of the chassis, not knowing at any second if the next would crash

him into a tree trunk and end his progress.

He came to the end of it, and saw a relatively clear way beyond the bend of the lane, for now the bitter wind whipped the snow off the road surface, thinning it to inches. Gates took off his ruined hat and looked at it. He said—"Your own car, sir?" in an altered, almost admiring tone: evidently, in spite of the necessity for a new hat, he forgave everything—or felt thankful for preservation.

Gees said—"I am under that impression. I wouldn't risk another man's property like that without asking his permission first. And that is the Hall, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Excuse me, sir, the garages—you go round to the left and turn right at the back. I mean, sir, you would probably prefer to put the car away yourself, before seeing Mr. Reed."

"Thank you, Gates. We will go round to the back."

He saw, as he drove, that the Hall had originally occupied three sides of a square, with its main frontage sunk back within the two wings. Now, only one wing remained intact: the one on the left, past which he drove, was a mess of knee- to breast-high ruined walls, on which the snow failed to hide ivy: fire, or whatever had caused the ruin, had happened long ago, for now the ivy covered all away. Turning right at Gates' direction, Gees drove into a paved yard, and then into what he recognized as an adapted stable—the drainage channels were still visible in the brick flooring. With the snow-encrusted nose of the car close against holes in the wall that marked where mangers had once been, he switched off the engine and got out.

"I'll take you in by the back way, sir, if you don't mind," Gates, beside him, said. "The front entrance is almost snowed up."

"First," Gees observed, "I'll see what damage has been done."

He gave the car a careful scrutiny, ripping away the packed snow on the radiator cover with his hands until he was satisfied that forcing a way through the drifts had done no harm. Gates said—"I'll see it all swept out for you, sir," as the inspection concluded.

They went across the yard and entered the Hall. Gates led on to a lofty, panelled entrance hall, decorated with antlers and stag heads, trophies of old arms on plaques, a couple of fine damascened breast-plates over the high mantel, and, between and a little above them, a casque, burnished and gold-inlaid—Gees knew enough to recognize it as a magnificent specimen of sixteenth-century workmanship, a museum piece rather than an ornament for a country house.

Here Gates took over hat and coat and wraps, and deposited them in an alcove. Returning, he had shed his own outdoor wear: the beginning of a bruise just in front of his temple revealed that his wrecked bowler had not quite saved him when his head had struck the side pillar of the car. He opened a door near the foot of a wide, oaken staircase and said—"If you'd be so good as to wait in here, sir—?" and switched on electric lights of which the controls were just inside the door.

Entering, Gees moved over to the wide fireplace on the inner side of the room, which evidently faced toward the frontage of the house. There were three heavily curtained windows: the ceiling was a good twenty feet from the floor, and its stucco decorations, glaring white over the rays of the electric bulbs, declared the house as Georgian—early Georgian, probably. One of the very few country mansions, Gees reflected, that had not been adapted to use as sanatoria, or schools, or hotels. And this room: lounge, drawing-room, library—anything! A profusion of bookcases along the inner and far-end walls; occasional tables, chairs of deep comfort, a luxurious carpet, pictures—there were a Burne-Jones and a Corot that Gees felt certain were originals. And mirrors, so many that they appeared to double the effect of the lighting. Somebody—this Sydnor Reed, perhaps—appeared to have a weakness for mirrors; tall silvered panels, two circular, convex mirrors in beautiful gilt frames, square and oblong mirrors pendent on the walls like pictures—even the finger-plates on the door were mirrors. They were garish, incongruous amid the really tasteful furnishing of the long, luxurious room. Standing with his back to the fire, Gees saw himself half a dozen times, in half a dozen apparently different postures as one mirror reflected him into another. He saw his six feet of leanness distorted on one piece of evidently flawed glass, swollen to middle-aged bulginess: his unduly large feet shrunk to ballet-dancing proportions, and his big hands reflected as fat and pudgy. He felt that he did not like these mirrors—and then the door opened. Toward him advanced a man of medium height and great breadth of shoulder and depth of chest, tweed-clad and easy of movement. Black-haired, apparently black-eyed—in reality, his eyes were of deepest brown, with abnormally large pupils; he was clean-shaven, and his face was bloodlessly white, with lips red as those of a lip-sticked woman. A long-nosed, thin face, unusual to a degree, and very attractive—a dangerous man with women, Gees decided at sight of him, and, given to reliance on first impressions, liked the man.

"Mr. Green? My name is Reed."

The voice completed Gees' impression. Here, he knew, was a throw-back, and a very long one at that, a reversion to Azilian type. Rarer, far,

than the Cornish throw-backs to Phoenician ancestry, or the occasional reversions to purely Celtic type in families of mainly Danish or Norman origin, but unmistakably deriving from an almost forgotten race, one of which the great days as a separate people preceded history.

"I got your letter this morning, Mr. Reed," Gees said, and smiled a little. "Not being very busy at present—well, here I am."

"Gates tells me you came by road. It must have been a trying journey. You will stay the night, of course?"

"That is very good of you. And your reason for calling me in—do you wish to state it now?" Gees asked. "If so, I'm quite ready."

For a second or two Reed hesitated. Then he asked—"Shall we have some tea here by the fire? I'm—thank you for your promptness."

"Tea is an excellent idea," Gees agreed, and knew beyond doubt, now, that he liked this man with the brilliant lips and almost femininely lustrous eyes—yet there was no suggestion of other than straight masculinity about Sydnor Reed. "And the sooner I know what you want, the sooner I shall be able to tell you whether I can do anything."

Reed pressed a bell-push beside the fireplace, and a capped and aproned maid appeared so speedily that she might have been waiting just outside the room. "Tea and toast, Perkins, please," Reed bade, and in the bidding evidenced two separate things: first, that he treated his domestics humanly, and next, his own standing in life: there is a difference between households in which maids are addressed by their first names, and those in which the surnames are used. Reed, evidently, sat above the salt—was of generations who had sat above it.

"Supposing I explain myself, first," he said rather bluntly when the maid had gone. "Squire Reed, here, but being squire is a poor thing in these days, as probably you know."

Gees thought of his father, the general, and of the estate in Shropshire which, once an asset, was now little more than a bad liability. "I have an idea, say," he assented, rather grimly.

"Yes. I wonder if you ever heard of a firm called Reed, Symonds, and Lawson?" Reed pushed an easy chair forward for his guest as he asked the question, and then another for himself.

"They are, as you might say, a new one on me," Gees answered.

"A new—yes, I see, though. Yes. As principal shareholder in that firm, Mr. Green—its interests in mining and transport range from Brazil to New Guinea—I succeeded my father as chairman of the board."

"Which is why this place is not a prep, school or a hotel," Gees suggested—and the door opened to admit the maid with a tea tray. She placed

a table between the two easy chairs on the hearthrug, put the tray on it, and withdrew, all before Reed spoke.

“Yes,” he said then. “Exactly. Not that we Reeds originated with the firm, though. An ancestor of mine built this Hall on the site of an earlier semi-fortified mansion, and there was once a peerage in the family, but the Yorkists beat the Lancastrians, and the peerage—got mislaid. This merely to indicate to you that we are not mushrooms. But the firm—will you help yourself to sugar and milk? My grandfather married a Miss Symonds. The present Lawson’s father was made a partner in my father’s time. A very able man indeed, Henry Lawson—father of the present Bernard Lawson. Am I making it clear to you?”

“The present partners are—?” Gees asked, and took a piece of toast.

“Myself, George Symonds, and Bernard Lawson. You will meet them both at dinner to-night. Now—Mr. Green, I heard of you through an old friend of my father, not in connection with this matter on which I asked for an interview with you. A Miss Aylener, a Scottish lady.”

“So,” Gees said, and left it at that.

“I gathered from her that I might trust you absolutely.”

“You must decide for yourself about that,” Gees said, rather stiffly. He was, then, remembering MacMorn, maker of shadows, whom he had destroyed. MacMorn had been Azilian, like this man here.

“I have decided,” Reed said, and smiled ever so little. “But have you? Are you open to undertake a commission?”

“You must first untie the poke and let the pig out,” Gees answered.

“Obviously. And yet I wondered—well, what impression you have gathered of me. But to—to untie the poke, as you expressed it. Henry Lawson, the present Bernard Lawson’s father, was as I have told you a very able man. Entirely engrossed in his work—which was for the firm, of course. A cold type of man, who put work before everything. He married a very beautiful woman, and it was because of her that my father made her husband a partner in the firm. Need I put that more plainly?” He looked full at Gees as he asked the question.

“It is not a new situation,” Gees answered indirectly.

“When my father’s will came to be read,” Reed pursued after a long pause, “it was found that he had left everything to me—with the exception of a few small legacies, that is—and with a proviso. If I die without issue, everything is to go to Bernard Lawson.”

“Are you married?” Gees asked abruptly.

Reed shook his head. “Not until next June,” he answered.

"I see. The next point in the story?"

"A complete suite of six rooms was set apart for the use of the Lawsons by my father," Reed went on, "in the wing at the other end of this house. It is mentioned in his will as to be retained for the use of Mrs. Lawson—her husband had died, by that time—and her son, for as long as they might choose to occupy it. Except for when he is in London or elsewhere in the interests of the firm, Bernard Lawson still occupies that suite. His wife is there nearly all the time."

"They are—what is his holding in the firm?" Gees asked.

"Quite small—two hundred and ten shares, I think it is. Together with his emoluments as partner, he averages between nine and twelve hundred a year. Not more. The suite was a useful gift, you see."

"Quite." Gees began to get a grip of the situation. "And this Bernard Lawson and you—how do you get on together?"

"Very well indeed. In every way. Very well indeed."

"Then we can pass to the next point," Gees suggested.

"Yes. I keep a fairly large staff to run this place, Mr. Green. A little more than two months ago, one of the maids developed dangerous homicidal mania, and had to be taken away and certified. The cause of it—even the actual nature of the mania—has not been determined yet. But what did come out is that the trouble began about a month before she was taken away—began with a curious twitching of the muscles of her left hand. Just the left hand, nothing else. And she felt no pain with it, but at times was drowsy, sluggish, and rather forgetful. The twitching grew worse, till she could scarcely use the hand at all, and then—madness, coming on her quite suddenly. Terribly."

"Is there any hope of her recovery?" Gees asked thoughtfully.

"None. I have ensured her the very best attention available, too. She ranges between maniacal fits and exhaustion, and the probability, they tell me, is that she will not live much longer."

"No hope, that is to say," Gees commented.

"None. No doctor will admit death as a certainty until he is absolutely compelled, but as you say there is no hope for the girl. Now, Mr. Green, some eight days ago my left hand began to twitch, and I can't stop it. Not violently, as yet—"

"Hold on!" Gees interrupted. "Auto-suggestion goes a long way, in things like this. You are of an extremely imaginative type, and—"

"The twitching wakens me," Reed interrupted in turn.

Gees thought it over. "I am not a doctor," he said.

"No, but I heard what Miss Aylener thought of you, before any of this began. And I remembered that personal column advertisement of yours—'Consult Gees for anything from Mumps to Murder.' So I determined to consult you, and wrote you the day before yesterday."

"To ask what of me?" Gees inquired, after another long pause.

"To suggest that you name any fee you choose, in return for ridding me of this fear. The fear that has come on me in the last eight days."

"Fear of—?" Gees asked, and did not end it.

"Of my father's will," Reed answered quietly.

"I see-e," Gees breathed rather than spoke. "Have you mentioned this to anyone—the twitching, or any part of it?"

"Only to the doctor who attended the girl. He attributes it to some sort of neurosis, sees no connection between the two cases—and gave me some tablets. Which, of course, make no difference."

"Put into words what you believe, Mr. Reed," Gees said abruptly.

Reed shook his head. "I cannot—dare not," he said. "It is so utterly fantastic—I may be frightening myself over nothing. But you see—I couldn't ask help of any ordinary person, could I?"

He got up, crossed to a table in one of the window recesses, and returned with a cabinet portrait in a silver frame. "Take a good look at it—at Bernard Lawson," he bade. "Better still, bring it with you while I show you something else. Something which may or may not—"

With the sentence incomplete, he went to the door of the room and opened it for Gees to precede him out. Under the staircase was another door which he opened to switch on lights, and Gees saw a narrow apartment, long as the room they had left—a sort of gallery, along the walls of which pictures were ranged. It was a portrait gallery, evidently, and, passing a dozen or more frames, Reed halted and pointed.

"My father," he said. "Now look at Bernard Lawson's photograph."

The portrait on the wall was that of a man in riding clothes, a full-length which showed him as a big, yellow-haired and moustached man, probably in his thirties when he sat—or rather stood—for the artist. Between him and this Reed who claimed him as father was no vestige of likeness: they might have been of differing nationalities.

"Quite so." Observing Gees' glance at him, Reed frowned slightly. "You are thinking—what it is natural for you to think. But a birthmark identical with one known to exist on my father proves your thinking wrong. Now look at that photograph of Bernard Lawson."

Except for the different style of clothing, there appeared no difference between the man in the painting and the one in the photograph. Gees

looked from one to the other, checking features—there was no difference! They were about the same age.

“And that, I think, completes all I had to tell you,” Reed said gravely. “Except—look at that.” And he held up his left hand.

He appeared to be attempting, and failing, to close his fingers and thumb to make a fist. He said—“I can’t stop it—day or night I can’t stop it. Now that I want most to live—more than ever to live. Can you think how I go on, what is in my mind all the time?”

“I want to ask a question you may not care to answer,” Gees said.

“And that? Ask anything you like, if only—”

He did not end it.

“What, in your own mind, do you see as cause for fear?”

“I cannot answer that question, Mr. Green.” He repeated, with sudden vehemence—“I cannot! I ask you to find the cause—name your own price for finding it. I—do you know I exist in a hell, these last eight days? Name your own price—find the cause for me!”

“My own price, eh?” Gees reflected aloud. “But I haven’t said—”

“One thousand pounds for every week, or part of a week of your time that it takes,” Reed interrupted. “All that he hath will a man give for his life—I see this as life or death. Look!” Again he lifted his ceaselessly-twitching hand, and Gees turned his gaze away from it.

“If I agreed to those terms, Mr. Reed, I might spin it out for a couple of months or more, and walk away with a year or so of your income. You set that value on what you ask of me. Very well. You may pay me one thousand pounds down, now. If I succeed in removing the cause of your fear, whether to-morrow or in six months’ time, one thousand pounds on completion. If I fail, naturally, nothing beyond the initial payment. Thus, you see, I shall not be tempted to spin it out!”

“If you will come back to our tea table,” Reed said, “I will write you the cheque here and now,” and turned toward the door of the gallery.

With a last glance at the portrait of the tawny-haired, Viking-like figure of his host’s predecessor, Gees followed out and back to the room of many mirrors. Reed said—“One moment, please”—and went to the table from which he had taken the photograph, opened a drawer and, without seating himself, took out a book and wrote for less than a minute with the fountain pen he took from his pocket. He came back to Gees on the hearthrug and held out a cheque.

“Is that correct?” he asked.

“You have left it open, I see,” Gees pointed out.

“So that you can go with me to my bank in the morning and cash it, if you wish,” Reed explained. “I want you to be sure.”

“You’re reposing a good deal of faith in me, Mr. Reed,” Gees told him. “But first—that hand of yours. Have you had a blood test?”

“A week ago. The full results came through yesterday. A rather high count of white corpuscles—full resistance to disease, that is, as I expect you know. No abnormalities whatever, nothing to indicate other than a perfectly healthy state. And in all my life I have never had a serious illness, nor is there any record of mental trouble of any kind in either my father’s or my mother’s family, for as far back as can be traced. And except for the one case of that girl who was taken away, nothing here goes to show that—well!” He broke off with an expressive gesture. “So I call on you,” he said after a pause.

“Do you want a receipt for this?” Gees held up the cheque.

“Your word is enough for me,” Reed answered.

“Consider it given. If your man Gates, or somebody, could get the big suit-case out of the back of my car, and you could tell me where I’m to sleep, I might try the problem over in a bath. And you—stop worrying. Come out of hell and leave it all to me. I’m going to earn the other half of this.”

“You mean that?” Reed’s expression brightened as he asked it.

“I certainly mean it,” Gees told him. Here, he knew, was a case in which inspiring confidence was the first requisite of all. “Also, no word to anyone at all of my reason for being here. Can you use Miss Aylener as a link for old acquaintance, cause for inviting me?”

Reed nodded. “The more so since you are the first person to whom I have spoken of this—this fear. Except for the doctor, of course. I’ll show you your room, and”—he looked at his watch—“you have an hour and ten minutes before we meet in here for cocktails before dinner. I’ll just ring Gates and tell him about the suit-case.”

Chapter 2

Claire

“The conclusion,” Gees told himself, as he unlocked the suit-case Gates had brought up to the room into which Reed had shown him, “is obvious.” He dragged out his dressing-gown. “Too obvious,” he added.

Here was luxury. A perfectly appointed bedroom, his own bathroom beyond that door in the corner, central heating, an electric fire to supplement it, and—that door on the opposite side from the bathroom? A dressing-room, perhaps. He went to the door, turned the handle, and pushed the door open to look through. He closed it again with—“I’m so sorry!” and stepped back. He had caught just a glimpse of a girl who had started up from an armchair with a book in her hand.

“Wow!” he observed, as he heard the key turned in the lock on her side of the door. “Lucky she hadn’t started changing for dinner. Or was it? And Gates isn’t so perfect, after all, or he’d have told her.”

Transference of Reed’s cheque to his wallet took his mind off the incident and brought him back to the reason for his presence here. He undressed, and made for the bathroom, to find it quite as luxuriously appointed as the bedroom, with the hot water really hot, and the towel rails almost equally so. While he wallowed, he tried to connect up the malady that had taken a serving maid with Reed’s twitching hand, but it did not make sense. Towelling himself, he recalled Reed’s emphatic assurance that he and Bernard Lawson got on very well together in every way. The tone in which the words had been spoken had indicated real friendship between the two men, and Lawson, obviously, was half-brother to Reed. But it was useless to attempt drawing conclusions on that head without seeing Lawson. Gees went back to the bedroom, and saw his evening clothes—he had brought only a dinner jacket, not

having anticipated staying with Reed, or foreseen any other possible necessity for a tail coat—all laid out. Gates, or some underling of his, had been busy.

Spinning out the business of dressing, in the knowledge that he had time in hand, still left him with twenty minutes to spare. Well, there was no harm in being first down to the room of many mirrors, and he might learn something by being on hand when others came in, while for a certainty he would learn nothing at all if he stayed up here. Thus he went along the softly-carpeted corridor, down the massive staircase, and into the long room—to stop just inside the door. For, over by the fireplace, stood the girl he had just glimpsed in the room next his own, clad now in a plain black dinner frock.

“I’m so sorry,” he said, and backed toward the door.

“No, do come in,” she bade. “You said that before.”

He crossed toward the fireplace, and faced her. She was not over tall, and he had to look down to meet the gaze of her blue eyes—a blue as deep as is that of the sea off Limasol, under Olympus. There were red shades in her brown hair, and he saw her perfectly-modelled neck and arms, the sensitive curve of her nostrils, full lips in a face almost Greek in contour and of little colour. Saw laughter in her eyes for a moment—only in the eyes, fringed by as long lashes as he had ever seen—and then a hint of reserve, or perhaps of resentment over his intent scrutiny.

“Fellow guests?” he asked, not knowing what else to say, and feeling clumsy over saying this. “Or are you—?”

“Fellow guests,” she answered composedly, and left it at that.

“Then—to introduce myself—I thought there was no harm in coming down early. My name is Green—Gregory George Gordon Green. I’ve just driven down from London at Mr. Reed’s invitation.”

“I am Claire Lawson—Claire with an ‘i’ in it,” she said. “My brother is—but I expect you know.”

“I do,” he assented. “And I much prefer your name with an ‘i’ in it, if you’ll forgive the comment.”

“Quite easily.” He noted the touch of irony in the reply. Noted, too, that her voice was low-pitched and restful, one worth hearing for its own sake, apart from what she might say. “About that door, Mr. Green, I ought to explain. I knew the room—your room, it seems—was not in use, and being naturally lazy used that bathroom, since mine has no bathroom belonging to it. That was why the door was not locked.”

“In other words, I’ve robbed you of a perfectly good bathroom,” he observed. “I must ask Reed to—”

"No! Certainly not!" she interrupted with energy. "As I say, it was laziness and nothing else. There are plenty of bathrooms—one just along the corridor from me that nobody else uses. And—is this the first time you've stayed here, though?"

"It's the one before the first," he assured her.

"The one—no, I won't rise to that bait. But—well, you can't ask your host to change your room, unless you actually meet the ghost."

"But I did meet it," he said. "A ghost that rose up and accused me of—well, I claim to have shut the door before the accusations could be hurled at me. And of all the ghosts I've ever met, this was the only one I wanted to meet again. I'm glad I came down early."

The deep blue eyes looked into his own. She shook her head.

"Must you?" she asked, with laughter rippling in the deep notes of her voice. Then—a complete change—"What do you know about ghosts, Mr.—Mr. Gregory George Gordon Green? Have I got it right?"

"Quite right. I'm called Gees by my friends—justly."

"Which does not answer my question," she reminded him.

"The other one, you mean? About ghosts. Well, I don't believe in them, naturally. I've laid one or two—that is to say, I've stopped one or two unwanted beings from making nuisances of themselves. And that's serious, though I don't know why I tell you."

"I know," she said gravely. "Even at this first meeting."

"Have it your own way. I should call it the second meeting."

"Very well, then, Mr. Green, keep on the surface. But if you are staying here—I don't know anything about you, or how long you're staying. If you are, you will—" She broke off abruptly, and turned away from him to gaze into the fire.

"You'd better finish it," he said. "You are—fey?"

She swung to face him again, an abrupt, swift movement. "Why do you say that? Why do you ask it? We've hardly met."

He said, slowly—"I think you, too, have been out of time."

"What makes you say that?" she countered.

"Those eyes of yours—I'm not keeping on the surface, even if this is only a first meeting. You have"—he almost peered into her eyes—"known what it is to be out of time. Perhaps that was why I came here as soon as I got Reed's letter asking me to come. That, and not—"

"We're getting terribly wrought up, for strangers," she remarked.

And that was all, for then the door opened to admit Gates, the perfect stage butler, bearing a tray of cocktails ready mixed—which Gees

thought wrong. He took a glass, as did the girl, and Gates solemnly put the tray down on an occasional table and went out, halting in the doorway to admit of Reed's entry. Reed came over to the fireplace and took a glass off the tray.

"Have you two been making acquaintance," he asked easily, "or shall I introduce you?"

"Not in the least necessary," the girl said. "We've met before."

There was, to Gees' sight, a flavour of doubt in the look Reed gave her. He asked, before Reed could speak—"Miss Lawson, do you remember that marvellous evening when the conductor of the orchestra dropped his baton, and the gallant way the first violin saved him?"

"The Mozart concerto," she said, a dreamy note in her voice. "You see, Mr. Reed, we're both passionately fond of real music, and directly Mr. Green came in we began on it again. And that Delius suite, Mr. Green—but we mustn't! Do forgive me, Mr. Reed."

Another entry to the room saved Reed the necessity of reply. Gees saw a tall, clean-shaven, youngish man, dark-haired and very thin—his lack of breadth accentuated his six-feet-three, or thereabouts. Reed said—"Ah, Symonds! Let me introduce my friend Green. Green, this is my partner, George Symonds."

They shook hands. Gees looked up into the thin man's humorous eyes, and saw him as a friendly soul. Symonds said—"An unexpected pleasure. And how did you get here on a night like this, Mr. Green?"

"Drove down from London," Gees told him.

"What's wrong with the night? I got here before it became dark."

"That accounts for it," Symonds told him. "There's about another ton of snow to the square yard fallen in the last two hours. We're all marooned, I believe—and me due in London by eleven to-morrow."

"You can telephone," Reed observed. "Put the conference off."

"That's where you're wrong," Symonds dissented. "I tried to get London half an hour ago, and the line's dead. Wire broken somewhere. It's a blizzard, Reed, and we're on a desert island, all of us."

"So much the better," Reed said. "Ethna and her mother can't go back to-morrow, if you're right. Though in these days—" He left the sentence incomplete.

Symonds took a glass off the tray. "In these days," he said, "the unemployed won't take a day's work clearing snow, because they lose their dole if they work. So we're marooned, as I told you."

“Well, if we get to the stage of eating each other, you’re fairly safe,” Reed told him, and went to the centre window to disappear behind the curtain. Presently he returned with—“It’s still snowing, too.”

Gees saw that left hand of his twitching, twitching, and marvelled at the man’s composure. There was tremendous strength in his way of ignoring the portent—outwardly ignoring it, before others. A thought came to Gees: was there some sort of infection in this house—some projection, perhaps, on which one might scratch oneself, to be smitten with the malady that had made a homicidal maniac of the serving girl, and now threatened the squire of Nortonsweir-Ferring?

He saw the twitching hand, because Reed made no effort to hide it from him. But, he noted, Reed kept it from sight of the others, turned his right side to them, or thrust the hand in his pocket—anything rather than let them see. And now Gees thought of the cheque in his pocket: so far, he had gleaned nothing at all as to the cause of the trouble, and questioned whether he ought not to return the cheque and say quite definitely that he could do nothing. For the cause might be a medical matter—might be anything! A very small needle in a very large haystack, and there was the time element, too. By what Reed had said, the girl had had only a month between the beginning of the trouble and hopeless insanity, so every day counted. There would come a point, probably, at which Reed could no longer conceal his disability from others, and then fear alone, or fear and auto-suggestion, might drive him mad. That he could retain a semblance of calmness as he did, knowing what threatened him, was proof of tremendous strength and courage.

The door opened again, and Gees saw Bernard Lawson, preceded, evidently, by his wife, a rather small, blonde woman with a face of charm through its expressiveness rather than of beauty. Lawson, as in the photograph Reed had shown, might have stood for the portrait in the gallery: he was about Gees’ own height, with just such massive chest and shoulders as marked Reed’s lesser stature, with yellow hair and moustache, the latter on the long side for these days, and with honest, straight gazing grey eyes. Reed made the introductions, and some talk about the weather and breakdown of the telephone followed, until Reed observed—“Ethna and her mother threaten to be late.”

“She’s probably making herself still more beautiful for you,” Mrs. Lawson observed, “but you must take her in hand and train her.”

Standing a little back from the group, Gees listened, observed. These Lawsons: sensitive to first impressions, he acquitted them both of any knowledge of the cause for which Reed had summoned him. Claire

Lawson stepped back beside him while the others talked.

“Why brood, Mr. Green?” she inquired, smiling up at him.

“The Mozart concerto, and the Delius suite,” he answered. “You picked up the cue beautifully.”

“Shall I tell you that you were not thinking of that at all?”

“Tell me anything you like. I like that name, Ethna.”

“Have you met her? They’ve only just announced the engagement.”

“Not only have I not met her, but till just now I’d never heard of her,” he answered. “You see, I haven’t seen Reed for a very long time!”

“And hadn’t met either my brother and his wife or Mr. Symonds?”

“Quite correct,” he agreed. “Will you be my Baedeker?”

“Oh, certainly! We’ve known each other such a long time, and it’s sweet of you to ask. Shall I begin with a description of the house and grounds?”

“I don’t think that’s necessary. I’ve already seen this room and the—the gallery of portraits next it.”

He saw her glance from him to her brother, and knew the allusion was not lost on her. She said—“And two bedrooms.”

“And a bathroom, don’t forget,” he counselled, rather grimly.

Lawson looked over Reed’s head at them to ask—“What are you two quarrelling about, over there on your own?”

“We were not,” Gees told him. “We were deep in topography.”

“And it’s just six minutes to the gong,” Reed observed, “and—Ah! Here they are. We were all early, the rest of us.”

Two women, one of middle age, beautifully dressed and coiffured, tall and stately, and perhaps a little over-jewelled—Mrs. Faversham. The other, her daughter, as was apparent from the resemblance between them, not quite so tall—standing beside Reed, she lacked perhaps an inch of his height—with Rossetti-red hair framing a face of classic beauty. Her hazel eyes questioned Gees as Reed introduced him to—“My fiancée, Miss Faversham.”

She said—“Surely we’ve met before, Mr. Green. Somewhere.”

“If we had, I’m perfectly certain I should not have forgotten,” he answered. “Possibly you sighted me on point duty when I was a policeman. I may have held your car up when you were in a hurry.”

“Were you really a policeman, Mr. Green?” Mrs. Lawson inquired.

“Napoleon the Third was one,” Symonds remarked before Gees could answer. “In the London force, too.”

"That was not my reason for joining," Gees said. "I felt it was my vocation. Like—like being a nun."

"I know, now," Miss Faversham remarked. "That is, if you know a Miss Brandon, Mr. Green."

"I have some slight acquaintance with her," he answered, wondering how on earth this girl knew his secretary—Eve Madeleine, as he always called her to himself, though never to her face.

"I was lunching with her at the ›Monico‹ one day, and she pointed you out to me," she said. "She's a very old friend—we were at school together. And she told me she—well, knew you."

"Gerald Brandon's daughter, dear?" Mrs. Faversham inquired, and gave Gees a look which appeared to indicate that he had gone up in her estimation. "Dear me!" She did not wait for his answer. "It's years since I last saw him. And now, Mrs. Lawson, how is King Baby?"

"His majesty has discovered some sort of joke, I think," the little blonde answered. "He's smiling in his sleep, an angel smile, but Anita wouldn't let me look at him too long, lest he should waken."

"Wouldn't let you?" Mrs. Faversham asked incredulously.

"Anita was nurse to my brother and me, and now to his child," Claire told Gees as they stood a little apart from the others. "A tyrant if ever there was one. I'm afraid of her yet."

"Thank you, Baedeker," he said. "I'm learning. I've learned that I must never lunch at the ›Monico.‹ Anita—that's not English, surely?"

"Spanish gipsy, originally. That very rare thing, a gipsy who has condescended to a settled life. But she worshipped my brother from his babyhood—she never worshipped me, by the way. I suppose he claimed all her affection before I was born. She's quite a character."

Gates appeared to announce that dinner was served, and Gees fell into the informal procession with Claire Lawson to cross the entrance hall and enter a very stately, panelled dining-room, in which both the appointments and service went to show that Reed kept up an establishment such as seldom characterizes an English home in these days. And, as Claire talked to Symonds for a brief while, and Mrs. Lawson held converse from the other side of him with Mrs. Faversham across the table—about her baby, of course—he had freedom to size up the whole party.

Reed, apparently at his ease, but keeping that left hand of his below the level of the table whenever possible. Ethna Faversham, not very desperately in love with her fiance, by the look of things—but over that no third party could be certain, Gees knew. Mrs. Faversham—might be

dismissed as negligible. Symonds also: he did not come into this, by what Reed had told. Claire Lawson—Gees felt he would have staked his reputation on her sincerity and lack of guile, already. Her brother Bernard, a genial, pleasant soul—if, in referring to his father's will as the cause of his fear, Reed had implied that Lawson was behind the trouble, then Gees felt certain he was wrong. Certain, that is, as far as a first assessment of the man went; Lawson both looked and acted like a man incapable of other than straight dealing. Then, his wife: over her, Gees felt none too sure; the surface charm of her covered away—what? She was a clever little woman, probably ambitious; her husband's income was twelve hundred a year at best: Reed, to whom as things stood now Bernard Lawson was heir, lived and looked like anything up to ten thousand a year—but would any woman or man have the will, even given the power, to devise such a terrible end for him as that twitching possibly foretold? Only possibly: it might be some form of neurosis, though Reed thought otherwise.

Out of the six people there, in addition to himself and his host, Gees knew he could rule out four. Two with absolute certainty: Mrs. Faversham and her daughter were utterly out of it. Symonds and Claire Lawson stood to benefit not at all if Reed ceased to exist, and thus were negligible as far as the problem was concerned. There remained Bernard Lawson and his wife, and on the face of it attributing evil design—such awfully evil design—to either of them was an absurdity.

The case—if case it could be called—had scarcely begun; except for what Reed had told him, and his initial sight of these six people, Gees felt that he knew nothing about it. But time was so important—every hour Reed had to live with that fear was torture to him, and so every hour counted. Whatever problem arose out of this, set of circumstances, it had to be solved swiftly—

“So you brood, even at meals?”

“I'm so sorry, Miss Lawson!”

“For the third time.” She laughed a little.

“As a proof of forgiveness, will you go on being Baedeker for me?”

“Certainly. Do you want topography, or antiquities?”

“I want pages and pages—small print, too. Not just now, but when it's possible, so tabulate the information.”

“And were you really a policeman?” she asked after indicating to Gates that she wished her glass filled only halfway.

“The simon-pure article, I assure you. Only for two years—the discipline was too strict. I tried hard to be good.”

Her deep blue eyes laughed at him, momentarily. "You shouldn't have told me that your friends call you Gees," she said.

"Always in the singular, I assure you. There is no plural."

"No plural—I see, though. But it was not that at all. You assure me you have been a policeman, you drive here from London all unexpectedly—Mr. Reed never so much as mentioned your name to any one of us, not even to Ethna Faversham, I'm quite certain, by what she said in the long room before we came in to dinner."

"So that's what it's called, the long room," he observed.

"Now you're trying to evade the issue—to put me off what I wanted to say. Never mind the long room, for the moment. Do you know, Mr. Green, I sometimes read advertisements in the personal columns?"

"Yes, I suppose you're capable even of that," he told her.

"And I remember one—I saw it several times," she went on, as if he had not made his comment. "It said—'Consult Gees for everything from Mumps to Murder.' And gave a Haymarket address."

"Sounds interesting, to me," he said. "Why—had you got mumps at the time, or were you contemplating murder?"

"If I'm to be Baedeker—and your asking that is a proof that I'm right—if I am to be, I want to know why Mr. Reed sent for you."

Again he met her gaze squarely: there was no laughter in her eyes, now.

"Will you promise to say nothing about me to him—ask him nothing about me?" he asked.

"Yes. I promise."

"I accept the promise, and hold you to it. Because the reason for my being here is between him and me, and so must remain. You see, I can't betray his confidence."

She thought it over.

"You caught me most unfairly," she said at last, "but a promise is a promise. And—I'll go on being Baedeker, if you wish."

"Spoken like a perfect gentleman. I do wish it."

Chapter 3

Most Immoral—Apparently

Back in the long room—the room of many mirrors, as Gees preferred to think it—after dinner, he found himself fended off from his Baedeker by Mrs. Faversham, who had managed to place him by means of her daughter’s reference to Miss Brandon, his secretary, and who—she told him—had known his father, General Sir George Green, in far back days, when the general had been a mere captain and Gees himself sporting bibs at meals—though she made no reference to the bibs. She wanted to know—so much! She suspected romance between Gees and his secretary, knew of the Kestwell and Kleinert cases, out of which Gees had gained a good deal of publicity, and congratulated him on his courage in setting up as a “confidential agent,” which went to show—as did his having been a policeman—that in these democratic days nobody need be ashamed of anything. She prattled, and he could not get rid of her. Symonds, Claire Lawson, Bernard Lawson and his wife, made a bridge four apart from the others after a time, and Reed and Ethna Faversham talked together: the room was big enough for these separatenesses.

Until, after an hour or so of the bridge which kept the four silent and absorbed, Reed went to the middle window of the three—Claire Lawson faced it as she sat, dummy for that hand—and disappeared behind the curtains. Bernard Lawson had just said—“And the last three are mine”—when Reed reappeared and stood facing the bridge table as he observed—“Bright starlight, and the night seems perfectly still.”

“Let me look, Sydnor.” Ethna Faversham crossed the room, and Reed held the curtain for her to pass into the window recess. Dropping it again, he stood in full view of the party, waiting for her to return, since he would not disappear with her. Symonds had begun to deal the next

hand when Claire Lawson stood up, and Gees saw stark terror in her eyes as she stared at Reed, in front of the window curtains.

"I—you'll have to excuse me," she said, with a note of desperation in her voice. "I can't go on—somebody take my place."

"Claire—what on earth—?" Mrs. Lawson began, and did not end it.

Gees got to the door in time to open it for the girl. She whispered—"Later," as she passed him. Mrs. Faversham rose to her feet. "Poor girl!" she exclaimed. "I must see what's wrong with her," and Gees opened the door again and closed it on her. Then Ethna reappeared, knowing nothing, and both Reed and Mrs. Lawson tried to explain. Sudden faintness, perhaps—anything. Mrs. Lawson said it was very strange, for if anyone were not neurotic, it was Claire.

The three remaining bridge players left their table, and all six of the party waited by the fireplace, rather constrainedly, till Mrs. Faversham returned. Claire had explained nothing, had only said that she felt unable to come back. No, she did not say she was in pain, or ill, simply that she could not come back. Perhaps she would have got over whatever it was by the morning ...

The incident broke up the party, for it was already well past eleven o'clock. The Lawsons were first to bid good-night and go, and, as he went, Bernard Lawson observed that he hoped Claire would be all right by morning, since she was always such a stand-by. Then Mrs. Faversham shepherded her daughter away, and Symonds, probably on a hint from Reed that Gees did not notice, went. As he left the room, Gees counted visible reflections, and knew that he saw four Symonds in the mirrors from his stance by the fireplace. Odd idea, those mirrors.

"Well?" Reed asked, they two being alone. "What have you found?"

"Not being omniscient, I answer 'nothing' to that," Gees told him. "But I have arrived at one definite conclusion."

"And that?" Reed sounded desperately eager; he let his real state of mind show, for the moment in which he voiced the question.

"That you must get away from here at once. To-morrow, say."

"But—but what difference will that make?"

"That girl—the one who was certified and taken away—developed whatever trouble it was, here, didn't she?" Gees asked in reply.

"Yes, but—I don't see—" Reed began, and left it at that.

"This way. First, though, what advice have you had about her—or what advice have her people had, perhaps?"

“I had the best possible,” Reed answered. “I feel my—call them my dependents, if you like—I feel they are my responsibility. She was a parlourmaid, and a valued servant—Gates misses her badly, I know. Not sentimentally, for he’s not that sort, but for her work. I heard what the local men had to say, and then got Sir Ensor Hailsham down to see her—at my cost, of course. He’s the foremost alienist of to-day, to the best of my knowledge. And he was baffled.”

“Quite so. Now listen, Mr. Reed. The period of incubation for infective diseases varies very much. Leprosy, for instance, may not develop itself till even years after the original infection—it’s a very variable disease in that respect. Measles, I think, shows in ten days. But in every case, to the best of my knowledge, for the period of incubation the disease itself is undetectable—except by blood tests and the like. Here you have a disease—if you care to call it that—declaring itself a full month before it reaches a virulence that produces homicidal mania. Is that not so—look at it calmly?”

“I’m trying to do that—God help me! Then—what are you trying to tell me? Put it plainly—brutally, if you like.”

“That’s not necessary. Only, as I see this, it’s a matter of cumulative infection. I’d say there’s no disease on earth that would declare itself with the one infection, and then work up for a whole month to get to—didn’t you say it was a month between noticing that girl’s twitching and the point where she became certifiable?”

“More. A month from the point when the left hand became quite uncontrollable—much worse than mine is now—and certification.”

“That is to say, you have more than a month to go. This place is responsible for the trouble, in some way, and the trouble is due to a progressive infection of some sort, not to a single infection. So I see it, and I want time to make inquiries and find out if I’m right. For that time, you’ve got to be out of reach of progressive infection. That is to say, out of contact with everybody who is here at the present time—me included, if you like—and everyone who has been here since that trouble with your hand started. And I’ll bet you up to half this cheque in my pocket the twitching stops.”

“You mean—but—I’ve been too far down in despair to think clearly—you mean I’m to be barred from my own home?” Reed asked.

“Only while I find out what is wrong with it—or who is wrong in it,” Gees answered. “For that, I want free access to it at all times till you come back, cured for good. I want you to tell somebody—Mrs. Faversham will do—somebody who will spread the news that I’m clever

enough as an investigator to be dreaded, and that I'm investigating this for you and quite certain to find the cause of that girl's trouble before I quit. Also that, since the doctors are puzzled, you suspect foul play. I suspect it now, and have little doubt about it."

"Why—who—the people you met to-night?"

Gees shook his head. "The nature of the trouble," he answered. "I want confirmation from medical authorities—your man Hailsham as well as others—to the effect that only cumulative infection could produce this result. And I want, if possible, to put you beyond reach of that infection while I probe into the business."

"And supposing—supposing you're wrong, and I go on getting worse than now? Follow the whole course that girl went?"

"I'll bet the whole cheque against it," Gees said confidently.

Reed held out his hand. "I don't know why, but you've given me confidence," he said, "and I'll get away to-morrow if the snow will let me. It sounds—yes, sensible. Good-night, Green."

"One moment. Is that twitching worse since dinner?"

Reed nodded. "Yes, it is. I think Claire Lawson saw it, too."

"I know she did," Gees confirmed him. "Don't worry, though. Get away to-morrow—go to London, and we can meet there, if you like. Stay there till I've laid this ghost for you. Goodnight."

As, after entering his room and closing the door, Gees turned to face toward the window, the communicating door leading to Claire Lawson's room opened, and she entered and closed it behind her to stand looking at him, still fully dressed. She said, slowly and distinctly—"Lest I, too, go mad. Because I know, now, why you are here."

He moved forward and switched on the electric fire. "Sit there," he bade, and pointed to a chair. "I understand."

She obeyed the gesture. "If I were damned for this—this most immoral intrusion, apparently—it would make no difference. You know—he asked you to come here for that—for what I saw when he stood in front of those curtains—when I couldn't stay near, had to go. You know—what do you know? Who—what is it?"

He shook his head. "I only arrived this afternoon," he answered.

"You see, I'm going to be perfectly frank with you—I've got to be perfectly frank with you!" She made the repetition an earnest exclamation. "That's why I come to your room in the middle of the night, because I couldn't rest, seeing what I have seen."

"Knowing what you already know," he said gravely.

“Knowing Bernard inherits, if anything happens to Sydnor Reed before he marries Ethna and has children. Bernard, my half-brother, and his baby son after him. And Sydnor Reed calls on you!”

“Your half-brother.” He made it a reflective comment, not a question. There was little likeness between her and Bernard Lawson.

“Sydnor Reed’s father died eighteen months before I was born,” she said. “I am my own father’s daughter. Since I have been old enough to understand, I have been glad my mother died before I was old enough to know her. Let that pass. Mr. Green, do you believe Bernard capable of a thing like this—for the sake of what he may inherit?”

“I don’t,” he answered. “Why—do you?”

“Good heavens, no! But the obvious inference. Knowing what you are, knowing too as I did when I left the long room why Sydnor Reed had called on you—I wanted to shriek, and I still want to shriek. Which is why I am here. Bernard, or Rosamund—his wife. They’re desperately poor, and there’s the baby now. Don’t you see?”

“That it may be a purely medical matter,” he countered.

“Then why are you here? The crime specialist, the dabbler in uncanny things? Why you? Mr. Reed does not believe it medical, or he would have sent for some medical specialist, not you. And—”

“Just one moment, Miss Lawson,” Gees interrupted, “and do have a cigarette with me, if only to calm your nerves.” He offered his case, and after she had taken one, lighted for them both. “That’s better. Do you remember my telling you that you had been out of time?”

“What has that to do with a horror like this?” she demanded.

“Merely that—since it is a horror, as you call it—merely that in such an urgency I feel justified in using any means I can see available, and in this case I’m going to use you, since you’re such a vitally interested party. Not materially interested, but in the right way, humanly and deeply. My only possible source of use.”

“Why—what makes you say that?” she asked.

“A favourite question of yours, apparently,” he commented. “But just think of the other people I have met here—if this is one of the worst of crimes, and not a medical matter. I’ll take them in order as I met them. Gates—out of the question. Mrs. Faversham—is what she is, and loves gossip. Her daughter—biased and quite impossible for my purpose. Your half-brother and his wife—interested parties and so even more impossible. Symonds—doesn’t dream anything of the sort is going on, and it’s not for me to enlighten him. Remains you. I haven’t put

them in the order in which I met them, after all, but it's near enough. See yourself as the only possible."

"And what—what do you expect of me?" she asked, after a long silence in which she thought it over—and smoked intermittently.

"I think I'm going to ask your co-operation and help, when the right point for such a thing arises," he answered. "Meanwhile"—he stood up—"I believe I've found a way of arresting what is happening to Reed—reducing it to negligibility till I find out what it is—with your help. Therefore you can stop feeling you have any cause for panic. Reed is trusting me—you trust me, too."

Risen to her feet, she faced him. "You're a comforting person," she said. "I shall be able to sleep, now. I couldn't, before."

"Because of Reed," he suggested, gazing straight at her.

She shook her head. "I can admire him for the way he faces this, and conceals what it must mean to him," she said. "But nothing more. No—you are utterly wrong if you think that of me. The—the awfulness of it, and the suspicion there must inevitably be of Bernard, if anything—if it happened that Sydnor Reed followed the way Elsie Carr went. The possibility altogether unnerved me to-night, which is why I am here. I had to ask you, had to get reassurance."

"You didn't know I'd be able to give it," he pointed out. "Elsie Carr—so that was the girl's name? Can you tell me anything of her?"

"Not much. I'm only a visitor here at times—not a resident like Bernard and his wife, though I suppose I have as much right to the use of their suite as they have, if I chose to insist. Under the will that gives them the use of it, I mean. And Elsie—rather above her class, she seemed. A brunette, very attractive to look at, with a sweet voice. Quick-tempered—it was her only fault. She turned on Anita for attempting to interfere with her, and struck her—my brother's wife wanted her dismissed for it, but naturally Mr. Reed wouldn't hear of such a thing. Anita has no right to interfere with any of the people he employs, as he told Rosamund at the time."

"That's very interesting," he said. "What did Anita do about it?"

"Owned she was in the wrong, and she and Elsie Carr became quite good friends again. She bore no grudge over it. Why—do the squabbles of domestics interest you to such an extent?"

"Anything affecting this Elsie Carr interests me, Baedeker."

"I fear I can tell you nothing more about her," she said.

“Not even”—he spoke very slowly—“whether a girl like her—above her class and very attractive, you said—whether she attracted attention from—well, say from someone very much above her class?”

“Now why do you ask that?” she countered.

“Yes, obviously a favourite question of yours. You know quite well why I asked it, and that evasion is very nearly a complete answer.”

“This—this was his mother’s room,” she said. “The one I am in was his father’s, with the dressing room communicating on the other side. I think I will say good-night, now. Thank you for understanding how it was that I had to see you alone before I could rest—and this was the only possible way. And for Bernard’s sake, not for Sydnor Reed’s sake, I’ll help you in any way I can.”

“Thank you very much, Miss Lawson. Goodnight.”

She went back to her own room, and he heard the key turned in the lock. Before undressing, he went to his window and looked out: the room was in front of the house, and he saw the way he had come as a level whiteness under the stars. Would it be possible to drive to London in the morning, or must he leave the car and find some means of getting to a railway station? Reed had to go away from here, too—

An odd problem, this—perhaps an insoluble one. As Gees drew the bedclothes up over his ear, he felt that the last piece of information he had drawn from Claire Lawson made a difference. Was it because of Reed’s association with the girl Elsie Carr, whatever that may have been, that madness threatened him now? Or because of his father’s will?

A charming girl, Claire Lawson. Lovely eyes, a beautiful voice—
Gees slept.

Winter sunshine, primrose rather than golden, reflected from the whiteness outside and lightened the panelling of the big dining room when Gees entered, the next morning, and saw only Reed and Claire Lawson seated at the table. Claire poured him coffee, and at Reed’s invitation he went to the sideboard to choose his breakfast. He returned to the table with a liberal supply of kidneys and bacon, to which he had added two sausages as an afterthought.

“I’m stoking for the day,” he explained, as he seated himself. “It’s a long run to London, and I intend to drive straight through—if driving is a possibility.” He gave Reed an inquiring look.

“It should be. The postman got here this morning, somehow, and he says the depth of snow is greatest in this valley—round and about Nortonsweir-Ferring, that is,” Reed told him. “Also that the main roads

are fairly clear. I wanted to know, on account of getting away myself. Symonds has already gone—there is a footpath that keeps to ridges, and the wind kept it fairly clear, so he risked the tramp to the station. And the weather has totally changed—when you go out, you'll feel almost a tang of spring in the wind."

"For the moment," Gees said, and crossed his fingers. Through the window that he faced he could see half a dozen men and boys industriously shovelling snow: already they had cleared a hundred yards or more of the drive that led to the main road, but their heaviest work would lie beyond the bend, on the section which Gees had charged the preceding day to the detriment of Gates' hat. "We're a small company this morning," he added, after beginning on his plateful.

"Yes," Reed assented. "Miss Faversham and her mother do not come down to breakfast, Symonds has gone, and Lawson and his wife are in their rooms in the wing—they usually take their meals there. Last night was—well, the finish of my little house party, call it. Ethna and her mother are leaving at midday, which is why I set the men to work clearing the way to the main road for a car."

"And you, Miss Lawson?" Gees asked, with intent to include her in their talk. "Are you running away too?"

She shook her head. "Not yet awhile," she answered. "Mr. Reed has appointed me chatelaine, since I'm one of the unemployed. Until he comes back—did you tell Mr. Green you were leaving to-day?" She turned to Reed as she asked the final question.

"No," Reed answered. "He told me."

"You see, Mr. Green," Claire said after a rather constrained silence, "Mr. Reed and I have had a talk this morning. He knows what I saw last night, he told me why you are here, and—and there are no secrets between the three of us on that head."

"And I was grateful to Claire for accepting my suggestion that she should stay on here for awhile," Reed added. "Not that I don't trust Gates to the limit, but—well, there is a difference."

"Umm-m!" Gees commented thoughtfully.

"If you're thinking of Bernard Lawson and his wife, it's unwritten between us that they keep to their suite as if it were a separate establishment altogether—it is a separate establishment."

"I was not thinking of that," Gees told him. "I had an idea of coming back here unexpectedly, perhaps. But on what you tell me—"

"If you are considering the proprieties, Mr. Green," Claire said, "my brother and his wife are here, as far as the outside world is concerned.

And if your plans for—ridding Mr. Reed of this fear involve coming back here, it is far too grave a matter for any conventions to prevent you, surely. Otherwise, I'll leave to-day too."

"That's unthinkable—and I'm not sure of coming back, either," she demurred. "And if I do, since you have put it as you have, I shall be very glad to see you again."

"Then for once—let me give you some more coffee"—her eyes smiled at him—"I shall look forward to the unexpected."

He handed his cup to her. "Now I think of it"—he addressed Reed—"looking out of my window this morning, I noticed that ruined wing of the building. A fire, I suppose?"

"Three fires," Reed answered, "the first of them about the time of Waterloo. The wing was rebuilt twice, and twice burned down—the last time when I was four years old. I can just remember it. My father said—both the last two fires were in his lifetime—said it might stay as it was, that time. He had an idea there was something abnormal about it, always that wing, and the rest of the Hall remaining unscathed. Since I have plenty of accommodation for all I am ever likely to need, I leave it alone, too. It's rather picturesque, with the ivy hiding the scars, when you can see it without this snow covering."

"Picturesque now," Gees agreed. "Like a choppy sea, frozen."

"There may have been something in your father's belief about it," Claire observed. "You see, Mr. Green, there was first of all a Norman castle on this site—if it were the first, and there were not one before that time, even. Then a mansion built early in the sixteenth century, and so damaged by Cromwell's guns that it wasn't worth restoring, so this Hall was built where it had stood. And both for that mansion and this the original castle foundations were left intact. The wine cellars are old dungeons, and there's an authentic torture chamber under this room, with pincers and chains still in it."

"Why should that lead to a belief that the ruined wing must be burned every time it is restored?" Gees asked.

"Because"—Reed took up the story—"there was an unusually large chapel that formed part of the original castle, and the crypt—a chapel in itself, with the stone of the original altar still as it was in old time—the crypt is directly under the ruined wing."

"And possibly somebody—or somebodies—out of time object to its being used by people who are still in time," Claire completed.

"Is it possible to see it?" Gees asked. "I'm interested in things of that sort, to a certain extent."

“Quite possible,” Reed told him, “but you’d need guidance in the passages, for the first time. They form rather a maze.”

“Ah! Not this morning, then. I like plenty of time and a free mind for that sort of experience. Time to soak in the essence of it.”

“If the unexpected happens,” Claire said, “you will find full directions in your Baedeker. I learned those passages as a child.”

“And I’m perfectly certain there’s nothing about the Hall or the dungeons and crypt—or anything about Nortonsweir-Ferring whatever—in Baedeker,” Reed observed. “I wouldn’t let the place be catalogued.”

“This is a different sort of Baedeker,” Gees told him, “a very special volume in a beautiful jewelled cover, and everything it tells you is set to music. There is only one—I mean there are no copies, only the original guide. And one has to get permission to consult it.”

“I see.” Reed’s gaze was on Claire’s crimsoned cheeks. “The poetic vein, eh? I’m afraid I must leave you now—several matters need my attention, since I’m to go to-day. Excuse me, won’t you?”

He went out from the room. Claire gazed steadily at Gees.

“You’re not at your best with your tongue in your cheek,” she said.

“I assure you my tongue was and is where nature intended me to put it,” he answered. “To translate that, I meant all I said.”

“Then—I’m not sorry you said it, even though I was not alone to hear it. And—and you think of coming back?”

“I’m not sure. Certain inquiries, first. Which reminds me—can you tell me the name of the doctor who attended that girl?”

“More than one attended her. Doctor Firth, in the village, first. After that, Mr. Reed called in specialists, trying to cure her.”

“I’ll see Doctor Firth first, and work on from him—” He broke off and stood up as the door opened to admit Mrs. Lawson.

She said—“Do sit down, Mr. Green—I don’t want to disturb you. Only to ask you, Claire, if you’ve seen anything of Anita?”

“Why, no,” Claire answered, in some surprise. “Not since I saw her when I came to look at baby yesterday. This morning, you mean?”

“Yes—I didn’t think you would have seen her, but I’m asking everyone. When we went back last night, I took a last look at baby, but naturally didn’t think to look in her room—the communicating door was ajar as usual. And now—her bed has not been slept in.”

Keeping his gaze on the little blonde, Gees saw real fear in her expression. He said—“She couldn’t have got away from here last night, surely. The depth of snow round the place—”

“But she isn’t here!” Mrs. Lawson exclaimed. “She must have—I’ve got Ethel Allen looking after baby for the time, while I see if I can get any trace of Anita. And if she did go away in the night the snow covered up all footprints, so we can’t tell—”

“Why should she go away in the night?” Claire asked in the pause.

“I don’t know. To the best of my knowledge she has no friends—Bernard says he never heard her speak of any. But—she’s gone.”

“Well,” Claire said after a silence. “I know nothing about her. I haven’t seen her since yesterday, as I told you.”

“I just wanted to ask you. Forgive me for troubling you.”

“Not in the least. I’ll come and let you know if I see or hear anything of her, though I expect she’ll come back to you rather than here. To the wing, I mean, when she does turn up.”

“I hope so. She’s never done this before.”

With which Mrs. Lawson backed out and closed the door again. Claire said—“This is more than strange. Anita is utterly devoted to that baby, as much so as if it had been her own. As she was to Bernard.”

“Spanish gipsy, you told me,” Gees observed.

“Yes. She once told Bernard she might have been a princess among her own people, whatever that may mean. A strange woman.”

“Which means what?” he asked.

“A secret woman—secretive, if you understand. Giving an impression of—of power, though she was merely nurse in actual fact. Perfectly even-tempered—I have never seen Anita in the least ruffled over anything. Absolutely unvarying—when you see her you’ll understand what I mean, if you’re any judge of character.”

“There is a proverb about still waters,” he remarked, and took out his cigarette case. “Can I offer you one?”

“Thank you.” She took a light as well. “More coffee?”

“Enough left to flavour the cigarette, thank you,” he answered, and lighted one for himself. “And they’ve got to the bend.”

She turned her head to look out from the window. Only two of the snow-shovellers were visible now, and the drive showed cleared up to the point where the trees hid it. “But they’ve got their hardest work to come,” Gees observed. “The drift there will take some clearing.”

“And if you can’t get your car away?” she asked.

“I’m going to walk to the village to see that Doctor Firth,” he answered, “the way Symonds went, after Reed has directed me to it. Then I’m coming back to see whether the car is still snowed in.”

"Then I shall see you again before you go? Go for good, I mean."

"Certainly. I want to know what's happened to this Anita."

She gave him a long look. "You mean—you think—" she began, and did not end the question.

"That's far too obvious," he answered. "So much so that I dismissed the idea as soon as it came to me."

She said—"But you haven't seen Anita, yet."

"No, but I shall make a point of it when—when I see you again. Now I'm going to hunt out Doctor Firth as soon as I've packed for going. Mrs. Faversham—do you know what time she is going?"

"They are due to catch the twelve-fifty—if they can get away."

"Ah! Then I won't see her again, probably. If you can, tell her for me how delighted I was to meet her, and how sorry I am not to be here to say good-bye."

"I will pass on your insincerities with as much sincerity as if you spoke them yourself," she promised gravely.

He got up and went to the door, opened it, and paused to say—"Every word set to music, just as I said before. Thank you, Baedeker," and went out, closing the door on himself before she could reply.

Chapter 4

Cause Removed?

In an ancient tweed suit, with faded blue eyes under shaggy brows, and a nicotine-stained moustache, Doctor Firth looked more like a middle-aged farmer than a member of the medical profession when Gees faced him in his consulting room, after struggling through drifts of snow three feet and more deep to get to the village of Nortonsweir-Ferring. There was, too, gruff inquiry rather than bedside manner in the doctor's question—"Well, Mr. Green, what can I do for you?"

"First, you can read this," Gees told him, and handed him the letter of introduction Reed had written and given him.

Firth looked up after reading it. He said—"H'm! I should have thought Mr. Reed would realize there is such a thing as professional secrecy. I don't discuss my patients with strangers, Mr. Green."

"Nor do I wish that you should," Gees answered coldly. "I think that letter tells you Mr. Reed had called me in to investigate the cause of what has happened to that girl, and possibly may happen to him, though you refuse to believe it. I don't."

"Then what do you want of me?" Firth demanded.

"In so far as you can give it without violating any confidence, a case history. Quite impersonal. I'm not interested in the girl, but in putting a stop to what placed her where she is now."

"Transferring it from medicine to crime, in fact," Firth observed thoughtfully. "I'm afraid you're altogether wrong about that. Sit down, won't you? The cause is nothing but a brain lesion, as far as can be ascertained. Gradual loss of reason—and not very gradual at that. Five weeks in all, as nearly as we can tell."

"We?" Gees asked. "Does that mean Sir Ensor Hailsham and you?"

“And Doctor Odzendael. He is in charge of a mental establishment about twenty miles from here, and Mr. Reed paid for the girl to be sent there after certification, rather than let her go to an ordinary county home—as they call them. He could tell you far more than I can—I am a general practitioner, not a mental specialist. His place is Langdon Rivers Grange, a converted country mansion going north along the main road through here, and if you wish to see him I’ll give you a note to him—you can take this letter of Mr. Reed’s with it.”

Evidently, Gees realized as he heard the offer, Firth’s bark was worse than his bite, his gruffness no more than a mannerism. “That’s very good of you,” he said. “But the beginnings of the case—as far as you consider yourself at liberty to tell me, that is.”

“Yes. Yes. When I was called to attend the girl—at the Hall, of course—there was nothing but this convulsive twitching of the left hand, and in the muscles of the left arm—physically, she was normal except for that. No pain, but a tingling. I tried an electric current on her, and she said the twitching was like that all the time. Like the effect of the current, I mean. Mentally, she was in an extremely excited state—wrought up is the common way of expressing it. As if—I don’t know if you are aware of it, but there is a recently discovered drug which you may buy at any druggist’s in tablet form, one which acts as a powerful mental stimulant, if taken in normal doses, while overdoses will drive those who take them to frenzy, and in two cases have caused suicide. As if she had taken double doses, say, of that drug. Mentally overwrought, physically near an exhaustion.”

“For how long, did you gather—if I may ask?”

“It had begun—that is, she had first noticed the twitching—about a fortnight before I first saw her. I made certain that she was taking nothing, no patent compounds or anything of that sort, which might have induced whatever it was. Sedatives had no effect, not even as much morphine as I dared exhibit—inject is the word you as a layman will better understand. I suggested calling in Doctor Odzendael to Mr. Reed, and he agreed at once. Odzendael could do no more than I had done, and owned himself utterly at a loss. Whether he still is I do not know, but the last I heard of the girl she was worse, not better.”

“Did you take any slides?” Gees asked.

“Obviously. There was no abnormality of any kind in the blood stream. A slight excess of white corpuscles, but that is to the good, as you may or may not know. For resistance to disease.”

Reed, Gees reflected, had had the same report on a blood test—a high count of white corpuscles. Which might mean nothing.

“Any other tests?” he asked, after thinking it over.

“Every one for which I had means,” Firth answered, “and negative results every time. Mr. Reed gave me *carte blanche*, and I spared nothing, until the girl became homicidally violent and had to be certified and taken away. Went for a poor little kitchen maid with a carving knife, and terrified the girl almost out of her wits, though fortunately she was stopped before she could do any damage. Gates and the cook at the Hall managed to get hold of her in time.”

A question came to Gees’ mind: had someone planned that the girl should attack Reed in that way, with nobody to restrain her in time? He dismissed it as too fantastic, although he knew by what he had almost compelled Claire Lawson to imply that Reed had been attracted by this girl. Dismissed it, only to find it recurring, persisting.

“And from then on, I suppose, Doctor Odzendael took over the case?” he suggested, after a brief silence.

“That is so. I was present when Sir Ensor Hailsham was called in to see if anything could be done, and except for the results of tests and analyses, I could tell him little more than I have told you.”

“Could he tell you any more?” Gees asked abruptly.

Firth shook his head. “He owned that the case was unique,” he answered. “By that time Odzendael had tried everything, spinal fluid test, Aberhalden—everything. Sir Ensor concluded that whatever has caused the lesion does not remain in the blood stream, even if it enters by it, but is absorbed almost instantly into the brain tissues. Odzendael sprang a new one on him by suggesting *lakiti*.”

“A new one on me, too,” Gees observed. “What is *lakiti*?”

“Odzendael,” Firth answered indirectly, “is Dutch East Indies by birth, and in my opinion quite as great an alienist as Sir Ensor, now. He described this *lakiti* to us as a kind of poison used by certain Dyak tribes for tipping their arrows. It is not the one in general use, and is known only to a few of them. When they make a kill of any game with the stuff, they invariably destroy the head, and regard all the rest as eatable. Eat it without harm to themselves, that is, and don’t trouble to bleed the game first. Odzendael got enough *lakiti* to try it on a few animals, and when he dissected them he found no trace of it anywhere except in the brain tissues. Complete paralysis, there!”

“And what did Hailsham say to that?”

“Wanted to know who was in a position to import *lakiti* to a place like Nortonsweir-Ferring, who would go to that trouble over a girl like her, and whether Odzendael contemplated calling in the police. To which Odzendael answered that short of a post-mortem and examination of the brain tissues he had no evidence, in addition to which the amount of *lakiti* that would kill a tiger in about ninety seconds would go on the tip of one Dyak arrow, puffed out of a blowpipe. Thus the amount that had infected the girl, if it were *lakiti*, was infinitesimal, and only complete examination of the brain tissues would reveal it—if at all. It might be so minute as to be undiscoverable. It might have acted as a catalyst, done its deadly work and passed out by her system!”

“The really untraceable poison at last,” Gees suggested.

“No. Not if you got some *lakiti*, tried minute doses on an animal subject, and then dissected the subject and revealed the effect on the brain. To get the comparison, I mean. There is no untraceable poison in existence, in the present state of scientific research.”

“A comforting thought,” Gees observed reflectively.

“On thinking it over,” Firth said, “I should recommend you not to go and see Doctor Odzendael. This is not”—he smiled slightly—“to make you still more anxious to go and see him, but because he won’t receive you as I did. By that I mean he wouldn’t talk to a layman. He has a very high opinion of himself—justly, as far as his profession goes, and I’ve told you his views as Hailsham and I heard him express them. Told you more than you would get out of him, I know.”

“Umm-m!” Gees sounded doubtful over it.

“If you can spare another minute or two, I’ll write you a note of introduction to him,” Firth offered. “Let you see for yourself.”

Gees stood up. “You have been most kind, doctor,” he said, “and if I seemed to doubt your word on this Odzendael I apologize. It was not that at all, and I take what you have told me as all I am likely to get. Except—I might see Hailsham when I get back to London.”

“Yes. He was very much interested, but quite—well, helpless.”

“Snow. Deep,” Gees observed, with a memory of the ancient man.

“Eh? I don’t get that. It is deep, locally, but—”

“It was an inconsequence, and I apologize again. Thank you very much for giving me so much of your time, doctor, and still more for considering me worth your confidence. Now I’ll go and see if it’s possible to get my car away from the Hall and on to the road again.”

“Yes—one moment, please.” Firth got up, and went out. A telephone bell had rung somewhere outside the room.

Left alone, Gees questioned if he would turn the car out yet, even if the shovellers had cleared the drive. For he had not yet seen Anita, and on what Firth had told him there was reason to see her, from some estimate of her before leaving Nortonsweir-Ferring. If this Odzendael were right in his surmise, and *lakiti* or some obscure poison had been used, there was her devotion to Bernard Lawson and his son, her almost certain knowledge that removal of Reed before he begot a child would ensure Lawson's succession to all that Reed owned, and—

Firth returned. "That nurse, Anita—found dead," he announced. "A call for me from the Hall. Fortunately my round is a very small one to-day, and the patients can wait till I've had a look at her."

"The Hall was cut off from telephoning last night," Gees observed.

"So was all the rest of the village—a branch dropped on the wires, broken by the weight of snow. It's all in order again now. If you don't mind, I'll walk with you to the Hall, Mr. Green."

"Splendid." They went out, and Gees helped Firth on with his coat. "Did they tell you—was this Anita killed by accident?"

"Found dead in the snow—that's all I know, as yet. There'll be an inquest, of course, police and all the rest of it. Her heart has been shaky for a long time, and I expect—"

He did not end it. They set off together on their walk.

All the drive had been cleared by the shovelling party, and a set of tyre tracks showed that a heavy car had already passed over it. A glance at his watch told Gees that it was already twelve o'clock, and he deduced that Mrs. Faversham and Ethna had gone to their train. Melting snow dripped from the trees: the weather had totally changed from the bitter cold of the preceding night, and Gees felt that the heavy coat in which he had made his journey to the village was more burden than necessity. Doctor Firth had gone silent, answering questions or remarks only by monosyllables.

Gates admitted them at the front entrance, and, it imperturbability meant perfection, he was as perfect a servant as ever. He suggested the long room of mirrors for Gees, and took Firth away to where Anita's body had been taken. Probably, on his way, he told Claire Lawson that their guest of last night was back, for within a minute or two she appeared, and Gees rose from his chair by the fire.

"I'm glad to see you—to ask your advice," she said. "I have already telephoned the police. Is there anything else I ought to do?"

"Nothing that I know of," he answered. "Mr. Reed—I suppose he's gone to see the Favershams as far as the station, though?"

"Gone altogether, before—before they found Anita," she said. "I must wire him to come back and tell him why, I suppose—"

"You must do nothing of the sort," he interrupted. "Obviously he can know nothing about how Anita got out or what happened to her, and unless the police demand him back here I want him to stay away. Do you know where he will stay in London, so I can get at him?"

"His own flat. A service flat in Albemarle Street. I can get you the telephone number and full address—"

"No—don't go, please," he interrupted again. "I can wait till he gets there, and then tell him to move out of it. He ought to have got in touch with me again before leaving here."

"Which sounds rather dictatorial. You mean you'll see him there."

"Probably. As for the dictatorial part of it, he's paying pretty heavily for my services, and unless he wants to waste his money it would be better for him to comply with what I have to ask."

"You will stay for lunch, now?" she inquired, after a pause.

"Thank you. I don't know how long I shall stay—I want to hear more about this Anita. Now I think of it—can you tell me whether the reason for my being here is known at all?"

She nodded. "Two of the maids were doing out your room this morning, and as I passed the door I heard one say—'Fancy putting a detective in a room like this!' and then something to the effect of finding out everything about poor Elsie. So it's known pretty fully, though I don't know how, or who betrayed you."

"Reed himself, by my wish," he told her. "Did they sound—well, contemptuous? Of the mere detective, I mean?"

"Not when I'd finished with them," she answered. "I told them you might need the room again, and they were to leave it ready for you in case you did. And—and a few other things."

"Was that wise?" he asked gravely.

"I've moved my things into the room Ethna Faversham had," she answered, looking straight at him. "So—well, you see!"

"Not that, Miss Lawson. You've possibly set two of the staff dead against me. Not that it's likely to make any difference. But tell me—how and when was Anita found? That is, if you know."

"Hedges, the gardener, found her. She was a bump in the snow beside the road after they'd shovelled and swept it clear, he said. He thought it looked like a human figure, and went to investigate—this was after the car had gone with Ethna and her mother and Mr. Reed. He said

he thought she must have been there since ten o'clock or half-past last night, because she was quite cold and stiff, and because of the depth of snow over her. And—I don't know what you'll make of this—she had a roll of currency notes grasped in her hand. Fifty one-pound notes, as they found when they got them away from her."

"That looks as if—" he began, and did not end it.

"As if what, Mr. Green?" Claire asked, after waiting vainly.

"She wasn't going to a savings bank, and she wasn't going shopping at that time of night. And considering what the night was like, it was an errand of some urgency that took her out—with fifty pounds. Then—how and where did she get fifty pounds in notes?"

"She was well paid, and spent next to nothing," Claire said.

"Kept it all in a stocking, eh? Or did she?"

"I know she had a savings bank account, and bought savings certificates, too. Yes, it is strange, of course. The notes, I mean."

"What acquaintances had she outside this place?"

She shook her head. "None that I know of. A secret woman, as I told you before. Quite content—as far as I knew—quite content to be what she was, a sort of confidential maid as well as nurse—before Bernard married, she had charge of the suite here, and cooked for him when he was here. He spends a good deal of his time in London, though not so much since his marriage. I think I told you she nursed him as a baby—nursed me too when it came my turn. And I have never heard her speak of knowing anyone outside our own circle of servants—and us. I don't think Bernard has, either."

"She took holidays, I suppose?" he asked.

"Very seldom. While Bernard was on his honeymoon she went to Spain—at least, she said she was going to Spain, to see if she could locate any relatives in or near the village where she was born—I forget its name, but it's near Valladolid. I looked out times for her in the continental Bradshaw, and gave her a list of them. She went by the Sud Express, I remember. She had had other holidays, but rarely, and only short ones at that. And that was the last, nearly three years ago. She never spoke of what happened on it in my hearing—naturally, since I am seldom here, and she keeps with Bernard and his wife. Kept with them, I should say now."

He thought it over. Abruptly he said—"I want to see Firth before he goes—and see Anita too—what's left of her."

She did not question it, but pressed the bell push beside the fireplace. And, when Gates himself appeared—"Has Doctor Firth gone yet, Gates?"

"Not yet, miss. He's still with—with the body."

"I want you to take Mr. Green to him, please."

"Very good, miss. Will you come this way, sir?"

Gees followed him, across the entrance hall and along a central corridor which eventually turned at right angles, into the wing in which the Lawsons had their suite of rooms, evidently. Then into a room furnished as a servant's bedroom, in which Firth, having finished such examination of the body as he had made, stood looking down at all that remained of Anita. The face only was uncovered: it was that of a woman well past middle age, wrinkled, olive-tinted in spite of the many years she had spent in English climate, and Gees saw it in death as majestic, even. Almost Semitic in type, yet with—to his sight—something about it reminiscent of an Easter Island sculpture. A face of tremendous strength, and one that justified Claire Lawson's description of the dead woman as "secret." Dignity in its placidity, and a suggestion of wisdom, too. Recollecting—"She might have been a princess among her own people," Gees felt that, if she had been like this in life, she might have passed for a princess anywhere. He said—"Well, doctor, what do you make of it?"

"Exposure and exhaustion—her heart gave out," Firth answered. "I shall make a complete *post mortem*, of course—I don't often get the chance of one—but I have no doubt of that as the cause of death."

"Did you know much about her—whether she was just as splendid in life as she looks in death?" Gees ventured.

"All I know is that she was a very devoted servant, a loyal one and a good one. I attended her a few times lately, and warned her about her heart and the danger of undue exertion. She chose to disregard the warning, and—well, this is the result."

He turned toward the door. "I've still got my round to do," he said. "It's a pity, this. Why she went out in the snow—good day to you, Mr. Green. I'll just see Mrs. Lawson for a moment, before the police get here, and tell her what to say to them."

He went out. Gees, following him out from the room, went back the way he had come, and found Claire Lawson awaiting him.

"Died from exposure," he said. "Tried to get somewhere and failed. Hullo—what's this?" For she held a letter out toward him.

“Came by the second post, which is more than an hour late,” she answered as he took it. “I don’t know—I suppose it ought to go to Bernard or my sister-in-law. Anita can’t read it, now.”

A cheap envelope, bearing the postmark “Nortonsweir-Ferring. 9.30 A.M.” and that day’s date, addressed in sprawling, poor handwriting, almost certainly that of a man, to “Miss A. Mendez, The Hall, Nortonsweir-Ferring.” For nearly a minute Gees studied it, turning it over to see that the back was smeared, as if the writer had pressed down the flap with dirty hands after licking it.

He said—“I want to take a chance on this, Miss Lawson. Can you tell me, though, if any other letter has ever come to her here, addressed in this same handwriting?”

“One—I think it was twelve days or a fortnight ago. Less—it was on the Monday morning, and this is Friday. I noticed it because I was in the entrance hall when Gates took the letters in, and went to see if there were any for me—there were not. Gates signed for a registered letter addressed exactly like this, except that the name of the county was on it, and it was postmarked London. I noticed it because of the handwriting—this handwriting, I’m certain.”

“I’ll take the chance, and trust you to say nothing about this unless some relative of hers turns up. Then, of course, I should hand it over—and explain why I opened it, if necessary.”

“Of course you may trust me,” she said. “I’m curious, too.”

Holding the letter by its edge—as he had done all the time—he took out a penknife and slit the upper edge carefully. Withdrawing a half-sheet of poor quality notepaper, he unfolded it and read—with Claire leaning toward him to read too—

Same time to-night at end of lane as before. If to much snow to-night, to-morrow night same time.

There was no preamble, and no signature. Gees folded the paper, replaced it in the envelope and, taking out his wallet, placed the envelope tenderly within it. “Possible finger-prints,” he explained, “though with all the handling it’s had that’s doubtful.”

“Rather illiterate, whoever he was,” Claire observed. “And it explains why she risked going out like that last night.”

“Yes. At what time, I wonder? Her bed not slept in—”

“The snow that covered her didn’t begin till about two o’clock,” she said. “I always draw the curtains back and pull up the blind before I get into

bed, and I couldn't sleep till past three. I saw the stars go out and the snow begin again. And you remember—it was star-light when we were all in here and Mr. Reed went behind the curtains to look out, when he came back and I saw—what I did see.”

“It being then somewhere about eleven o'clock,” he said slowly. “Yes. I wonder—he won't keep that appointment to-night, of course. He'll hear of her death. Unless he doesn't want to make contact with anyone in this village or come here till after dark, which is possible. Yes—just possible. Would you mind—if I do stay here to-night, would you mind very much?”

“Please do. I shall be glad.”

He gave her a long look, and saw her colour deepen.

“To—to help in any way I can, I mean,” she added. “I must—I want to see Gates about something—do excuse me.”

He managed to get to the door in time to open it for her—just managed it, and noted that she kept her face averted as she thanked him.

Chapter 5

Bernard Lawson's View

The main telephone, Gates said, was in the library, and Doctor Firth's number was one-two-one. He conducted Gees to the library, another very spacious and luxurious room, the next doorway along the central corridor to that of the dining room. There were extensions from this line, the omniscient butler explained, to Mr. Reed's bedroom, to the room next that which Mr. Green himself had had—the one in which Claire had slept, Gees divined—and to an instrument in an alcove of the entrance hall. Questioned on the point, Gates said there was a separate line altogether for his and the cook's use when they wanted to communicate with tradespeople, and yet another separate line to the suite occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Lawson. Thus, Gees felt, when he wanted to ring through to Reed in London, he would be fairly safe from listeners-in, if he used this line.

Doctor Firth had not yet returned, he was informed when he got the number. Leaving a message for Firth to ring him on return, he went up to the room in which he had slept to change his shoes and socks, since ploughing through snowdrifts had left his feet sodden. Lunch was at half-past one, Claire had told him, and at a quarter-past he went down to the long room of mirrors and found Bernard Lawson standing on the hearthrug before the big fire and looking far from pleasant.

"I want a word with you, Green," Lawson said abruptly.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't have it, Lawson," Gees answered, and put into the sentence as much offensiveness as he had heard in the other's remark. He guessed what was coming.

"I noticed something last night," Lawson went on. "Something that upset my sister badly, and rather shook me at the time."

"Indeed." Gees kept a poker face.

“This morning I learned—never mind how—I learned that you are a detective, and Reed is employing you to smell out the cause of—of what I saw last night. Now I know this is a purely medical matter, not one calling for any such step as Reed has taken in employing you, and I resent his doing so, very much indeed.”

Behind him, as he concluded the last sentence, the door of the room opened noiselessly, and Claire entered. Gees, facing the doorway, saw her lay her finger on her lips to indicate silence: had Lawson had half a glance to spare at either one of two mirrors, he must have seen her reflection, but all his attention was focused on the man he addressed. Gees said, very quietly—“Whether you resent it or no is no concern of mine. The matter is between Mr. Reed and me.”

“Is it?” Lawson coloured a little with anger. “When the terms of Pelham Reed’s will—this Reed’s father’s will—are common knowledge? By dragging a person like you in, Reed has implied that this is not medical at all, but a criminal matter. And who benefits, if it is?”

“I don’t object to your making statements,” Gees told him, “but don’t ask me questions. You might not like the answers.”

“As if any answer you might make counts for a damn with me!” Lawson retorted contemptuously. “I’m here to tell you that Elsie Carr was Reed’s mistress, and whatever is wrong with him is what he caught from her. And to tell you, further, to clear out from here, at once.”

Gees took out his cigarette case, extracted a cigarette, and lighted it. He made no reply. Claire, just inside the doorway, stood still.

“You hear me, Green, or Gees, or whatever you choose to call yourself?” Lawson demanded fiercely, as Gees inhaled for the third time.

Gees said, calmly—“That phrase—‘whatever you choose to call yourself,’ doesn’t come well from you, I’m afraid.”

“Blast you, you damned cheap detective, you dare to make an insinuation like that to me?” Lawson clenched his fists as he spoke.

“Your half-sister is listening, mind,” Gees said, as Claire came forward, quickly, and, at last observing her reflection in one of the mirrors, Lawson turned to face her.

She said—“Bernard, Mr. Reed left me in charge of this house, all but the part you occupy. That being so, you are insulting my guest, in what is for the time my house. You can either apologize to him or go to your own rooms at once. I think you had better go, in any case. Mr. Green is perfectly right in his attitude over this.”

For long seconds Lawson stared at her. Then he said—"You fool!" and, stalking with long strides to the door, went out and slammed it on himself. Claire watched him go, and turned to face Gees again.

He said—"Now I'd better go and get me a room at the village pub."

"What have I done, then?" she asked sharply.

"You? You were splendid. It was I—I'm afraid the things I said were a trifle cheap. And rather than cause dissensions here—"

"For everything you said," she interrupted, "you had full justification. Bernard was cheap. He had no right to talk to you like that. It is all between you and Mr. Reed, and—and me, since he left me in charge here, and told me everything—nearly everything—before he left. And I, your hostess, ask you to go on being my guest as long as you need to stay in Nortonsweir. Will you, please?"

"Risking another clash with him," he pointed out.

"There will be none. He has no more right here without invitation than a stranger, unless I invite him. Please stay, Mr. Green."

He smiled. "You're being very good to me."

"I—it's because of to-night, and Anita's mysterious correspondent, that you don't want to go to-day, I know. And—and you said you wanted to explore the crypt. You—you could take your Baedeker with you, and perhaps it might be useful in other ways, too. Things you may want to know to help in what you're doing, I mean."

"Yes, very good to me," he said gravely. "I couldn't go after that, Bernard or no Bernard. One thing—"

"That's the gong for lunch," she interrupted, "and you had such a meagre breakfast. You must be starving by this time."

They went out, and across to the dining-room. He said as he seated himself on the right of the carving chair—"I don't like you any less with your tongue in your cheek. The ordinary Baedeker hasn't a solitary spark of humour in it, more's the pity."

"Burgundy or Graves, sir?" Gates inquired. "Or whisky?"

"Graves, thank you," Gees told him.

When, served, they had the room to themselves, Claire asked—"You were going to say something about one thing. Was it something I could do to help? If so, you have only to ask."

"Yes, I said you were very good to me. Something I'd rather you found out for me—if possible. Bernard and Mrs. Lawson came into the long room last night at somewhere about a quarter past seven, and by what Mrs. Lawson said Anita was with the baby then. If you could find out

for me—without putting too much point on the inquiry—find out the latest time at which she was seen in the house last night.”

“I’ll do my best. Yes, I see. Because that letter said the same time to-night, and you want to get as near the time as possible.”

“Exactly. For one thing, it’ll be miserably chilly waiting about in thawing snow, and for another, the more nearly I can fix the time of that appointment, the more time I shall have with you.”

Gates’ reappearance saved her a reply. She steered their talk to light topics—cleverly, Gees knew—and so kept it for the rest of the meal. They discussed films over cigarettes and coffee, and Gees had just stubbed his end out when Gates appeared again.

“Doctor Firth on the telephone—in the library, sir,” he said.

With a word to Claire, Gees went to take the call. Firth’s gruff voice asked—“Mr. Green? I hear you wanted me to call you.”

“Just a query, doctor,” Gees told him. “If you can give me any idea of the time at which Anita Mendez died. It might be useful.”

“Sorry, but I can only localize it to between half-past eight, say, and midnight or a little later, She had been dead some hours when I first saw the body, you see. I can give you no more than that. And the post mortem I’m holding will make no difference on that point. It will only reinforce my certainty as to the cause of death.”

“You call it a certainty?” Gees asked—though he saw no cause for doubt. Had there been any, Anita would not have had the fifty one-pound notes still clutched in her hand, he felt certain.

“Of course I do!” Firth answered with a note of irritation. “By the way, Odzendael rang me a few minutes ago to tell me the girl Elsie Carr died this morning, and he’s doing an autopsy on the body—there will be no inquest on her, I may tell you—doing an autopsy in the hope of verifying his *lakiti* theory.”

“Interesting,” Gees observed. “Could you let me know the result, if I give you a ring to-morrow or the next day?”

“I see no reason why I shouldn’t, having told you so much. Yes. You’d better make it the day after to-morrow, if you will.”

“Many thanks, doctor. The day after to-morrow—can do. I won’t keep you any longer now. Good-bye for the present.”

He hung up and went back to the dining-room. Claire, standing beside her chair, had evidently waited for him to return. She asked—“Is all well, or have you to be busy the rest of the day?”

“All is very well,” he answered. “Except that Elsie Carr died this morning. As for me, I want to look out the probable time of Reed’s arrival in

London, I want his telephone number from you, if you will, and to ring him when he's had time to get there. Except for that, I'm free till it's time to keep Anita's appointment to-night."

She nodded. "Perhaps you can find something to interest you for an hour or so, and forgive me for neglecting you so long."

"I know where to find a lovely fire, and chairs to fit it," he answered. "That being so, there's nothing to forgive."

"Shall I let you sleep on till tea time, or waken you to go and see the crypt when I've finished what I have to do?"

"I think you'd better waken me. Especially if I'm snoring."

"I will, then. One thing, Mr. Green. What Bernard said about Elsie Carr and Mr. Reed is quite true. You'd better know it. And so—the rest of what he said may be true too, and it—it is medical."

"I won't overlook the point," he promised, "but I've got to satisfy Reed, and my opinion is that the cause is not to seek in any association between him and that girl. It may be, but I think not."

"Which you must realize is an accusation," she pointed out.

He shook his head. "No. The cause might be anything at all. Accidental—anything at all. I can understand Lawson's view. And if it is not accidental, but in my province, remember that Anita's death may have removed the cause and put an end to the trouble. In fact, it looks rather like that, at the moment. We shall see."

"Thank you, Mr. Green—for talking so frankly, I mean. Now the lovely fire and chair to fit it. I'll look for you there."

Bernard Lawson's outburst was not that of a guilty man, Gees reflected as he adjusted a chair so as to get the benefit of the fire in the long room without scorching himself. It was consistent with the opinion Gees had formed of the man's character: he would naturally resent the transference of this affair from a medical field to a criminal investigation, especially since he himself was, on the face of it, the only likely criminal. Would resent it all the more since he, interested party that he was, had not been consulted, but ignored, by Reed, in this calling in an outsider. Reed, obviously in deadly fear of such a fate as had befallen Elsie Carr, had not considered that point: in fact, Gees decided, he had not played fair with Lawson, but had left the man who would benefit most by his death to make what he liked of it. And Lawson had come to the only possible conclusion.

All the same, Lawson had no business to go for Gees: his quarrel was with Reed, and he should have made his complaint to Reed. He had

been too angry to realise it, and by his very anger had as good as declared his innocence to Gees. As Gees had told Claire Lawson, it looked now as if Anita had been the guilty one. Elsie Carr had struck her, an unforgivable insult to such a one, and she had taken her vengeance in her own terrible way—whether with *lakiti* or something equally deadly in its effects was yet to be ascertained—perhaps. Then, in care of the child of the man she had nursed, devoted to that man in the first place and then to the child, she had thought it safe to put an end to Reed by the means that had left her unsuspected over Elsie. It would look like epidemic: probably she had had no difficulty in getting at Elsie to administer whatever it was, and had had to wait some time for a chance to introduce the poison to Reed. If time justified this hypothesis—if Reed recovered and returned here to find himself safe from the malady, then the means Anita had used to get at him would never be discovered, though Odzendael's autopsy on Elsie Carr's body might reveal *lakiti* or whatever she had used. It was barely credible, just credible, that one in her position would plan to kill in such an awful fashion. Devotion to Lawson and his child might have warped her mind to that extent; the impulses that might act as driving forces in a Spanish gipsy are not those actuating people of colder, more northern temperament and training.

So far Gees had got in his reflections when Gates, entering to him, said—“Mr. Reed would like to speak to you on the telephone, sir. In the library. He is holding on while I inform you.”

Gees went to the library and took up the receiver to hear Reed's voice, unhurried and distinct—“Is that you, Green?”

“Yes. Glad to hear from you. I was going to call you in London.”

“Ah! I've anticipated you. I'm speaking from Leicester, having just said good-bye to Miss Faversham and her mother. They go to their home near here and I take the next train on for London. I wanted to speak to you about Bernard Lawson. It has occurred to me that he will draw rather awkward conclusions when he finds out why you're there.”

“He has already drawn them, and told me to clear out,” Gees said. “I don't blame him—I should have felt like it myself, in his place, though I'm afraid he rather put my back up by his way of putting it to me. And on Miss Lawson's invitation I have not cleared out.”

“Don't, as long as you see any necessity for staying. I'm going to talk to Bernard, but I thought I'd have this word with you first. Even more, now, on what you have told me, I don't know how he's going to take what I have to say to him. I ought to have said it before I left, I see now.”

“That same idea has occurred to me,” Gees told him.

"It would." There was a slightly ironic note in the reply. "But I want you to know that whatever Bernard says, I have put this affair in your hands, and given you *carte blanche* over handling it. Stay at the Hall as long as you think necessary, and ask anything you think necessary. I told Gates before I left that he was not to question anything you might ask, and that that was to apply to everyone under him, too. You see, you've given me confidence, lifted me a good way out of the state I'd fallen in, and I appreciate it."

"Very good of you to say that. How's the hand going on?"

"No better, and no worse. You said you were going to ring me in London. Is it anything you could tell me now?"

"It is," Gees answered. "Don't make use of your service flat. Go to Brown's, the Dorchester—anywhere rather than there. I want you away from every possibility, while I probe a bit deeper into this. And one other thing. Anita Mendez was missing last night, and found dead in the snow this morning beside your drive. I want to ask you—unless you are called back by the police for her inquest, or anything of that sort, do not come back because of her. Doctor Firth diagnoses death from exposure, on an initial examination of the body—she had some heart trouble, he told me, and ought to have known better than to go out. So let it pass—she was not in your employ, and you knew nothing about it. Keep away if you possibly can."

"Well, but ... Yes, I see. Very well, I'll obey you, Green."

"That's good. And for emphasis to the request, I've made a little progress since I saw you. Just a little—I don't regard the solution of the mystery—to express it melodramatically—don't regard it as hopeless. I'm not leaving here till to-morrow, so will you ring me by about ten o'clock and tell me where you've located yourself?"

"Yes, I can do that. Anything else?"

"Not that I can call to mind at the moment. Yes, though! Are you likely to be very busy to-morrow morning or afternoon?"

"Since you've driven me out from Nortonsweir-Ferring, I've got to find some way of killing time," Reed answered rather grimly.

"Driven you out in the hope of saving you," Gees retorted, "so don't swear at me. But this. I'd like you, if you will, to go along to my office in Little Oakfield Street, just off the Haymarket, with an hour or so to spare. You'll find a most charming and sympathetic girl in charge there—Miss Brandon, my secretary and confidential second-in-command. I'd like you to state this case to her as you stated it to me—

more fully, if possible—and let her take it down. Dictate it to her, the whole story, quite frankly.”

“You’re asking a good deal, Green.” Reed told him, and even over the telephone he sounded coldly annoyed.

“I said I’d like you to do it,” Gees retorted. “If it irks you, don’t. If you feel you can, I’ll get through to Miss Brandon and have a word with her, so she knows what to expect. And another thing—if you don’t dictate it to, her, I shall, eventually. I keep a record of all case-histories, and in talking to her you’d be talking to me.”

“Very well, then, I’ll do that,” Reed promised, after a silence in which his second three minutes on the line registered itself.

“That’s good. I’ll tell her to expect you—morning or afternoon suit you better? It’ll be all one to her which you choose.”

“Make it about two-thirty. And is that all?”

“Enough too, by the sound of your voice. Thank you—both for your opinion of me, which I hope to justify, and for your co-operation. And for final emphasis, do not come back here until I consider it safe for you, and whatever you do, do not come back at all without letting me know you intend doing so. That is all.”

“I understand. Now I’m going to ring Bernard Lawson and tell him to leave you alone. Try to make him understand. Good-bye, Green.”

Which, Gees reflected as he replaced his receiver, would leave the line free, since Bernard Lawson’s suite had a line to itself. He lifted the receiver again, dialled trunks, and eventually got connected with his own flat—of which two rooms served as office accommodation for himself and Miss Brandon. She said—“Gees, confidential agents. Who is speaking, please?”

“The same,” he told her. “From Nortonsweir-Ferring, and a rotten drive it was, too, yesterday. What have you at your end of the table?”

“Very little, Mr. Green. Three divorce inquiries, a Wiltshire farmer wants to know whether you can do water-divining, and a lady—titled—wants advice as to whether to bring an action for breach of promise. That’s all that has come in since you left.”

“Ah! We are not agitated, let alone amused. The usual form letter in each case, Miss Brandon. Now something for you. At two-thirty or thereabouts to-morrow, you will encounter a dark man—sounds just like fortune-telling, doesn’t it?”

“Encounter him here, you mean?” She disregarded the final query.

“You’ve guessed it first time. He should have a story to tell. If so, I want you to take it down—quite openly, in front of him as he talks. That’s all

arranged. And I want you to question him if necessary on any point, so that you get it all quite clear. Because I may want to discuss it with you, on the principle that two heads gather no moss. Now about the dark man—you remember my case that involved MacMorn, the maker of shadows, and a Miss Margaret Aylener?”

“You never completed the record of that case,” she accused.

“No, nor will. Though I managed to destroy MacMorn, I'm not so proud of it as all that. I didn't save Helen Aylener—couldn't. But I didn't ring you to recite history. MacMorn was Azilian—you've never seen the type to recognize it, have you?”

“I should say very few people have,” she said. “By what you told me, the Azilian race got absorbed in other peoples or was extinguished before the time of recorded history, so it isn't likely—”

“Granted, to quote Tooting,” he interrupted. “But once in ten thousand times, or even less, you get a throw-back to the Azilian type. MacMorn was one—no, he was not a throw-back, though, but a survival of the type. I want you to note your dark man particularly when you see him, because he is a throw-back to that type. I've seen his father's portrait, and in that there's not the slightest trace of Azilian. So your dark man is a freak, really, and a proof of the strength of the Azilian strain if it exists in a family, since it can break through and declare itself as in this case.”

“And why am I to take particular note of it, Mr. Green?” she asked drily. “Will it form part of the story I am to take down?”

“You are to take particular note because you never know when recognition of the type might be useful to you—or useful to me, possibly. Don't be scared of this dark man. As nearly as I can tell, he hasn't indulged in—well, in practices of any sort such as made MacMorn a being I was justified in stamping out. So far, I regard your dark man as rather a good sort, and in very bad trouble at present, as you'll find out if he recites his piece. Which is why I am still here and he will be there, to-morrow. I think that's all, Miss Brandon.”

The girl at the London end of the line replaced her receiver after she had said good-bye, and took up the library book she had been reading, through lack of other employment. Then she put it down, and looked round the comfortably-furnished room which Gees had appointed to her for her work. Eventually she took down a file and scanned the typescript sheets within it, a record of the first stages of the case in which had been involved MacMorn, maker of shadows. Only the first stages: Gees had kept the end of the case to himself.

She closed the file and replaced it on its shelf.

“I wonder,” she said to herself. “Ever since then he has been different—” She took up the book again and, after awhile, went on reading, but only for a very little while. For then she started up, as if restless, and went to a mirror in the corner of the room to stand facing it. She studied her own long-lashed blue eyes—not so deep a blue as that of Claire Lawson’s eyes, but hyacinthine and, as even her own sex had told her, lovely. And the brown hair, silkily soft, the piquantly irregular features—she could not know how the play of expressions made it a very attractive face, but knew herself above the average by effects she produced—without effort, since she wanted to produce effects in only one instance, and that the one in which, apparently, she could produce none at all. Eventually she went back to her book.

“I wonder!” she said again, and, determined to put a stop to this futile self-communing, forced her attention to the printed page.

Chapter 6

A Horned Altar

Starting up from a reverie that was in danger of becoming a doze, since the chair and the fire between them induced drowsiness, Gees saw that Claire, entering the room, was carrying an electric hand lamp by the ring with which it might be suspended when not in use. In shape it was a hurricane lamp, though without the guarding wires, and, since it was already switched on, he could see even in this light room that its bulb gave far more illumination than any of its oil-fed prototypes. He said—"Then the cellars are not wired for lights?"

"The cellars in use are wired," she answered, "and so is the old torture chamber, though that is not in use at present. But you said you wanted to see the ancient crypt, and that is not lighted."

"Hence this." He took the lamp from her, and found it weighty by reason of its large storage battery. "All this trouble you're taking is—well, it's very good indeed of you. We go—which way?"

"There is a trap-door under the corner of the carpet here," she answered, "but I think we'll go Gates' way, by the staircase just outside the dining-room door, rather than roll this carpet back. And I want to tell you, first, about Anita. One of the maids saw her, with a cloak on her arm—it was the cloak in which her body was found—saw her come down to the corridor in the wing at ten o'clock last night. I can't find anyone who saw her later than that."

"Umm-m! How does that maid fix the time so accurately?" he asked.

"Because she was on her way up to bed, and noticed the time before she started. So simple, my dear Sherlock."

"I deserved that," he remarked. "Then if I start at half-past nine, and give the man who wanted fifty one-pound notes—if it is a man, and

not a woman—give whoever it is till eleven, unless he or she turns up before, I shall have earned a night's repose."

"But Anita was still in the house at ten," she pointed out.

"Quite so, but if I go at ten and the fifty-pound mystery happens to be waiting there already, he or she will take to his or her heels at sight of me, and might get away, although I'm capable of a fair sprint in spite of the size of my feet. So simple, my dear Watson."

She laughed. "You needn't tell me I deserved that," she said.

"And now, the crypt, complete with Baedeker," he observed. "Do you mind—is there an electric torch anywhere, in case I want to go poking in corners or standing on my head to read an inscription."

"There's a very good torch on the stand in the entrance hall just outside this door," she told him, "but the corners of the crypt are perfectly square and plain, and there are no inscriptions."

"Still, I think we'll take the torch." He opened the door for her as he spoke. "I might drop this lamp and break the bulb—anything."

He followed her to the corridor entrance of the dining-room—there was another, main doorway to it from the entrance hall—and between it and the library door she turned the knob of a scarcely noticeable, small door in the wall and, thrusting the door inward, disclosed a stone stairway of which the steps were worn concave by the many feet that had passed up and down them. Following her, and leaving the door open, Gees held the electric lamp high and over her, to give light for her descent. He counted sixteen steps, and they reached a level, stone-walled passage, not wide enough for two abreast.

"We are in the thickness of the old castle wall, here," she told him. "The hall is built on it as a foundation, and it was fifteen feet in thickness. Tapered to twelve feet or so at the top, probably."

"So you've studied Norman architecture," he observed.

"I know a little of a good many things, and I'm really good at nothing," she answered. "Do you mind if I take the lamp? The floors of these passages are fairly level, so you won't stumble following."

She led on, turned left—though the passage went straight on—to pass through a long, narrow chamber lined with bottle-racks, which ranged from half-full to full of sealed bottles. At its far end, an abrupt turn to the right, disregarding another passage which went straight on, and then left again where two passages crossed. Another right turn, after a few paces, and then again to the left—

"It's a labyrinth," Gees remarked. "No wonder you said I'd lose myself if I'd come down here alone."

"I learned it all with Bernard when I was a child," she explained. "We used to play Arabian Nights and all sorts of games, till one day Bernard brought a corkscrew and a teacup with him, and after that we were forbidden ever to come down again. I had to be carried up, they told me. I was speechlessly tight, and knew nothing about it."

"On what?" he asked.

"Vintage port—it was extra special, and only about a dozen of it left. Bernard broke the crust getting the cork out, and we tried chewing pieces of it. I was about seven at the time."

"And felt seventy when you woke up," he suggested.

"Felt awful. My only essay in drunkenness. Now we're under the burnt-out wing. Notice—if it interests you—this passage is hewn in the solid rock, not built, as the walls are under the main part of the Hall. I think myself this must be the oldest part of it all."

He could see that she spoke truth. The walls, and the roof or ceiling over them, were smooth and jointless. In places, not quite smooth, but revealing serrations left by the tools the hewers had used—how long ago? Gees said—"Just a moment, if you don't mind. And may I have the lamp for that moment?"

He took it from her and held it close to a line of serrations. "Oh, very old!" he breathed rather than spoke. "See that—the greenish marks on the stone, I mean. Bronze tools, not iron or steel."

"Which means—?" she asked, turning to look at him.

"Long before Norman times," he answered. "Iron was smelted in this country even in early Saxon times, and known during the Roman occupation. I know men who would go into ecstasies, down here."

"They won't come down if Mr. Reed has anything to say about it," she observed. "You heard what he said about cataloguing the place, I think. Shall we go on? That's the crypt door, straight in front."

The light of the lamp revealed it, a door of unpainted, new-looking deal planks set in a doorway little more than five feet in height, of which the top was a rounded arch. Leading on, Claire pushed at the door, which apparently had no fastening, and Gees stooped to follow her through the doorway. He found himself in a chamber of which the far end was apparently about thirty feet from the door, while it may have been fifteen or twenty feet in width. Four slender pillars, six or seven feet distant from each other in the middle of the chamber, supported its flat roof, which Gees could have touched by lifting his hand. Some ten feet short of the far end the floor was raised six inches or so above the level at which they two stood, and halfway between the difference in level

and the far wall was placed an altar, at sight of which Gees gasped audibly, so that Claire turned to look at him.

“What?” she asked. “What do you see?”

“This is no Christian crypt,” he answered. “At least, even if it were ever consecrated, it was not built as a Christian crypt. Hewn as one, I should say—are those pillars hewn too?”

He moved forward to examine them. Claire, carrying the lamp as she advanced beside him, said—“But the altar is at the east end.”

“Even Stonehenge was designed to catch the first rays of the midsummer sun on its altar,” he pointed out. “Nearly every religion turns its worshippers to the east for their ceremonies, no matter how old it is. Yes, these pillars were hewn—left, rather, when the rest of the stone was cut away. Oh, this is very old—very old!”

“Very well. You turn Baedeker, now,” she said, rather impatiently.

“Yes? Take a look round, then. The stone all round you—and under and over you too—looks to me like the stuff that comes from the Purbeck quarries. I’m not much of a geologist, so I won’t assert definitely that it is the same, but it’s good, enduring stone for building. I expect there are quarries in the neighbourhood?”

“Several,” she answered, “and all this sort of stone.”

“Yes. Now come and look at the altar. Not the same, but granite, past question. Brought here. And observe the shape—you never saw a Christian altar that shape. About breast high to me—a bit less, if anything. The flat part of the top, you’ll see, is just about six feet, and when we stand over it you’ll find, I think, that it’s about two feet from front to back. And at each end it goes up to points like the tips of a crescent—what you might call a pair of horns, extended beyond the vertical sides. Am I Baedekering to your taste?”

“Very much so. And you’re quite right. I have never seen an altar before with projections like those crescent tips.”

“A horned altar. Probably the only perfect one in existence—of that period, I mean. Brought here—when? Because it was never meant to stand here, under a roof. It belonged in some grove, or somewhere on open downland, ringed in with cromlechs like the pillars of Stonehenge, or the dolmens at Carnac. And it faced east, not west. Is there any inscription on the other side, do you know?”

“I don’t know, but I think not. I’ve been behind it, of course.”

“Well, let’s go behind it with this very good lamp, and see.”

Taking the lamp from her, he moved forward beyond the central pillars. But, where the floor lifted to the level on which the altar stood, Claire stopped, and he stopped too, to look at her.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

She shook her head. “Nothing, but—can’t you smell it?”

So far, he had noted only that the air was quite fresh in all the underground passages and chambers they had passed through, and not less so in this crypt or chamber which had but the one doorway as break in its walls. Now, inhaling slowly, he caught the very faintest trace of the scent she had noted, an odour sweet as that of spring dawn in a garden of many flowers—yet for all its freshness it had a heady allure. It was the faintest tang of a fragrance, just enough to call back to his mind the only time he had smelt it until now. A time when he had experienced its full power, when MacMorn, maker of shadows, had used it to spell him to helplessness.

He saw the girl’s face upturned toward him. Saw the questioning gaze of her eyes, darker and more lustrous in this light, and saw the line of her throat and uneven, quick rise and fall of her breast as she breathed. Over such a one, he knew, even this faintest tinge of the scent had power. He forced himself to speak in a matter-of-fact way, and stepped up to the level of the altar.

“Yes. That scent is—not normal. I warn you against it, Miss Lawson. It may—well, influence you, colour your thoughts. If so, don’t yield to it. We are not in a quite normal place, I think. But now we’re here, I want to look at that altar—the other side of it.”

She followed him past the right-hand horn of the altar, and he held the lamp to give all possible light on the side nearest the wall.

“It is so,” he said. “There is the sign—those faint lines near the top. Weather-worn—when I last saw them cut in a stone, they were still more weather-worn. These are fairly distinct.”

“Can you read them?” she asked. They occupied a circle about six inches in diameter, and looked like Runic characters, intertwined.

He shook his head. “Recognize them,” he answered. “If ever they stood for words, those words belonged to a language that has passed out of human knowledge, so old are they. You know—I expect you have heard of Persephone?”

“Wife of Hades.” She nodded. “Queen of—of hell.”

“Also called Kore—that is the older form, coeval with Saturn and the Titans, perhaps. Before her was one far more terrible. It may be that those symbols, if we could translate them, would record her name. As it is,

she is the Unnamed. I think, even in the days when she was openly worshipped, her name was only spoken as an invocation—that the sound of it summoned her to altars like this.”

She shuddered. “I feel horribly afraid,” she said.

“Yes, we’d better go—wait, though!” He lowered the lamp almost to floor level, for he had sighted an oblong recess low down in the altar. In it, as the light revealed, stood what he took to be a brass bowl, about the size of a breakfast cup. He reached down and lifted it out, to find it far heavier than its size seemed to warrant: it was almost full of dried herbs that had been reduced nearly to powder, a mass of thin, tiny, greenish-brown shreds. He lifted the bowl to smell at its contents, and saw that so much of the inner edge as the mass of herbs left visible was grimy, apparently smoke-stained.

“May I smell too?” Claire asked.

He answered—“No,” and did not qualify it. She appeared not to notice the discourtesy of the reply.

He took out his cigarette lighter, nicked it alight and, standing the bowl on the altar top, took from its contents no more than three or four shreds. Then, holding the lighter up close to his face, he let the shreds drop into the flame—and even from that tiny portion the scent rose up at him in a reason-shaking wave, an odour that might have been distilled in Eden itself.

“This goes deep,” he said, half to himself. “It goes very deep.”

Claire said. “I don’t understand—won’t you tell me, please?”

“A little patience, and I’ll tell you all I can. I’ll acquit nobody, now—nobody but you, that is, and you only because of your obvious reaction to that scent. Now I want—”

Without ending the sentence, he thrust the lighter back in his pocket and took out an unused, folded handkerchief which he opened out. “I always carry one like that, in case somebody might want to borrow one,” he explained. “Will you hold this for me—both hands—hold it open so I can drop some of this stuff in it? I want to take some away. It’s the source of the scent, you see. I didn’t know how it was produced, till now. Yes, so—just a moment.”

Lifting the bowl, he tilted it over the handkerchief she held in readiness, and so poured nearly a third of the dried and pounded herbs before restoring the bowl to level and putting it down. “Enough for about forty incantations, I should think,” he observed as, taking the handkerchief from her, he twisted it to form a closed bag and replaced it carefully in

his pocket. Then he took up the lamp and held it to throw full light on the bowl as it stood on the altar top.

“Can we—do you mind if we go?” Claire asked. “I’m afraid.”

“Can you stay one more minute?” he asked in reply.

“If—yes, of course I can! I’m sorry to be so silly.”

“It isn’t. But look at this—feel the weight of it, first.”

He picked up the bowl with his free hand, and she took it from him.

“It—it’s very solid,” she said.

“It’s more than that. Now look here.” Taking it from her, he put it back on the altar top, since he was still holding the lamp in his left hand. Then he rubbed lightly with his finger on the smoke-discoloured edge of the bowl, and rendered it bright yellow with little more than a mere touch. Again he rubbed lightly, and another patch was bright as if he had polished it.

“Which means—?” she asked.

“I thought it was brass, at first,” he answered, “but brass would not clean up as easily as that. If it had been heated and smoke had got at it, you’d have to use metal polish to get it back to such a colour as this. The bowl is plain, solid gold.”

“But—” she began, and said no more, but stared at the bowl.

He picked it up and put it back in the recess in which he had found it. “Somebody is pretty sure Reed doesn’t intend this place to be catalogued,” he said, “or a thing of that value wouldn’t be left down here. I suppose—you don’t know if anyone else comes here?”

“Gates goes to his wine cellars—nobody comes here,” she answered. “I mean, I thought nobody ever came here. I haven’t been in this crypt since—since that day when Bernard and I drank the port.”

“We’ll go back.” He took up the lamp. “I want to sort out my impressions. Yes, this thing goes very deep, I think.”

She walked beside him toward the door. “And—you said you’d tell me all you could. I wouldn’t be a woman if I didn’t want to know.”

“Naturally. Give me a little time, though. Now—will you take the lamp? I’m not quite sure of my way back, so you’d better lead.”

“Straight back, or do you want to see the torture chamber?”

“I’ve seen one, up in Cumberland. If there’s a chance some other time I’d like you to show me yours, but I’ve seen enough for to-day. Thanks to you—even if I don’t sound grateful for your help, I am.”

“Then if we go straight back, it should be just time for tea.”

Seated well back from the fire in the long room, since it was a comfortable distance, Gees took the cup of tea Claire handed him across the occasional table. For that brief while he looked at her, and then again he averted his gaze to the wall beside him. He had said little since coming in to the room to find her seated at the tray, awaiting his arrival before she poured out.

"May I ask what you find so interesting on that wall?" she asked after awhile, as he went on gazing at it.

"You, if you must know," he answered. "Reflected from that mirror between the windows into this convex one here. I get you at a different angle, and the convex mirror gives you very clearly."

"Now I wish I hadn't asked," she remarked. "But you said you would tell me about things going very deep. Can you, now?"

"A little, perhaps. Do you know how long there have been Reeds here—how far the family goes back? This Reed mentioned the existence of his ancestors here during the wars of the Roses. Do you know if they go back farther than that?"

"Much farther back. Actual records carry back no farther than Domesday, but they claim descent from Siward of Northumbria—I'm interested in the older part of history, in my small way, and found out all I could. One of the kings of Mercia gave them this holding in return for services, and it was taken from them after the Conquest, but William Rufus restored it to them—why, I don't know. The Siward part of it is little more than legend, I understand."

"That will be Siward of the fairy bear tale," Gees commented. "And Northumbria—yes, it would put them in touch with Celtic origins, and the Celts of the north absorbed an Azilian invasion—this is going far back out of history. Yes, it's coming clear."

"Not to me, though all that is fascinating conjecture," she commented. "What is coming clear—or may I not ask?"

"The existence of that altar you showed me," he explained. "You know, I expect, that Reed is not in the least like his father. He is a freak reversion to Azilian type, showing that the Azilian strain is strong in the family. I don't think he knows of it."

"There is one other very much like him in the line of portraits," she said. "Pelham Reed, killed at Marston Moor. But what is Azilian?"

"The dark people, who came from the south in ships, and brought that Unnamed with them," he answered. "One of the most terrible cults that has ever been practised. And—I wonder if you'll forgive me if I drag the family skeleton out in connection with this?"

"Of course I will! You mean—about Bernard?"

"You heard me call you his half-sister, speaking to him."

"I heard. I know it—have known it since I was old enough to understand such things. So you need not be diffident about it."

"But the series of deductions arising out of that is even less palatable," he told her. "Yes, I will have another cup, please."

She took the cup and filled it. Gees took out his cigarette case, lighted two, and handed her one of them as he took the cup back. She said—"Since those deductions are entirely due to me—I showed you the crypt and what was in it, remember—since that is so, I hope you will let me have them, palatable or no. I guess a little. Bernard is half-brother to Mr. Reed, therefore Bernard has what you call the Azilian strain in him, to some extent."

"Although it does not show—yes," Gees conceded. "The tendencies it may cause—it is not dependent on external appearance. Now I tell you frankly, Miss Lawson, I attributed all this trouble—the girl Elsie Carr and Reed's apparently identical affliction, or rather the first stage of it—I attributed it all to Anita Mendez. I am by no means sure, yet, whether to go on seeing her as the author of it all. But as I've promised Reed to carry on investigating, put the cause of it beyond question and make this place safe for him, I must consider alternatives. Now, on what we saw in the crypt, on the possibility of a waking to Azilian influence on Bernard's part—I'll call him that for ease in talking—on that, and on all Reed told me, I can see only one alternative to Anita. Do you want that more clearly?"

"As clearly as you can possibly put it," she answered.

"Brutally, then—and you can tell me to clear out when I've said it, if you feel like that. And I think you may feel just like that. First, it would be to Bernard's interest, and to that of no other person except his baby son, to put an end to Reed before a direct heir can materialize through his marriage. You concede that."

"It has always been obvious," she said gravely.

"The normal Bernard Lawson, I am perfectly certain, would abhor any thought of such a thing," he went on. "But we found down in the crypt that golden bowl—and though Anita may have saved quite a lot of money, I cannot see her owning such a thing, unknown to anyone. What we found in the bowl, and the scent you noticed, go to show that oblation to the Unnamed has been made in the crypt, not so very long ago—a few days ago, at most. Now if, by some means, Bernard had

been wakened to knowledge of that cult, and through hereditary tendency had felt impelled to attempt the practice of it—”

He broke off and put the empty teacup down on the tray after drinking its contents without a pause. “Not any more,” he said.

“Not any more tea, or not any more deduction?” she asked.

“Neither, thank you,” he answered.

“Mr. Green, you have said either too much or not enough,” she insisted.

“I demand to know the rest. Please! I ask it.”

“Very well, then. If he has practised the cult, then Elsie Carr is a sacrifice to the Unnamed, in the only way he could compass it without bringing suspicion on himself, and Reed is destined to be another sacrifice with, for Bernard, his reward from the goddess—demoness is a better word—in his succession to all that Reed owns.”

She kept silent for a long while. At last Gees asked—“Do you want me to go, now? Perhaps it would be better.”

“It would be—you would leave me to such terror as I knew last night, when I saw that hand he couldn’t keep still—saw it against the darkness of the curtain. Don’t you understand? Sydnor Reed looks to you, believes in you—I know! I believe in you as the one person left I can trust without fear of any kind, the one to whom I can talk without reserve. Bernard—I dare not talk to him of this, since you have told me what you see as possible and almost incline me to believe. Rosamund is no more than an echo of her husband, negligible—and in any case she would side with him and against me, naturally. And there is nobody else—it is a thing not to be mentioned except between ourselves—and you. Ethna—much as I love her and want to see her happy here, I dare not discuss any aspect of this thing with her. There remains only you—and you talk of going!”

“That was very nicely put—and all set to music. Now, as a proof of complete forgiveness, may I have one more cup of tea?”

She laughed, softly. “And may I have one more cigarette, lighted like the one I’ve just finished?”

He met her gaze as he handed the cigarette to her, lighted as she had asked. She said—“I like your big hands—it’s a rude thing to say, I know, but I do. Sensitive hands—musician’s hands.”

“Policeman’s hands,” he amended. “They threw a shadow when I held up the traffic. And I very seldom turn to music—to producing it, I mean. I enjoy it—suites by Delius, and Mozart concertos.”

“Tell me a little more, Mr. Green. That scent—you warned me against it, you remember. Why?”

“Because it is more than scent. It has power over you. Releases desires and destroys restraint—drives you to take, independently of ethical considerations. To go for whatever you want most, and forget that right or wrong count for anything at all.”

“You mean, if Bernard were under its influence—” she began, and left the question incomplete.

“As I said, I believe the normal Bernard Lawson to be incapable of causing any of these happenings. But if he became—not only under the influence of the scent, because one wakens from that and is free of it, after—if he came under the influence of that being whose symbol I recognized down in the crypt, he might—anything!”

“Mr. Green, prove him innocent, or save him! I don’t know—I don’t know what to think! He’s—this in absolute confidence—he’s terribly hard up. For the last two years he has been borrowing from me. And he and I—you understand? Just as much as if he were altogether my brother. I’m glad I know all of it, glad you told me.”

“Whether you’ll go on being glad—” he said, and did not end it.

For awhile she gazed at the fire, and then looked up at him and smiled.

“Yes. You are ... strong, something to lean against. And you know so much—how do you learn all these things?”

He shook his head. “Not learning. Call it absorption, or possibly memory from far back. One senses things, rather than knows them. And a fact here and another there build up, make knowledge.”

“Then—yes, I remember one other thing I want to ask you. The stuff in the bowl—you only took a little of it. Why didn’t you take it all, and destroy the chance of Bernard—anyone—using it?”

“And so, possibly, destroy the chance of ascertaining who is using it down there,” he pointed out. “No, that wouldn’t do.”

“It was very lovely,” she said, almost wistfully.

“Datura is lovely,” he told her. “So is a volcano in action, and so is a king cobra. We’ve talked a lot—I have, rather. To finish it, remember when you think all this over that Anita is the strongest possibility, and if she were responsible all danger is at an end—though I want to turn that to certainty before letting Reed come back here. If I can catch whoever wants that fifty pounds, when I go out from here to-night, I may get certainty out of it.”

“And if you don’t, what then!” she asked.

“Remains the possibility of further rites and ceremonies in the crypt, and finding out who conducts them,” he answered. “Remains also the possibility, since Reed advertised me, apparently, as an infallible sort of

detective, that whoever is at the back of all this may try to include me among the victims. Get rid of me as dangerous.”

“You—you would risk that?” She stared at him, wide-eyed.

He smiled. “When I get frightened, I’ll ask you to hold my hand,” he said. “I’m trying to foresee everything—and probably missing something within an inch of my nose. Now I’ve talked quite enough.”

“You said—down in the crypt—said you had taken enough of what was in the bowl for forty incantations. What did you mean by that?”

“Merely that the infinitesimal pinch I dropped on my cigarette lighter informed me that a tea-spoonful of the stuff would be enough to fill this room with the scent, if it were set alight. And I must have nearly on forty teaspoons of it. A figure of speech, call it.”

A maid entered to remove the tea tray. Gees stood up.

“Your mention of the stuff reminds me,” he said. “I’m going to lock it away in my car—don’t want it any nearer me than that. Now.”

“Then—if I don’t see you again in time—will seven-thirty dinner be soon enough for you, or shall I have it put forward?”

“Quite soon enough, thank you. I can change back to outdoor togs in ten minutes, easily.”

“Very well. Cocktails in here before dinner, remember. Thank you for everything. I mean that—everything!”

He went out, thoughtfully, and found the Rolls-Bentley as glossily polished as when he had taken delivery of it.

“Feller”—he apostrophised the absent Reed—“you sure are the whole cat, let alone a whisker!”

He locked the handkerchief containing the herbs—secured from spilling by a rubber band, now—away in the little compartment he had had built in under the dash to contain his automatic pistol and anything else he wanted to conceal. The stuff was safe, there—and he himself would feel safer. Even without being set alight, it might have diffused a faint tang of the scent in his room if he had left it there, and he felt a little afraid of it, knowing how it had once wrought an irresistible spell, bound him in an illusion that had been perfect as the scent itself, while it lasted. A little afraid ...

Chapter 7

Vain Vigil

The clock at the back of the entrance hall chimed the quarter-hour as Gees came down the staircase and, opening the door of the long room, halted in the doorway, so startled for this once as to let his expression declare his amazement. For Bernard Lawson stood on the hearthrug, his legs wide apart and a look of determination on his face: his wife, beside him, appeared dwarfed by his splendid figure, and facing the two of them stood Claire, obviously unconcerned by their presence, in spite of what she had said to Bernard that morning.

“Do come in, Mr. Green,” she asked as she glanced round at him. “We shall be a foursome for dinner. I hope you don’t mind.”

He advanced slowly. Bernard moved towards him.

“Mr. Green,” he said. “I owe you an apology. I make it unreservedly, and before my wife and sister. I insulted you badly this morning, and ask you now to forgive me—if you can.”

“Why, certainly,” Gees said frankly, sensing that Reed had talked on the telephone to some purpose. “Let’s forget it, shall we?”

“Gladly, since you’re so decent about it.” Bernard offered his hand, and Gees shook it. “Reed rang me this morning and—well, explained things. I’d jumped to wrong conclusions, and—but you say we can forget it, so I will. And drink your health, as we’ve been waiting to do since my wife and I came in.”

Rosamond Lawson went to the cocktail tray, and returned with the only remaining glass, which she handed to Gees. She smiled up at him as he took it from her—and dropped her handkerchief, a thing of flimsy lace with a postage stamp square of linen in it. Bernard Lawson stooped and picked up the handkerchief, which she took from him.

“Yet again!” he exclaimed, and laughed. “Dropping handkerchiefs about would be your long suit, if it were not for the way you lose your fountain pen. She’s incurable on both points, Green.”

Rosamund Lawson put the handkerchief away in her handbag. “You nearly made me forget what I wanted to tell Mr. Green, Bernard. It wasn’t all Mr. Reed’s doing, Mr. Green. Bernard came to me this morning after he’d seen you, and he was simply emitting sparks. It took me the whole of lunch time to make him understand he had no business to say anything to you at all, because you are acting for Mr. Reed—and I know all about your Kleinert case, too, and Miss Faversham told me about your father and her mother knowing each other, and what a splendid soldier General Green was. And I do hope you finish whatever Mr. Reed wants you to do just as wonderfully as you finished off your Kleinert case. It fascinated me—I always read murder trials.”

“The point of that speech is in the peroration,” Bernard said drily. “I have to wait for the newspaper till she’s finished with it if there’s a murder trial on. But here’s-health and success to you, Green, in all you undertake. Skoal!”

He held his glass high before drinking, and smiled at Gees. A frank, honest sort of smile which declared that he was glad to be at peace with the man he had insulted. Gees too lifted his glass. He said—“To my hostess, first, and to you and Mrs. Lawson too.”

“Success to you, Mr. Green, in all you undertake,” Rosamund Lawson said, and again smiled at him. Claire raised her glass and let her smile shine in her eyes as she gazed at him, but spoke no word before she sipped. But her eyes had spoken, and he knew their message: as clearly as if she had put it into words, he knew that she had in mind the possibility of his being made to share the fate that had befallen Elsie Carr and Reed: because of that, only her eyes had smiled, not her lips.

He said—“It wouldn’t bother you as much as all that, surely.”

“You are a very good thought-reader, and a very bad one,” she told him. “Because—well, it would. You are my guest, remember.”

Gates, appearing to announce that dinner was served, prevented Bernard Lawson from questioning the exchange, though evidently he was curious about it. During the meal, in intervals which gave him the chance to reflect, Gees decided that Bernard was being just a trifle fulsome, not only over his apology, which had sounded almost over-earnest, but after it, too. He appeared so very friendly. Yet, Gees reminded himself, this view might be due to his own wish to complete his mission here: Bernard was frank and honest-sounding enough, even though his

cordiality were rather oppressive. Perhaps his relief at being on good terms not only with Gees, but with Claire as well, was to be held responsible for his attitude.

They talked easily, all four of them, on indifferent topics. Mrs. Lawson, to whom Gees had at first been inclined to attribute cleverness, seemed now rather doll-like, not quite stupid, but humourless and inclined to drag her baby into the conversation whenever possible. She missed two or three subtle touches of wit with which Claire flavoured her talk, and managed to get herself launched on a long story about the baby which interested nobody but herself—but she could not see it. Lawson's devotion to her was evident; he saw no fault in her, endured the long story cheerfully, though it was plain that he already knew it, and past question was just as much in love with her as when he had married her, if not more.

They went back to the long room for coffee, and at a quarter past nine Gees rose and looked at his watch, ostentatiously.

"I'm going to ask you to forgive me, Miss Lawson," he said. "I had an exacting rather than a busy day, and want to make some notes and do a few things before I sleep. So may I say good night now?"

"Of course," she answered readily. "We quite understand."

"I think we'd better be going too, Claire," Rosamund Lawson remarked. "The girl Allen is not Anita, and I don't feel happy over leaving baby too long until she has been with us a little while."

So Gees bade them good night, and nodded only just perceptibly to Claire when her eyes questioned him. He went up to his room, changed into the thick tweed suit he had worn on the drive from London, and took his heavy overcoat from the tallboy. He had finished changing when a knock sounded on his door, and he opened it to see Claire.

"These," she said, and put down a pair of rubbers. "They fit over Mr. Reed's shoes—I expect you'll have to wear them without shoes. But it's been thawing all day, and you'll find it horribly slushy if you have to wait long. I couldn't let you go without them."

"The fact that you thought of them will help to keep me warm," he told her. "Perhaps I shall not have long to wait."

"I hope not. In any case, my woman's curiosity won't let me go to bed till after you come back, so I won't say good night."

With that she left him, and he put on the rubbers—with no shoes inside them, as she had predicted—and went down, letting himself out from the front door. It was kind of her to think of a thing like that. Marvellous

eyes she had, tremendously expressive. Almost she talked with them, sometimes. With an effort he concentrated on his errand.

Until he came to the bend in the drive, it was possible to keep among the shadows, but under the trees the drifted snow was still so deep that he had to keep to the cleared way. There was no moon—the new moon would not be visible until to-morrow night, he knew, and then only until a little after sunset, since this was its first day. New moon! It had its significance in many religions, and in the worship of that Unnamed whose symbol was graven on the altar in the crypt it might mark—had marked, he knew—the looking of hell's own ministers. She had power, on the night of the new moon.

Thus reflecting, he came to the end of the lane—it had ceased to be a drive where the trees began, for there was the gateway to the Hall grounds. A cluster of holly bushes near the junction of lane and main road afforded means of concealment, and, taking it, Gees saw by the luminous hands of his watch that it was then twenty-five minutes to ten. He breathed his opinion on standing here for an hour and twenty-five minutes, as fervently as silently, without so much as the chance of a smoke. But the result might justify the sacrifice.

He was craving for that smoke when, at about ten minutes to ten, a very large policeman crunched solidly into view, stood for awhile gazing along the lane, and went a score or so paces along it. But evidently he did not care for it, for he turned about, regained the main road, and alternately crunched and plashed out of hearing. Gees rejoiced that the incident had used up five minutes, and again rejoiced when a big, empty lorry went by, its driver singing loudly about a certain landlord's daughter—a song which has even less claim to respectability than the unexpurgated version of that which recites the adventures of Mademoiselle from Armenteers. Going over the stanzas of the driver's song in his mind took Gees on to the point at which he heard a clock in the village strike ten, and he blessed that driver for helping him to get rid of another five minutes.

After that, he became quite certain that the hands of his watch had stopped, although the tick was normal. Now, though, the actual time of Anita's appointment must be getting near, and thought of that disposed of a few minutes. Two country lads went by, each apparently engrossed in his own thoughts, and they were almost out of hearing before Gees caught—"And I says to her, I says—" Just that, and the voice faded out.

Gees experienced an imperative urgency to know what he had said to her, but it was vain—vain as his vigil, apparently.

When the clock in the village donged once for half-past ten, eternity had become altogether negligible, a fleabite on the face of endless time—like this! His feet were numbly cold in the rubbers, and he dared not move them to get circulation going, for the one for whom he waited might come silently and with ears at strain. That one did not appear: Gees saw nothing, heard nothing, except for the passing of two cars and a motor bicycle: they gave him three almost momentary chances of movement, and he gave each of them his blessing.

Nothing else. No other pedestrian, after the two lads of whom one had said to her. The last quarter of an hour was slightly less difficult, but when the village clock struck eleven, and Gees found it three minutes fast by his watch, he almost swore aloud. Yet, when the watch registered eleven o'clock, he stayed another five minutes for good measure, and then went back. If Anita had been seen with her cloak on her arm at ten o'clock, obviously she had had an appointment that would let her get back to the Hall by eleven at latest.

He saw as he approached the Hall that the long room was lighted, and presently saw someone draw aside a curtain and let it fall again. Claire, for a certainty, shutting herself into the window recess, away from the light, to look for him. She would see him, too, against the background of snow. He went on, remembering the spring latch of the front door and that he would have to ring to gain entry, but Claire opened the door before he could reach for the bell-push, and he stepped into the entrance hall and faced her.

"You must be nearly frozen," she said. "Come into the long room. I've got hot coffee waiting for you, and some sandwiches."

"You're kindness itself. Will you wait while I run up to my room and put on some slippers instead of these things?"

"Of course I will! I've kept a big fire for you."

When he came down, slipped and at ease, she stood back from the heat of the fire, beside a table on which was the coffee pot over a spirit lamp and two cups. As she faced him, he took both her hands and held them, looking down at her upturned face, into her eyes.

"Why do you do all this for me?" he asked.

She said, almost whisperingly, "Your hands are so cold—your poor hands are so cold!"

Then his arms held her, and his lips were on hers. With closed eyes she returned his kiss, her arms about his neck.

He said—"This is all wrong. I ought not to kiss you."

“Your lips are cold, but I love-them,” she told him. “It isn’t wrong—I’ll tell you when—nearer the fire, while I pour your coffee, and—and the sandwiches are on the mantel. I put them there so they shouldn’t go dry. Nearer the fire—your hands—your dear hands! You said your intimates called you Gees. May I?”

“You’re very lovely to-night, Claire, and very sweet.”

“Am I? I wanted to hear you call me by my name, before—there isn’t long for me. That’s why—why I wanted you to kiss me, soon. I don’t care what you think of me for telling you. There’s your coffee, and I’m going to have some with you.” She turned to fill the second cup. “I saw you out there, hidden among the hollies, waiting and keeping so still. So very still! Was it all for nothing?”

“Yes.” He made it a sombre answer, for now he felt afraid. “I want you to tell me what you have been doing, Claire. You have been down into the crypt while I was out there.”

“Yes,” she answered, and sipped at her coffee. “Drink yours—it will help to make you warm again, sooner than if you don’t.”

“Was it there you saw me among the hollies?”

“Yes. Don’t be angry with me, please.”

“Tell me, Claire,” he asked, far more gently.

“I—you said a teaspoonful was enough, so I took just that and made a tiny mound of it on the altar top. Lighted it, and it made a greenish haze. You said—it drives you to go for whatever you want most. I wanted to see you, and I saw you in the haze, quite plainly.”

He said—“Yes?” in a dull, unemotional way. He too had known that haze, and the illusions one might experience in it. But she, apparently, had seen reality rather than illusion.

“And then—I want to tell you all of it—and then there was a presence. Over the altar, it seemed. I couldn’t see it or hear it, but it told me, promised unutterable things. Happiness as great as the beauty of that scent—greater, a completeness. Showed me how I might gain it—I heard no voice, and saw nothing, but I knew the presence was there, and felt what it offered me.”

“What did it offer you?” he asked.

She shook her head. “No. Unless we—unless we were in the haze and knew the scent together, I couldn’t tell you. But that was not all. I don’t know how long I was down there—I knew you would not be back before eleven—knew before you told me that you would wait till then to no purpose. You see, I knew so much, while the haze lasted at its best. And then, when it began to disperse, I saw a shadow. Not plainly,

because when I tried to look full at it, it drifted aside. I couldn't get it fully in my line of sight, if you can understand. Oh, I'm trying so hard to tell you!"

"My dear, I know. I know, Claire," he said, very gently. For he too had had that experience, seen not one, but many shadows. And now he knew past question that Anita had not been responsible for all that troubled Reed, for, if that had been so, her death would have released the shadow that Claire had seen—the part of a life that was set drifting near the one who had taken that life, until that one was destroyed. It was not Anita who had made sacrifice to the Unnamed.

"The shadow spoke to my inner self," Claire said. "I was not afraid of it—I was not afraid at all, down there, not even of the presence I had felt, though it seemed a very great presence. I'm trying to make you understand, and it wasn't a dream. It wasn't!"

"No, not a dream," he assented. "Tell me about the shadow, Claire. What it thought at you—told your inner self, I mean."

"Yes, that was it—as if the shadow thought at me and I understood the thought. That—that I had not long—only a little time."

"Because I should be coming back?" he asked, puzzled.

She shook her head. "No, not that. That I had not long to live. I asked in my thoughts, how long? And the shadow told me—days, a few days. Not more, it told me, and then I too would be a shadow like itself. So you see, when I felt you take my hands, I knew there is such a very little time and—and wanted all every moment of it could give. Once before I thought myself in love, but I never knew—"

The last words were no more than an awed whisper. Gees put his cup on the mantel and turned to lay both his hands on her shoulders.

"Claire, dear, will you do something for me?"

"Anything. Whatever you ask. All I can do or be or give."

"A small thing. Go straight to bed and sleep. No, don't look so hurt! I've been in just such an illusion as you have experienced, and know shadows like the one you saw can exist—yes, you did see it. But I want you to sleep on what you felt it tell you, and waken to know that an illusion. You're young, and in perfect health, as is evident, and a shadow's telling you that you have only a few days to live is its wish, not its knowledge. I want you to sleep on that fact, rest on it—want you to get quite clear of the influence of the scent, for it's still on you, I know. So ... yes, dear, I wanted to hold and kiss you, just as much as you wanted to be held and kissed. Take that to bed with you too. Not hurt now, are you?"

“No—not any more. I understand, and you’re terribly good to me. I shall be afraid to face you in the morning—afraid lest you won’t have forgiven me for—for all this.”

Again he held and kissed her. “Will you forgive that, Claire?”

“Gees—my dear—I loved it. You know!”

“Just so much will I have to forgive you in the morning. And you have many years, not a few days, left for your happiness. Believe it—you said to-day you trusted me. Good night, Claire.”

When, after a last long kiss by the door, she had left him alone, he went back to the fire to stand gazing into it.

“I don’t know,” he whispered. “Even if it is so, better that she should be free of the thought of it, the fear of it, until—”

She had not dreamed, he knew. Knew, too, that for the second time in his life he had come to a place where the cult of the Unnamed survived, a place where one whom he had yet to find made shadows.

Sleep was far off, Gees found when at last, after a long session alone before the fire in the long room, he went up to his own room and to bed. He tried to disregard the foretelling of which Claire had told him, that she had only a few days left, but could not get rid of it. Could a shadow, such as MacMorn had made, and as had been made here, see forward into time, foretell? All that had been was visible to the shadow entities, each of which was a part—not all, but a part—of all that went to make up a life: they could see back as far as time had been—he himself had seen back to the very beginnings of life, when he had been spelled into contact with them for awhile—but could they see forward, or was the foretelling that had been infused to Claire’s mind that of wish rather than of knowledge?

Either way, let her believe that it was wish and no more, a hope of companionship on that strange plane of existence that these shadows knew, a state that was not life, and yet was not death—was not even beyond death, since they were not separate from the material world altogether, but cognizant of it, able to see it. Let her view the foretelling as something she could disregard.

It was not the normal Claire, the graceful, charming hostess, who had come into his hold so gladly, wanted his kisses. She was subject to the scent, and that, he knew, was just such a compelling force as the fabled potion Tristan and Isolde had drunk, a strength beyond their own that drove them to each other and made their tragedy. Perhaps the potion was no more than a fable, and perhaps it had been this very scent in

some other form. Perhaps there was truth behind the legend, for in their time the cult of the Unnamed had not been so near extinction.

As for Gees himself, he did not love Claire, he knew. He was, perhaps, a little in love with her, a very different, unsafe thing. In nearness she attracted him, strongly: his impelling, not hers, had brought her to his clasp, after he had held her hands and looked down at her. She had been glad of his kiss, but his own—weakness, thoughtlessness, passing desire, or whatever he chose to call it, had changed their relationship from that of friendship to lovers' intimacy. And if she had not gone down to the crypt alone, let the green, Eden-scented haze that he knew envelop her, she would have resisted—rather, he would not have seen that in her eyes which told him of desire.

He slept, and dreamed. In the dream he stood by the fire in the long room, and Claire was there, and Bernard Lawson not far from them, watching them. Bernard, stooping, picked up a poison dart and said—“Claire is always dropping these things about,” and Gees himself said angrily—“You liar!” but Bernard took no notice. Then Claire leaned close to Gees and said—“Against your heart, my dear. This side, against your heart.” On that, he dreamed, he put his left arm round her to hold her close to that side, and the arm grew numb and stiff, and then tingled, pins-and-needles fashion, as the stiffness passed off—and Bernard laughed and said again—“Claire is always dropping these things about.” Then Gees awakened to daylight and, reaching for his watch, saw that it was eight o'clock: in half an hour a maid would bring him his early tea.

He must have been lying on his left arm, he thought, though he had wakened on his right side. Perhaps he had turned over just before wakening, for the pins-and-needles tingling of his dreams had not ceased. He withdrew the arm from under the bedclothes and, as it lay on the eiderdown, looked at his fingers. Although he had not realised it, they were twitching, jerking to curve and straighten, persistently. By a strenuous effort of will, and some muscular strain, he stopped the movement, but as soon as he relaxed his effort it began again. Not nearly so violently or noticeably as the twitching of Reed's hand had appeared, but ceaselessly, and quite involuntarily. The tingling in his arm went on: it was not painful, not even unpleasant, but as constant as the movement of his fingers. He reached out for his wrist watch, and found that he could hold it without difficulty. Then he tried holding the left hand with the right, and felt the uncanny movement of his fingers, as if some other than himself were trying to close and open them alternately.

“So I’m too dangerous—I’ve got to go,” he whispered. Then—“No! I’m damned if I will! Bernard, you devil, I’ll get you yet!”

It was a shock, although he had known it might happen. The infection, however induced, was cumulative—he believed, even felt certain, that if Reed could be kept away from the source of infection, whatever that was, he would recover. It had taken five weeks and more to complete the treatment which had brought Elsie Carr to insanity and eventually to death, and he, Gees, had only been infected once, so far. Perhaps not with intent to destroy his reason and cause his death, but as a warning that he must not interfere, but must go. He would not go! He would discover how this thing was done, put an end to it. Discover how it was done ...

His thoughts raced, grew inconsecutive. Had Bernard, knowing the state of affairs between Reed and Elsie Carr, feared marriage between them, and determined on eliminating the girl to prevent such a barrier between him and—as things then stood—his inheritance? How was it done? In that hand-grip Bernard had given him, after apologising? In drink or food it appeared impossible: Bernard had sat across the table from him at dinner, both times. He might have got at the cocktail tray the night before: when Gees had entered the long room, the other three had taken their glasses, and only one had remained on the tray, the one Rosamund Lawson had handed to him—and he felt sure she had had no chance to tamper with it. He calculated on what had probably happened: Bernard had taken two glasses from the tray, handed one to Claire and one to Rosamund, and then turned his back to them to take a third glass for himself. That would give him his chance to put in the fourth glass the infinitesimal quantity of the poison which would produce this initial result, the first slight tingling and twitching which further doses would increase to the state in which Reed had gone away. And if, he, Gees, stayed here, how soon would Bernard repeat the dose, give him a second reminder that he must go?

All this did not clear Anita. She, it appeared now, was the agent through whom Bernard had procured the drug, *lakiti* or whatever it was. She had probably instigated him to this course of action in the first place, perhaps got him to go down to the crypt with her under some pretext, and initiated him into the hellish rites which would kill his moral sense and distort his vision to an extent that would render him capable of so fiendish a crime. Those fifty one-pound notes had been intended as payment to the outsider who had procured the drug for her—perhaps he had been bringing a further supply, and perhaps she had gone to pay him for what he had already brought or sent. Yes, that was it: Claire

had seen the letter registered to her, in which the fifty pounds' worth of the stuff had been enclosed.

The mirrors! Stay on here, get Claire to invite Bernard and his wife to dinner each night, and in the long room watch, not Bernard, but the mirrors. Especially the convex one in which he had seen Claire reflected from the big plate-glass oblong on the far side of the room from the fireplace. He could watch that with his back to the cocktail table, could see in it the movements of everyone near the fireplace. And if he left his glass on the tray until the others had taken theirs, and Bernard went near the tray—

The maid brought in his tea, paused to look at the curtains and blind as if she thought they ought to have been left for her to open up, and went out. Sitting up in bed, Gees made a point of pouring the tea with his left hand, and saw his fingers begin twitching again after he had put the pot down.

Chapter 8

Odzendael Explains

The smile with which Claire greeted Gees when he entered the dining room was one of normal friendliness: she said—"Good morning, Mr. Green," with exactly the right inflection; it was a pleasant greeting, nothing more. But when he would have passed her to go to the place laid for him, she held up her hand, and he paused to take it.

"You were quite right," she said. "It was the scent, last night. I tell you because I want complete forgiveness. I was—not myself."

He tried to persuade himself that he was relieved, but felt a trifle chilled. Releasing her hand, he said—"I still say—thank you for everything. Everything!" And went on to seat himself, and reach for the toast rack and butter dish.

"Coffee, or tea?" she asked, almost too solicitously.

"Coffee, please. I hope you slept well?"

"Very badly, I'm afraid. I—I saw things. Thought I did."

Gazing at her, meeting her gaze, he knew what she had seen. In his former encounter with these things, Margaret Aylener had barred out the shadows and all else of evil by means of the four rowans she had set about her house, but here was no barrier of that, or of any kind. There was fear in Claire's eyes, fear that she feared to confess to him, except by the implication she had made.

He took his coffee from her. She asked—"What about your real breakfast, like the one you made yesterday? From the sideboard?"

"I thought I was stoking for the day, then—for the drive through to London," he answered. "To-day I see no need to stoke."

"Does that—does it mean you will stay another night?" She could not quite conceal the eagerness which impelled the question.

“If you let me, please. I—well, I won’t make it difficult for you. I’ve discovered a very urgent reason for staying, if I may.”

“Then I won’t”—she made a long pause—“won’t make it difficult for you. And I shall be glad that you are staying. Do you see?”

It was a brave smile that she gave him, but he saw past it. He stopped buttering toast and looked steadily at her.

“Before going into anything else,” he said quietly, “we’ll get your white night cleared up—drag it all into the open and slay it. I’m going to suggest that as soon as you switched your light out you thought you saw—or very nearly saw—the shadow that had thought at you in the crypt. The hellish cult that produced things of that sort is very nearly extinct, and what is left of it is driven underground—literally driven from the light of day and underground, in this case.”

“All of which means—?” she asked, evenly.

“That you did very nearly see a shadow. You never do see them clearly, but always they elude direct sight. And you felt no fear?”

“None. It seemed to me that the thing floated—moved, or whatever best fits—in a cold—coldness. Though my room was warm.”

“The cold of isolation—of a terrible loneliness and hopelessness, is what you sensed,” he told her. “And—did it convey a thought to your mind? Think at you, as I express my own experience of them?”

She nodded. “The same thought—that I have not long,” she answered.

“Impressed it on me. I tried to believe I was only dreaming—”

“You needn’t try,” he said. “In this case, there is only the one shadow. I’ll tell you now—I believe it to be part of the personality that was the girl Elsie Carr. It is not a complete spirit personality, but only a part, and as long as the one who made it is living in this life, it drifts as you saw it, hopelessly seeking reunion with the other part—that to which it belongs. And that other part is absorbed, for the time, into the life of the one who made it—in this case, the one who brought Elsie Carr to her death. So the shadow keeps near that one, just as a ghost is said to haunt a certain place and keep near it, but with a very vital, intense reason.”

“Which is all very complex,” she commented, “yet I believe I understand. And Elsie Carr—this part of her that I saw as a shadow, knows and told me that I have only a very little time—”

“No!” The interruption was sharp, even harsh. “Will you get that idea out of your head? She—it does not know! I’m sorry, Miss Lawson—do forgive me for losing control of myself and getting excited over it. You felt it as in a cold of intense loneliness—it wants you to live but a very

little time, sees in you a possible companion in its own state, instead of a living, complete person—since you burnt those herbs down in the crypt and felt that presence with you there, this shadow knows that you may come under the influence of the Unnamed, may become a victim, even, if you give yourself to the cult, accept the promises of wonderful things that you felt as made to you and burn incense on that altar for the sake of those promises. I have no fear for you, I who know of these things. Since I'm older than you are, I see you quite easily outliving me.”

He put conviction into the statement, and saw the fear pass from her eyes. He knew that, whether he himself believed what he was saying or no—and he was far from as sure as he sounded—he had made her believe it. He added—“Now I'm going to eat my toast, and tell you about a decision I made while I was shaving, if I may.”

She said—“I would not wish to outlive you, to miss the comfort you can give. Gees, my friend, you are very good to me.”

“And you have been very good to me, Claire,” he said gravely.

She smiled, friendlily. “That's better,” she observed. “I feel we are on a surer footing, now. If you hand me your cup, I can give you more coffee, and you can tell me the urgent reason for staying you found in your shaving brush—or was it in the razor?”

“You're forgetting the soap. Claire—I'm going on calling you Claire, now, because the other way doesn't belong to this surer footing. You remember my saying I might call on you to help?”

She nodded. “Go on being Baedeker?” she asked.

“More than that. Co-operate with me, if the need arises. And for a beginning, will you ask Bernard and his wife to dinner again to-night? It wouldn't inconvenience you in any way, would it?”

“I thought of doing so as soon as you said you'd stay,” she said.

He knew the reason: she feared the possible embarrassment of an evening alone with him. He had no time to say more before Gates appeared and said—“You are wanted on the telephone, sir. In the library. I have left the receiver off for you.”

Gees rose. “That's earlier than I thought he'd ring,” he remarked as he went toward the door, remembering that he had asked Reed to ring him. But, when he put the receiver to his ear, it was not Reed's voice. A gruffer tone marked the announcement—“Doctor Firth speaking. Is that Mr. Green?”

“It is, doctor. What can I do for you?”

“Ah! I hoped you would still be there. Mr. Green, could you find time this morning—somewhere between eleven and half-past, if that would

suit you—to look in on me here? If so, you will meet Doctor Odzendael, and I think you may be interested in what he has to say. I have already told him about you, and your interest in a certain case. He will relax so far as to tell you a new feature in it.”

“Certainly I will be there,” Gees promised. “This is very kind indeed of you, doctor. My very sincere thanks to you.”

“Possibly.” Firth gave a grim note to the word. “I’ll expect you not later than half-past eleven, then. Good-bye.”

Gees hung up and went back. He said, as he seated himself—“Now where were we? Yes, inviting Bernard and his wife. That was Firth on the line, and I don’t know why he wants to see me between eleven and half-past, but he does. I’m telling you that because I want you to feel you are co-operating with me, and I have enough confidence in you to tell you everything about what I am doing.”

“As far as I can, I will help,” Claire told him.

“I know. In this case, it is a very simple thing. You will have cocktails in the long room as usual, of course?”

“Unless you think it better not,” she answered.

“Who am I to break established custom? No, but—seriously, by all means have them there. And I want you to supplement me by watching what anyone does who goes near the tray or touches a glass. By seeing, as nearly as possible, exactly what they do, in case I’m not in a position to see fully for myself. It may—well, finish things.”

“I—yes, of course I will! Anything you want me to do—to help, I mean. But what makes you think—you can’t possibly—” She broke off, but her gaze completed the sentence. Then—“But that’s impossible! You couldn’t have seen anything—there is no reason—”

He finished his coffee and put the cup down.

“To complete the confidence, I’m going to show you there is a reason,” he said. “I’ve thought over it since I wakened, and see that—the distribution of cocktails—as the most likely cause. So I’ll come in this evening as I did last night, after Bernard and his wife have got there. My reason is—this.” And he held his left hand for her to see.

He knew instantly that he ought to have chosen some different, less melodramatic way of telling her—or have kept the knowledge from her altogether. There was not much colour in her face normally, but now he saw it chalk-white, and terror beyond belief in her eyes. She started up, overturning her chair, and came to him to grasp the twitching fingers with both her hands, and press them against her breast. Her tears rained down on his face as she bent over him.

“My dear—you must go! As you sent him—you must go! I send you! Do you hear? I can’t bear it! You! Oh, no—no—no! Not you!”

“Claire!” He put his right arm round her, and drew her close. “Quiet, girl! Quiet, dear! I’m not going! I’m fighting, and you’re helping me till the fight is won. Listen—stop crying and listen. If you don’t, I’ll—I’ll kiss you! Now will you stop it?”

She laughed through her tears, shakily. “Not—not for that. But you must go, all the same. I won’t—”

“And leave you alone with a shadow, and a fear that is far worse than a host of shadows,” he broke in. “No, I stay. I’m not frightened by this, but fighting mad over it. Now will you listen?”

“Yes. If you—if you keep on holding me and—and let me keep your hand just here. Keep it still—still! Close to me.”

“Even so, and you’re very dear, Claire. But listen. This is not meant to put an end to me. It’s only a first dose of whatever the stuff is that produces this effect, and a slight dose at that. It’s meant to frighten me, to make me do exactly what you asked—go.”

Steadied by his apparent certainty, she shook away the last of her tears. “Are you sure?” she asked. “Mr. Reed—he told me—began just like this. And then worse and worse, till he couldn’t hide it.”

“And now he’s going to get better and better till there’s nothing of it left,” Gees said. “That is, if he stays away as I told him. Remember what happened in the case of the girl Carr.”

“What? How do you mean, what happened?”

“As nearly as I can gather, an initial stage like this of mine. Then successive steps, leading up to the point where she had to be certified and placed under restraint. It was obviously a matter of adding and adding again and again to the initial effect, like—like filling in brick after brick to a doorway, to asphyxiate whoever might be shut in by the brickwork. But this is the point of it. As long as health—apart from the twitching in the left hand and the effect on the left arm—as long as health exists as fully as it still exists in Reed, and the effect already produced on him is not increased by further poisonings, nature will bring about a complete cure. If one has strength and the mentality is still normal, as is his—and mine, as far as mine ever is—a healthy blood-stream will expel the poison, given time to do it. That’s plain common-sense. I’m not a doctor, but I feel sure any doctor would confirm me.”

“Do you know what you are?” she asked gravely.

He smiled up at her. “I have some idea, Claire. I have also grace enough to be ashamed of myself for not realising the effect the scent had had

on you last night. This—holding you like this—is different. You’re my very dear friend, and I want to reassure you.”

“Gees, I do not regret last night. I was ... very happy. I could be very happy now, if it were not for your danger. Now let me tell you what you are. The bravest man I have ever known. Because you are not facing a danger you can see and fight fairly, but—dear man, I honour you! The bravest I have ever known.”

She released herself in time, and was back by her own chair, with Gees also on his feet, when Gates’ head appeared for the second time.

“Mr. Reed on the line, Mr. Green. In the library, sir.”

Again Gees went to lift the receiver. He said—“Glad to hear from you. Not from your flat, I trust?”

“I stayed last night”—Reed’s voice rasped acidly in the transmitter—“at one of the cow-pens in Park Lane. Never mind which one—I’m moving out and going to Brown’s to-day. This place looks like a glorified work-house infirmary outside, and smells like seven hairdressers’ shops and a leading lady’s dressing-room put together inside. I’m country-born, Green, and I want to come home.”

“You can’t yet,” Gees told him. “Things are moving fast, and I intend staying here yet another day and night. By to-morrow I may have definite news for you. How is the hand going on?”

“Slightly less noticeable, I think. Or perhaps I’m getting used to it. But I really believe it doesn’t twitch quite so badly.”

“All to the good—you convince me finally that I’m on the right track, and you’ll have to write me another cheque.”

“If so, I shall have very great pleasure in handing it to you,” Reed said, “at the Hall—I want to come back home.”

“Yes, I know,” Gees said soothingly, “but for the present you’d better—well, call in at the leading lady’s dressing-room, or find some other way of passing time inexpensively. And do not forget your appointment at my office this afternoon. Miss Brandon is expecting you, and she’s got a most sympathetic personality, you’ll find.”

“I have the appointment in mind,” Reed said, rather coldly.

“Excellent! And I can get you at Brown’s, if I have occasion?”

“You can. All right, Green, I’ll carry on as patiently as I can, and accept your rulings since you say you’re really making progress—accept them all except the one about the leading lady, because she’s on tour in South Africa this winter, and I hope to be married before she gets back. You have nothing definite you could tell me?”

"I have, quite a lot, but it won't tell over the telephone. I'm not punning. What's the weather like with you?"

"Foul. Good-bye, Green."

Smiling to himself, Gees went back to the dining-room, but Claire had gone. Having finished breakfast, he went on to the long room, and found her there, gazing pensively into the fire.

"Reed hasn't mutinied yet," he remarked, "but he sounded restless, and I couldn't give him a date for his return to the ancestral hall."

"His is a restless temperament," she said. "I wish he cared more for Ethna, wish he were more her lover and less sure of her. I should hate to think I was going to marry a man like Sydnor Reed."

"But you don't dislike him, surely?"

She turned her head to look up at him. "I like him, find him interesting—and very kind, too," she answered. "But—"

"Well?" he asked, as she did not end it.

She took his left hand in both hers again, and held it. "You know!" she said. "And this—it stays in my mind all the time. Fear for you. Don't be angry, please—I know you won't go, and it's no use asking that of you. And don't tell me I'm silly, because I'm not!"

"You are—Claire," he told her, "and everything you say is still set to music. But you can forget the fear—I have absolutely none."

"But I am only a woman," she said, "and women are given to thinking strange thoughts—foolish thoughts, sometimes. Sometimes, too, they do strange things, even what might appear foolish things."

"You're not referring to last night, I hope?" he asked gently.

She shook her head. "I was thinking of—of my to-morrows, not of any of my yesterdays," she answered. "If I can go on believing what you told me about outliving you, I shall do no strange things."

"And if you don't believe me?" he asked, not quite so gently.

"You will know. No more—I can tell you no more."

"I see. And since I intend to walk to the village for the sake of the exercise, it's time to start. I don't know how long Firth will keep me. You will understand if I'm not back for lunch?"

"If you're not, do get a good lunch somewhere. You had no breakfast except for a shred of toast. Promise me."

"I promise to order elephant on the half-shell, and a large steak if elephant is out of season. Satisfied?"

"Go away. Take every care—Claire asks it of you."

He kissed the hands that still held his fingers from their ceaseless movements. "Reason enough," he said, and left her.

A short man, five feet six, or thereabouts, fat rather than stout, with clean-shaven face a uniform pink all over, and pale, hard grey eyes behind thick-lensed, tortoiseshell spectacles—Dr. Christian Odzendael. He stood in Dr. Firth's shabby consulting-room, with his hands on his hips pushing back the tails of his immaculately-fitted morning coat, and kept rising on his toes and letting his heels down again, monotonously and irritatingly. He spoke rather stilted, over-perfect English, except for occasional undue-emphasis on his sibilants, and Gees prayed that he might never be a patient under such a one.

"I was here at nine o'clock, Mr. Green," he said, after the introduction had been made and acknowledged. "My good colleague"—he rose on his toes as he nodded at Firth—"hass told me of your interest in my case of the girl Carr"—his heels made contact with the floor again—"and I think now in some measure the case passes from our domain to yours. By reason of the death of the woman Mendez, on whom my good colleague made the autopsy—and asked me also to examine all that he hass found. Analogy, shall we say?"

"Do sit down, won't you, Dr. Odzendael?" Gees invited, and cared nothing at all that he made the invitation in Firth's house, for the fat, teetering figure was irritating him badly.

"Thank you, but I prefer to stand," Odzendael answered blandly, and went on rising and dropping. "Yess. I think there is in this case the element of crime. Yesterday, Mr. Green, I make the autopsy on the body of the girl Carr, and I come to the brain. I find complete paralysis of the brain, on which ensued death, ass iss a natural consequence of that state. My good colleague here hass told you, he hass informed me, of the *lakiti* with which a very few Dyak tribes tip the darts for their blowpipes. So deadly iss the poison of *lakiti* that so much ass iss dried on the tip of but one dart, introduced into the blood stream by way of the blood vessels just under the skin—for *lakiti*, once introduced, runs of itself with lightning speed into the blood stream—so little as that quantity can kill a full-grown tiger in from thirty to ninety seconds. You understand?"

"Fully," Gees told him. "Dr. Firth told me, as you say."

"Yess. Now, if I may continue my lecture to you"—("And your blasted rocking!" Gees thought but did not say)—"since so small a quantity of *lakiti* shall produce so swift a death in the organism of a tiger, how small must be the quantity gradually to bring death to a human being? The

more so since, to produce so gradual a death as the girl Carr died, it iss not caused by the one injection, or the one administering by the mouth, but is built up and built up, ass one might place one brick on another brick, and a third brick on the second brick, and sso on until there iss a tall heap of bricks. So wass this girl killed by *lakiti*, and I understand it wass for five or six weeks the bricks were piled, the injections or the administering by the mouth were given, and all—all!—wass passed from the blood stream into the brain, there to lodge and cause at the end complete paralysis. Not any of it to stay in the blood stream, and here I will give you another analogy. For if you throw a stone in a river, the stone will not keep in the stream. It will sink to the bottom, and if the current be strong, it will roll and roll the stone till there is a niche, a pocket, in the bed of the stream, where the stone will stop as in its appointed place. So the *lakiti* roll in the blood stream until it find the soft, grey matter of the brain, and there iss its niche, its pocket, its appointed place. You see?"

"You are making it admirably clear," Gees told him, and even forgave the man his persistent rocking, now. The exposition was fascinating, perhaps by reason of Odzendael's earnest certainty.

"Thank you, Mr. Green. When I make the autopsy on the girl, Carr, yesterday, I dissect the brain and make one simple test which, because I have before studied *lakiti* and its effects, inform me at once that she hass died of *lakiti* poisoning, and I know by the case history it wass administered in so greatly diluted form that the quantity of each poisoning wass—how shall I say it? Ultra-microscopic? Not so small that I, Odzendael, would not ascertain the presence of *lakiti* if the dose were given me to examine, because I have the one simple test, an infallible test. But so small that it would not be detected in the blood stream, not even if a hundred slides and a four-ounce sample were taken five minutes, ten minutes, and fifteen minutes after the injection had been made. So small, building up, and building up, all to lodge in the brain, and if so much hass been given that the system do not have strength to cleanse and evacuate as in strength it eventually evacuate all foreign substances, then there will ensue just such paralysis of the brain as come to the tiger in thirty seconds or at most ninety seconds. You understand?"

"Again I say, you make it admirably clear," Gees said.

"Thank you, Mr. Green. Now I tell you, if you do not know, I am specialist on the brain. I am interested only in the brain. I have dissected many hundreds of brains, of animals, of human people, even of insects

and reptiles. I tell you too that paralysis of the brain by the use of *lakiti* is recognisable, even before one shall test for *lakiti*,—or if one knows how to recognize the paralysis but do not know how to test for the presence of *lakiti*. For in each case of brain paralysis not caused by *lakiti*, cases that I have dissected, the convolutions of the tissue are totally different from those cases of brain paralysis that are caused by *lakiti*. This is infallible. Paralysis by *lakiti* is always recognizable ass such, and ass from no other cause. Do I make the necessary point quite clear to you?”

“Absolutely, thank you,” Gees answered.

“Thank you, Mr. Green. Now my good colleague here, he think the woman Mendez die of exhaustion consequent on exposure, he tell me, but because he get very few corpses to make autopsies, he use this corpse of the woman Mendez if it may increase his knowledge and so his power to heal. He is not satisfied that she die by exhaustion, and so he open up the brain and find—paralysis. Perhaps accelerated by exposure, by the weakness of her heart, but still there is paralysis of the brain ass cause of death. So this morning, very early, he ring me and tell me, and I drive over to see. Not only iss it paralysis of the brain, but it is the especial convolutions in the paralysis which only *lakiti* can cause—Mendez wass killed by the use of *lakiti*. I think it wass one administering only, not a series, in thiss case. For, if it were not that *lakiti* causes a certain twitching on the left side, most often in the left front paw of the animal for the moments that it live, or the left hand of a human being, ass like the girl Carr before she become quite maniacal—if it were not for that, *lakiti* iss an excitant which might be used in medicine, diluted to so small a quantity that so much ass a Dyak use for one dart point may be divided into five hundred or even one thousand parts. Being thus an excitant, it affect the heart of the woman Mendez, over-stimulate it, and on that follow the exhaustion during which the *lakiti* work very fast on the brain. Thus she also iss a case, like the girl Carr. I say this before I make my simple test, but I do not need the test to tell me there is *lakiti* lodged in her paralysed brain, in the convolutions of the grey tissue. For I recognize it, I know. It iss clear to you? I have made you understand?”

“Perfectly, Doctor. Thank you very much.”

“It iss for me to thank you, Mr. Green. But not yet have I finished all I would say to you of this second death emanating from the home of the respected Mr. Sydnor Reed. Also, I understand, Mr. Sydnor Reed himself iss affected, though not yet so very seriously. He can be made to recover, if he is dissociated from the source of the poison at once. But

that must be soon—”

“I sent him away, and told him to stay away, yesterday,” Gees interrupted. “He will stay away till I tell him to come back.”

“That was very wise, Mr. Green. Yess. Very wise. And still I have not finished all I would say to you about these cases.”

“I shall be very glad to hear the rest,” Gees told him.

“Thank you, Mr. Green. I must now repeat that with the death of the woman Mendez from such a cause the case passes from my province, that of the brain specialist, to the domain of crime. I must preface that which I would say by reminding you that *lakiti* is a very rare poison, even among the Dyaks who use it. There it is known only to a few, and I know of no other race in the world who know the secret by which it is made. So far ass I know, it iss made by those few Dyak tribes only. So it iss not like *wourali*, also used for tipping arrow points, or any other snake venom compounds, which are comparatively common and easy to obtain. This I say ass preface.”

“Very good of you to explain so fully,” Gees said.

“It iss very good of you to listen so patiently, Mr. Green,” Odzendael replied gravely. “But I have not yet finished all I would say. It iss that I tell my good colleague here it iss my duty to inform the police, for these two cases, they are murders.”

“And he agreed with you,” Gees suggested.

“I have not yet finished all I would say,” Odzendael said, and made a reproof of it, this time. “My good colleague observed that Mr. Reed hass put you in charge of this case, and he reminded me that you were of the Kleinert case, and before that of the Kestwell case. That you are very capable, and of sufficient judgment to summon the police to your aid at the correct moment. In fact, my good colleague talk most irregularly, make most improper suggestions about the cases.”

“As how?” Gees was smiling, now. “I mean, may I hear them?”

“You may, Mr. Green,” Odzendael conceded gravely. “My good colleague reminded me that the good Mr. Reed is a very generous man, and iss the mainstay—it was the word of my good colleague—the mainstay of the village here. I also have benefited from the generosity of the good Mr. Reed—shall I say rather that my establishment received benefit? For I take nothing to myself, all that he give of his generosity iss for the establishment and the better treatment of the patients.”

“That is to say, you live for your work,” Gees suggested.

“For the knowledge of mankind, and to heal—always for the greater knowledge, the greater power to heal,” Odzendael amended. “It iss not

altruist, but my pleasure. Now, Mr. Green, here in these cases I see my plain duty. The one, the case of the girl Carr—it may be she contract the *lakiti* anywhere. I would say it iss of suspicion, but not of certainty. But then, from the same house, the Hall of Nortonsweir-Ferring, come the second case of the woman Mendez. The one case, possibly misadventure. The two cases, certainly crime. Murder. It iss my plain duty to inform the police. Iss it not sso?”

“Obviously,” Gees agreed, without hesitation.

“Thank you, Mr. Green. But I have not finished all I would say. My good colleague point out to me the position at the Hall of Nortonsweir-Ferring, which before I do not know. That there wass association between the girl Carr and the good Mr. Reed”—Gees wondered what folly or carelessness on Reed’s or the girl’s part had let this knowledge reach to Firth—“and it iss not to me to sit in judgement on any man or woman for such a thing. My good colleague also tell me of the certain will by which all the inheritance pass in a certain contingency. He tell me there iss but the one conclusion on this crime, though for what reason the woman Mendez iss murdered he cannot think. The one conclusion, yet it may be unjust, my good colleague say. He point to me that if I inform the police they leap to that one conclusion, the newspapers learn of it, and the police they question, suspect, perhaps even arrest, and so put on the name of an innocent man a slur which no after exoneration can quite wipe away. There will be always the suspicion against that man, the feeling on his part that he wass unjustly accused, or unjustly suspected, and between him and the good Mr. Reed, who are now friends, there will be a bitterness for which can be no cure, no removal. So my good colleague see it and tell me.”

“There is some reason in it, too,” Gees observed.

“I have not yet finished all I would say,” Odzendael persisted, and went on exercising his ankles. “My good colleague tell me Mr. Green is already making investigation, not ass the police would make it by unwanted entry to the Hall of Nortonsweir-Ferring and by long questionings of which the newspapers must learn, but ass guest of the good Mr. Reed, in position to make contact with all who may be suspect, and perhaps, ass in the cases of which we know Mr. Green have made successes, to point with certainty at the criminal, not to cause unjust suspicion and set stigma on a name of one innocent. My good colleague say—let uss ask Mr. Green to come here, and you shall tell him of this certainty of crime by the discovery of paralysis of the brain by *lakiti* of the woman Mendez, and he shall then inform the police. Because in his

position, it may be that he will know how to so govern the police that there shall be no great outcry in the newspapers, no mention of the so-foolish will, and thus less of mental distress to the good Mr. Reed who iss the mainstay of this place.”

“I appreciate this very much, Dr. Odzendael,” Gees said sincerely. “That is, if you see it as Dr. Firth does.”

“I have not yet finished all I would say,” Odzendael repeated. “It iss that before my good colleague conduct the autopsy on the corpse of the woman Mendez, he have already given the certificate of death to the undertaker which is employed, on which is stated the cause of death as exhaustion due to exposure, though he use the correct medical definition and not those words. For then he was certain of that ass the cause of death, certain that the autopsy can reveal no other, and thus the certificate was but a matter of form to him. Now if there shall at the finish be a trial, I, Odzendael, the great brain specialist and the only authority on *lakiti* and its use and effects, shall be called as expert witness. I will witness that it wass on my instructions that my good colleague did not alter the certificate, not that we might pervert the course of justice, but that we might assist it, since if we certify *lakiti* poisoning as the cause the poisoner will, ass the hunting people say, go to ground, increase the difficulty. And already there is great difficulty, for the poison is infinitely small, minute, recognizable by few people in this country. Perhaps recognizable only by me, Odzendael. And I so far see it ass does my good colleague ass to see that if those who seek the criminal make but the one blunder, then the criminal may never be discovered. So I agree with my good colleague that you shall inform the police, ass and when you will. You will inform them soon, for I see that already the criminal have begun to poison you, and in a week at most, if the poisoning continue, it may be dangerous for you.”

“I know all about that, and I take the risk, Doctor.”

“Yess. You are a very brave man, Mr. Green, and it iss to me an honour to meet you and know you. I think, if only for that you are of such courage, there will be little or no blame to my good colleague or to me or to you that we three agree you shall inform the police in ssuch time ass you see fit. I have now finished all I would say.”

“If you’ll accept a suggestion, Mr. Green,” Firth put in, “Mr. Reed and the Lord-Lieutenant of the county are very good friends. Mr. Reed could use his influence, and the Lord-Lieutenant could filter down a suggestion to the police chiefs to cooperate with you, rather than butt in and make a nine days’ wonder of it.”

"I'll remember that, and act on it, Doctor," Gees told him. "You are both far more helpful to me than I have any right to expect, and I assure you I'm grateful for it—to you both."

"It iss a unique case," Odzendael said, "and I take the course my good colleague suggest because, although it iss most irregular, I believe it will assist and not pervert the course of justice."

"I hope—and believe too, that it may," Gees remarked.

"Now I will go back to my patients," Odzendael said, "taking with me the brain of the woman Mendez that I may make my simple test for the presence of *lakiti*, to place beyond doubt, if there shall be a trial, that she die by that poison. For no other in this country but me, Odzendael, know of the peculiar convolutions in the brain caused by the presence of *lakiti*, and so, in actual fact, the certificate of the cause of death given by my good colleague is still in order, until I have completed my test. For without my knowledge, brain paralysis might eventuate of such exhaustion as that woman undergo. All our knowledge, Mr. Green, is empiric beyond a certain point, for no two organisms react similarly to the one cause, and so ever we increase our knowledge that we may have more power to heal."

He ceased his rocking for the first time since Gees had entered the room, and held out his hand. "Now I go," he said. "I am honoured that I meet so brave a man as you, Mr. Green, and I think we shall meet again, in the trial of the criminal you discover, or it may be before. I will now say good-bye, having finished all else I would say."

"I also feel honoured, Doctor," Gees answered, with an utterly different feeling toward the man from that with which he had first viewed him, "and thank you very much for your frankness and kindness."

"Thank you, Mr. Green. The jar of the brain is with the corpse"—he addressed that statement to Firth—"and I can get it without your coming to help. I will tell you the result of the test, though already I know there iss not necessary any test to prove *lakiti* present."

He went out. Firth asked—"What do you think of him?"

"He is a great man, and knows it," Gees answered.

Chapter 9

Dea In Machina

In his room at the Hall, Gees had just finished coaxing his dress trousers into their creases, preparatory to placing them in his suitcase, when the gong sounded for lunch—ten minutes past the normal time, his watch told him. He ceased packing, and went straight down to the dining-room, where Claire had already seated herself.

“I put it back ten minutes for you,” she opened on him. “Have you been in long? I didn’t know you were back.”

“I’ve had a most interesting morning, and a most useful one,” he answered cheerfully. “Graves, please”—this to Gates. Then to Claire again—“Do you know who is lord-lieutenant of this county?”

“Yes, Sir Horace Dundas-Morton. He dined here last week.”

“The bow-legged baronet, eh? I’d no idea he was parochially-minded. Well, that gives me two strings to my stitch in time.”

Gates’ hand quivered a little as he poured the Graves, and Gees saw his back shaking as he retired to the sideboard with the bottle. Then he went out, and possibly exploded outside the door.

“That wasn’t fair,” Claire said. “Gates leads a very quiet life, and the result is a simple mind. He doesn’t go to the pictures, even, and—but why this sudden interest in lords-lieutenant?”

“No, only in one of them. And he and my father both get red in the face when they settle to slanging the Army of to-day in their club—I’ve seen them at it. Now if I start for London at three—” he broke off, estimating possibilities at the end of the journey.

“You said you were staying to-night!” Claire almost protested.

“Yes, but that was a long while ago, and now I’m so much at sea that I want time to sight land. Dundas-Morton is the only man who can give

me sailing directions, and to get them I've got to get in touch with Reed, whom I won't let come back here. Ergo!"

"May I know any more?" she asked after a long pause.

"The police of any county are responsible to the chief constable, and the chief constable is responsible to the lord-lieutenant," he answered. "I don't know whether that's theoretic or practical—I don't know what actual powers a lord-lieutenant has, because I have never looked it up, but I think Dundas-Morton both can and will ease my way for me, since I'm acting for Reed. I want Reed to make him smooth it, anyhow. You see, the police have got to come in on this, and I want to keep the free hand I've had so far."

"Do you mean we've got to have police here?" she asked incredulously, almost fearfully, as she stared at him.

"They haven't got here yet," he said, "and since Reed will like the idea as little as you obviously do, probably he'll walk up walls to avert it when I tell him. You see, Anita Mendez died from the same cause as did Elsie Carr, which makes plain murder a certainty."

"Anita?" She almost gasped the name. "But who would murder her?"

He shook his head. "I can't understand it, either—yet," he answered. "But there it is. If, on that, the police are not informed, I get two good men into trouble and myself too. So, on the advice of one of those good men, I plan to inform them through the bow-legged one—get him to do it for me, and perhaps—only perhaps!—keep everything quiet as it can be kept. It's a hope, no more."

She thought it over. "In a way, I'm glad you're going," she said.

"I know. Thank you, Claire."

She smiled. "You will come back?" she asked.

He said—"I am sure of two things. One is death, and the other the next demand for income tax. A third—that I trust you absolutely. And I'm sure of nothing else, but as things stand now I intend to come back here, to-morrow if possible."

Gates, entering then for service, had not merely regained his dignity, but had added to it solemnity, Gees noted. Not till he and the maid who seconded him had gone out again did Gees speak.

"I want to ring Reed at about a quarter to three, and start immediately after that," he said. "And I want a promise from you."

"To—to keep watch and tell you what I see?" she asked.

"I take that for granted," he answered, "on what you have already told me. Not that you are likely to see anything at all in my absence. No.

That you will not, either while I am away or at any other time, burn herbs for scent on that infernal altar again—ever.”

“An easy promise,” she said. “I give it. I—I wouldn’t dare repeat the experiment, after what you’ve told me.”

“If I hadn’t had that promise to take with me, I should have worried about you,” he explained. “It’s like the drug habit, so fatally easy to come under the influence and be drawn nearer and nearer to—to the shadow state, either as hierophant seeking power and in gaining it making shadows, or becoming one of those hopeless wraiths. Don’t ask me to explain that if you don’t understand it.”

“But I do,” she told him. “The—the presence over the altar explained everything. Took me out of time—quite out of time—and showed me all the kingdoms of the world, if you can understand that.”

“Easily. All illusion, Claire—all of it. You’d give your soul to gain a world if you yielded to that power—and you’d never so much as see the world, let alone gain it. Do you believe me?”

“Believe you and believe in you, Gees. The strength of you.”

“Little enough of that, as you’ll realize if you look back to last night,” he said sombrely.

She asked, rather tremulously—“Is it—is it so bitter a memory for you?”

“So bitter, that I wish it were all to live again,” he answered, “which ought to prove my weakness to you—Claire.”

She smiled. “I am answered, and I shall put the answer away with my memory. Since you’ve given it me, I want to sing you a little song before you go—in the long room. It’s a man’s song, and I shall have to transpose the accompaniment as I play it, but—”

“Another gift of yours—though I might have known you had it by the quality of your speaking voice,” he observed.

“Which proves nothing,” she pointed out. “Yes, I’ve topped the bill, as theatrical people express it, for concert platforms. That’s not conceit, but gratitude for a gift bestowed on me—a singing voice is either given one or not given, like—like red hair or a squint. So—coffee in the long room, and there will be time for the song before you telephone to Mr. Reed. If you can bear it.”

“But then, you told me I was strong,” he retorted.

“I deserved that. Shall we go—for the coffee?”

He followed her across the entrance hall. On a small table just outside the door of the long room stood the electric hand lamp she had taken down to the crypt the day before. He observed, but did not question

its presence. Even if she had intended to go down to the crypt again and repeat her experience of the preceding night, she had given him her promise, and he knew she was not one to break it.

“You told me”—he stirred his coffee after taking it from her—“of two entrances to the cellars and crypt, one under this carpet and the one we used. Are there any others, can you tell me?”

“One other, in a storeroom in the wing,” she answered.

“Umm-m! Is it possible to fasten that one down—lock it?”

She shook her head. “It is a trapdoor, like the one under the carpet here. There is a recessed ring in the trapdoor, and you pull it open. Naturally, the weight of the door holds it down when it’s closed, and it has no fastening of any sort.”

“That’s a pity. Because I thought of asking you to keep an eye lifting to see if anyone at all went down by the way you took me yesterday, but with that alternative entry it’s hardly worth while. I mean, the trapdoor in the storeroom would be far less conspicuous.”

“Yes, I understand. But I can get Gates to give me the key of the storeroom, and lock it, if you wish.”

He laughed. “I suppose it’s no use asking you to kick me,” he remarked. “Two heads are certainly worth a bird in the hand, especially when one of them is as thick as mine.”

“Then if I lock the storeroom, and keep watch,” she suggested.

“Sounds as if you meant to take a chair and sit in front of the door in the corridor,” he remarked, “but I know what you mean. Yes, you might have something to tell me when I get back—if I get back. And now”—he went to the long grand piano and lifted the lid—“or is it too soon after lunch?”

Without verbal reply she went to a music rack and, sorting over its contents, took out the song. Gees saw the title, “Request,” as she opened the pages after seating herself at the piano. The opening chords gave the air, plaintively haunting as a Mexican folk-song, and then her voice, a contralto of which the depth and sweetness made Gees understand that her claim to have “topped the bill” was fully justified. She enunciated every word clearly:

*“Beneath the tender sweetness of your breast,
Keep me a little secret place, apart
From all the fret of everyday’s unrest—
A shrine of dreams, loved one, within your heart.*

“There I will build you music-memories,

*And clothe the walls with singing, as with flowers,
And set an altar, lighted by your eyes—
A shining altar, jewelled like the hours
You have made golden.*

*“Keep me, dear, that place,
Secret, inviolate, known only to us two.
There let me, dreaming, for a little space,
Dwell in the happiness I lived with you.”*

The last chord of the accompaniment died out. She sat still, her hands on the keys, and her head bent down toward them.

Gees said: “Clothe the walls with singing. Yes.” Very softly.

“Three days—less than three days.” Abruptly she stood up and faced him. “Come back, soon. Until then—good-bye.”

And passed him, going toward the door. He went with her to open it, but she did not look at him again, nor speak again. When he had closed the door, he went back to the piano and read over the words of the song. He said: “Yes, less than three days—and what a voice!”

It was just a quarter to three when, after dialing trunks and giving his own number, he heard Miss Brandon’s voice.

“Yes, and you should have a Mr. Reed there with you, the dark stranger I told you about,” he answered her statement of herself. “If so, what do you make of him—how do you like him?”

“Much too dark,” she answered. “Otherwise, fairly.”

“Ladies prefer—never mind, that’s out of date. Let me speak to him, please, and tell him I want to talk to you again after.”

A brief clanking interval, and then Reed’s voice. “You, is it, Green. Can I come home yet?”

“You can not!” Gees informed him. “Things are moving so quickly that they’re due to catch fire by friction at any moment. I understand you know Sir Horace Dundas-Morton?”

“I lunched with him to-day—left him to come on here.”

“You did? Betterer and betterer, as Alice might say. Have you any idea how long he’s staying in London?”

“He’s going back home to-morrow morning,” Reed answered. “When can I come back home too? I’m country-born, as I told you before.”

“Shelve the question,” Gees bade. “Records get scratchy if played too often. But about Sir Horace, his going back home so soon is not so good. But I have an idea. Can you make an appointment for him to

be at my office—where you are now—at eight o'clock to-night, and be there yourself too, to meet me?"

"Eight o'clock to-night?" Reed sounded flabbergasted. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"I told you things were moving fast. I'm talking about keeping the police out of Nortonsweir-Ferring Hall, and Sir Horace appears to me to be the only man capable of doing it. Now do you see?"

"Good heavens!" The exclamation was vibrant with horror.

Gees waited, and at last said: "Come back to earth, which is not so good. Can you move it and heaven too, and get Sir Horace there?"

"If you—I think I can," Reed answered. "I'll do my best."

"Now let me speak to Miss Brandon again please," Gees asked, knowing that, with his bombshell exploded in Reed's ear, the bow-legged baronet would be dragged to his office somehow. And presently he heard: "Miss Brandon on the line again, Mr. Green."

"Ah, that's good. I want you to do a spot of overtime to-night, Miss Brandon. I'm just starting back for London, and want to meet Reed and a friend of his at the office at eight o'clock. Can do?"

"If you mean can I be here at eight to-night, yes," she answered.

"Can you be there at eight to-night is eight syllables. Can do is two, and long trunk calls cost money. Not that it matters in this case—this is Reed's telephone I'm using, and he packs his mazuma in fat wads. As for to-night. I'll interview the pair of them in my room, with the microphone in the side of my desk switched through to you. Take down all you can hear—it may not be useful, but again it may. Thank you very much, Miss Brandon—that's all."

"Good-bye, Mr. Green."

He smiled at the receiver as he put it down. "Peeved, yes," he murmured. "That'll larn you not to correct my poetic euphonies. Can do, Eve Madeleine—can do! Now to hit the trail—can do."

From the window of the room next his—the one in which she had slept the night after his arrival—Claire Lawson watched him until the car disappeared among the trees. Then she went down to the entrance hall, took the hand lamp, and with it made her way to the door in the corridor which gave access to the cellars and crypt. She opened the door, switched on the lamp, and went down the age-worn steps, to follow the way along which she had guided Gees.

Turning Londonward after he had driven out from the lane, Gees was about to depress the accelerator of the Rolls-Bentley when, with a report like that of a big gun, his near front tyre burst. He stopped and got down

to look at the damage, seeing it as a clean cut in the almost new tyre, a two-inch wound at the outer edge of and diagonal to the tread. When he pressed the cut open, he saw that it had been so cleanly made that only a couple of threads of cotton on the inner surface of the tyre had been left to break.

Then, looking along the temptingly straight stretch of road, a good half-mile of which was visible, he noted it as almost over-cambered, and knew that, had he been doing his usual fifty-five to sixty where road conditions justified it, the burst might easily have somersaulted the car through the low hedge and into the ditch beyond. He got back in, uncovered the four-wheel jacking system to set it for front only, and presently had both front wheels clear of the road. Changing wheels was easy, if dirty, and after he had finished it he examined the off-side tyre carefully, to find it undamaged. Then he let down the front and jacked up the back to examine both wheels there and ascertain that only the one tyre had been cut.

If he himself had done the cutting with such a purpose, he knew, he would have cut a little less deeply, so that nothing short of a bump at high speed would complete the burst. It was an amateurish attempt at putting an end to his activities—he had no doubt as to the cause of the trouble. Also, he was quite calm over it. All things pointed to Bernard Lawson, now, and he would get Bernard, if he could keep the police out of the Hall and complete the case himself.

He drove on, remembering Claire's song, the placidity with which Gates had taken his tip and lack of interest with which he had received Gees' announcement that he might be coming back—Gates had been shaken once, almost to unseemly mirth, and Gees concluded that he would never move the man again in any way. The perfect stage butler! Claire, bidding good-bye, bidding him come back soon. Dangerously attractive—and dangerously attracted, too. There was no conceit, but recognition of evident fact, in that last conclusion.

When he had travelled ten miles or so from Nortonsweir-Ferring, the thawing snow had shrunk so much that patches of bare ground and sodden grass land were visible. He drove straight through, to find the northern suburbs altogether clear of snow, and in spite of the burst tyre and his halt for changing wheels the car was in its garage by-ten minutes past seven. Gees laughed to himself as he entered the Monico: if Eve Madeleine were dining there too, he decided, he would share her table and insist on standing her dinner. An extra-special dinner, with wines to fit and a bottle of Clicquot especially for her. He felt in an

extravagant mood, and murmured: "Can do."

But she was not there, so he contented himself with a steak off the grill and a pint tankard of bitter. At a quarter to eight he closed the door of his flat from the inside, and saw Eve Madeleine seated at the desk in her room. Entering, he took out his cigarette case and offered it. She took one and said: "Thank you, Mr. Green," and he lighted up for her and for himself. That was their greeting.

Then he took out his wallet, and laid Reed's cheque down on her desk. He said: "I kept on forgetting all about this. Pay it in for me in the morning, will you, Miss Brandon—I have endorsed it. You took down Reed's story, I hope?"

"It is in typescript," she answered. "I have labelled the file 'Nortonsweir-Ferring Case', if you wish to consult it at any time."

"Lengthways, not across the back," he surmised. "Ah, well! If these two guys don't park on us too long, and if you can stand it, I'd like to add to Reed's story by dictating the case to you as far as it goes—or some of it, and the rest in the morning."

"I can stand it as long as you choose to dictate," she said. "I shall have all the more time for novel-reading after transcribing my notes—unless another case follows immediately after this."

"Which is on the knees of the future," he observed. "One must make hay when it knocks at the door—and there, if I mistake me not, is the bold and bow-legged baronet and your dark stranger. I'll let them in—no, though! I'll go along to my room and look as if I'd been there years—you let 'em in, Miss Brandon."

He went softly along the corridor to the next door on the same side, and entered his own rather luxuriously-furnished office.

Chapter 10

Deus Ex Machina

S eated in the luxurious, leather-upholstered armchair designed for the use of clients, and placed directly in front of the concealed microphone in the end of Gees' desk, Sir Horace Dundas-Morton listened to all that Gees told him, occasionally interpolating a question, while Reed sat on the arm of the chair, with his twitching left hand concealed in his trouser pocket. The baronet's bowed legs were not noticeably so as he sat, though, when he was on his feet, nobody could doubt the justice of the epithet so often used in connection with him. He was very tall and very thin, and although in his sixties was still to be found among the first half-dozen in rear of a pack of hounds; he had spent some years in the diplomatic service, resigning when he succeeded to the baronetcy, and, like Gees' father the general, was a trifle peppery at times, especially in the close season for fox-hunting, when he got less equestrian exercise and his liver suffered in consequence.

He said: "Aha! Well, Gordon, of course you ought to have informed the police at once. You ought to have informed them, Reed."

"I think Mr. Green has pointed out to you, sir, the full reasons for his asking me to bring you to see him, instead of going to the local police station," Reed answered. "And, after all, you are the head of the police for the county, and he has put it before you."

"Yes—yes. Most irregular—hummm! Of course, I see your point, Reed, but I must do my duty. One cannot allow personal considerations to—er—you, Gordon, seem to have taken a pretty good grip on the situation. Not that I—hummm! It is not so long ago since I had to sympathise with your father about that perfectly damnable mumps to murder advertisement of yours in the personal columns of newspapers."

"Some while ago now, Sir Horace," Gees said meekly. "I haven't had to advertise for quite a long time, and I've promised my father not to repeat that particular advertisement."

"Damn it, boy, I should hope you have! When I was your age, if I'd done such a thing—but that's not what we were talking about. I tell you flatly, Gordon, and you too, Reed, I cannot think of acceding to this suggestion. Immediately on leaving here I shall—er—trunk call the police and put them in possession of the information that murder has been done at Nortonsweir-Ferring Hall."

"Then there's no more to be said," Reed observed, heavily.

"On the contrary, there is a good deal more to be said," Sir Horace dissented sharply. "I am not altogether a fool, though you young men appear to think me one. I appreciate the unique position in which you, Gordon, are placed—your unique opportunities for obtaining evidence. No police officer could be placed so advantageously as you are, on the footing of a guest at the Hall. Do not think that I am conceding merit to you, or conceding any qualities which you do not possess, when I say a thing like that. It is your good fortune to be in such a position, and nothing else. Your good fortune, Reed, to be able to put him in such a position, and nothing else. Humm!"

"I felt sure we could rely on your kindness, Sir Horace," Gees cooed. "You mean you will let me—"

"If you will kindly not interrupt while I am talking—hummm!" Sir Horace interrupted. "I have already told you, the police must be informed. In fact, by informing me you have informed the police, and if I do not know my duty at my age, I should—er—I should be a fool. Now this will—hummm!—let me see! This will fall to Superintendent Smith, who will detail Inspector Pallant to conduct the case. Yes. Yes. Most irregular. Most irregular. Hummm!"

"You mean, sir—" Reed began, with a note of hope.

"I wish you would not keep on interrupting me!" Sir Horace exclaimed testily. "I must talk to the chief constable—yes, I must talk to him, certainly. If there is one thing the police resent more than another, it is the interference of amateurs. You, Gordon, are an amateur. I do not say that you have not proved yourself of average intelligence, especially in that Kleinert case in which, I gathered, you supplemented the work of the police to some extent, but you are an amateur and nothing else. Nothing else whatever."

"I spent two years in the force," Gees reminded him.

"If you insist on interrupting; I may as well cease trying to say anything more," Sir Horace remarked bitterly.

"I'm very sorry, sir—very sorry indeed." Gees made it sound contrite, and managed to look ashamed of himself.

"Ah! Humm! Give my very sincere regards to your father when you see him, Gordon, and tell him how sorry I am not to see him during this visit to London. I have been too fully occupied, tell him, and have had to neglect old friends. Legal matters, my daughter's approaching marriage—lawyers are the very devil. Humm!"

Gees and Reed looked at each other. Both knew that neither dared speak. Sir Horace looked at each of them in turn.

"I hope you heard what I said, Gordon?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I'll certainly convey your message."

"Very well. Now this matter we were talking about when you interrupted me. Where was I? Yes. Inspector Pallant will take charge. You, I take it, Gordon, will go back to the Hall?"

"I intended doing so, sir, to-morrow, if possible," Gees answered.

"What about you, Reed? Are you going back?"

"Green wants me to stay away," Reed answered gloomily. "I don't like it, but by all appearances he's justified in asking it of me."

"I see. Humm! Well, Gordon, if you go back to-morrow, you may expect to see Inspector Pallant—the case is certain to be given to him—you may expect to see him at the Hall some time to-morrow. What time will you be back there, do you think?"

"Oh, two o'clock, or a little later," Gees said miserably. "To give him all particulars to date—hand over, as you might say."

"Ha! Hand over! Humm! No wonder the police detest amateurs! Axe you aware that I am going to the trouble of getting in touch with the chief constable over this? Not for your sake, since your head is so thick—you seem to have got mumps yourself, young man! No, not for your sake, but for Reed's, I am getting in touch with the chief constable, I tell you!"

"And Inspector Pallant is taking over the case," Gees completed incautiously.

"These persistent interruptions will drive me mad!" Sir Horace exploded. "You youngsters are positively exasperating. Positively exasperating! When I was your age—but it's not the slightest use talking to you—you need stronger correctives than talk. For your sake, Reed, I am getting in touch with the chief constable."

Reed preserved a discreet silence.

“And,” Sir Horace went on, “I am going to point out to him the unique position the son of my old friend General Sir George Green enjoys in connection with this case. A position—hummm!—due in no way to any abilities he may possess, but to your having invited him to the Hall as a guest. I am going to suggest that Inspector Pallant can ascertain some useful facts in connection with the case from Mr. Gordon Green, on whom he may call for such assistance and such purposes as he sees fit, as long as Mr. Green remains a guest at the Hall!”

“Yes, sir, I see.” Reed sounded rather doubtful over it.

“I also intend to put to him,” Sir Horace pursued, “the point made by that Dutchman with the unpronounceable name, the point about your father’s will, Reed, and the possibility of unjust suspicion not only arising over this case, but persisting after it, suspicion of young Lawson, if the case is made much of in the papers. I know Lawson sufficiently to be certain that any such suspicion is an utter absurdity, but it might arise and persist—persist for a very long time, to his great detriment. Hummm! That being so, I intend to suggest to the chief constable that Pallant must disregard his inevitable prejudice against amateurs in this case, and leave all investigations at the Hall itself to Mr. Green. Mr. Green, of course, will work under Pallant, act on his suggestions and in fact take orders from him. I cannot for one moment weaken the authority of the police in any way—hummm! And that is the best I can do for you, Reed.”

“It is a very great deal, Sir Horace, and I’m most grateful to you,” Reed answered. “It’s a weight off my mind.”

“You’ll have a whisky before you go, Sir Horace?” Gees offered, as the baronet eased himself up from the chair and the curves of his legs began to declare themselves.

“No, Gordon, thank you all the same. All this, you understand, is most irregular. Most irregular! You should have informed the police at once. Hummm! You will find Pallant both capable and amenable. Hummm! A very clever officer, and most tactful. Hummm! I will wish you good night, Gordon, and trust you will never again make a fool of yourself and disgust your father in the personal columns of newspapers. Disgust your father’s friends, too. Me. Hummm!”

“I promise you it shall not appear again, sir,” Gees told him.

Reed paused at the outer door of the flat. “How soon do you think I can come back home?” he asked.

"You can buy new records at Keith Prowse, and I believe they keep open all night," Gees answered. "You heard me tell Sir Horace the full story to date, so you know nearly as much as I do myself. Good night, Reed, and thank you for coming along with him."

He closed the door and went into Miss Brandon's room. Her shorthand note book lay on the desk before her, together with the headphones belonging to her end of the microphone. Gees nodded at them.

"You can condense all that talk into a page of typing, Miss Brandon," he told her. "Don't put the humms in. I leave it to you. I'm not going to do any dictating to-night. If I get away by eleven in the morning, it will be quite soon enough, and I can take on from the end of Reed's story and dictate all there is in half an hour."

"Couldn't I take the story as you told it to Sir Horace?" she asked. "You—you told it very lucidly, I mean. For you, that is."

"Am I not usually lucid?" he demanded with asperity.

"Comprehensible," she answered demurely. "Usually. Sometimes you use—well, contractions and obscure phrases."

"I see. Oh, yes, I see! Well, ten o'clock in the morning?"

She looked him squarely in the eyes and answered: "Can do."

"Ah! Well, the lucid story I told is not the full one, so I intend to dictate an unabridged version to you for record. Now I think of it, have you had dinner yet?"

"Yes, thank you. Good night, Mr. Green."

"Good night, Miss Brandon. Thank you for staying so late."

"That's quite unnecessary. In fact, I have rather enjoyed it—over the microphone. Good night!"

"I shall have to spank you yet, Eve Madeleine." He apostrophized the door after closing it on her. "Somehow I shall have to find a way to spank you. Comprehensible! Grr-rr-r!"

Lambs were calling, and their mother ewes shouting replies, in a meadow opposite the end of the lane leading to Nortonsweir-Ferring Hall when Gees turned the Rolls-Bentley off the main road the next afternoon. With the hood down, he looked up as he drove along the lane, and saw shining brown chestnut buds, not yet unfolded to show the tender green inside. Great patches of snow remained, but the air was soft with promise, and the pale sunlight heralded Persephone's return from the shades to upper earth. The adaptation of the grim worship of Kore, and still grimmer and older belief that had given power to the Unnamed, to this kindlier legend which typified earth's awakening year by year, was in his mind as he saw the angled frontage of the Hall. He

drove round to the garages, ran the car in as when he had first come here and, taking his suitcase, went round to the front entrance, to find Claire waiting under the Georgian porch.

"Glad to see you again," he said cheerily. "Any news?"

She shook her head. "Unless that I am glad to see you is news," she answered. "Isn't it a perfect afternoon?"

"Just that. Do you remember your Browning?"

"He's so big. I didn't memorize all of him." She smiled.

"Just one bit. It's there in front of you." And he quoted:

*"Thou wilt remember one bright morn when winter
Crept aged from the earth, and spring's first breath
Blew soft from the moist hills; the blackthorn boughs,
So dark in the bare wood, when glistening
In the sunshine were white with coming buds,
Like the bright side of a sorrow, and the banks
Had violets opening from sleep like eyes."*

She said: "And yet there are people who say they can find no music in Browning. Evidently you know him better than I do."

Quite silently, Gates took up the suitcase Gees had put down when he turned, and said: "Your room is ready for you, sir, the same one. I will take the case up for you."

"And so we come back to earth," Gees observed as he gazed at the butler's retreating figure. "That man is almost uncanny. He's too perfect altogether. If butlers grew haloes, he'd have one."

"It would be inconvenient when he waited at table," Claire pointed out.

"Perhaps he puts it on when he has an afternoon off."

"Or maybe he's had it stuffed and framed," Gees suggested.

Abruptly she asked: "Shall I invite Bernard and his wife to dine with us this evening? I didn't last night, since you were not there?"

"By all means do, and thank you for thinking of it. What does Bernard do with himself all day?"

"Goes to London some days, in connection with the firm's business, and when he stays here manages to busy himself over something. For one thing, he collects moths and dissects them with a big microscope. Cuts slides, he calls it, and writes monographs for scientific papers. This is my fourth visit here since his marriage, and though I'm supposed to be here because of him I see very little of him."

"It's a queer arrangement, that sort of flat divided off from the rest of the Hall," Gees mused aloud.

"We've got used to it," she said. "And the hand—yours? Is it any better than when you went away yesterday?"

"No, just about the same. Since I don't feel it overmuch, I forget about it most of the time. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll go and shake the dust off my feet—the London dust I've brought with me."

"And come to the long room for tea, if not before," she asked.

"Before, if I may, since I can't think of anything that needs doing, till to-night," he said, and turned to enter the doorway.

"Just as soon as you wish," she told him. "I shall be there."

He went in and up to his room. Some ten minutes later, as he stood pummeling his head with a couple of hairbrushes, a knock sounded on the door, and, going to open it, he saw Gates the inflexible.

"A Mr. Pallant would like to see you, sir."

"Very good, Gates. I think—yes, the library. I'll see him in there. And tell Miss Lawson I may be delayed, but will go to the long room for tea after I've finished with this caller.

"Very good, sir," and Gates departed.

Following him some two minutes later, Gees entered the library to face a well-dressed man, tall as himself, with a thin, clean-shaven face, deeply-set, dark brown eyes, and very dark hair. One whose face in repose was set to sternness, and who relaxed the expression not at all as he questioned—"Mr. Green?"

"That is so. And you are Inspector Pallant."

"Yes. I have instructions to see you on taking over the case of a girl named Carr, and to hear what you can tell me about it."

"Instructions from Sir Horace Dundas-Morton?" Gees asked. "He came to see me last night, and told me you would handle 'the case."

Pallant's expression altered slightly. "My instructions were given me by my superintendent, Mr. Green," he said. "There seems to be—well, something rather peculiar about the case, I gather."

"There is. Oh, there is, plenty!" Gees assured him. "Now—nothing whatever to do with this affair, but just to help you to place me—did you ever hear of Inspector Horace Tott, of the Specials?"

"Very few men in my position have not heard of him—sir." Pallant added the last word as if doubtful whether to use it or no.

"I suppose that is so," Gees concurred. "Before he was transferred to the Special Branch, I was under him for two years. He trained me, and now we're what you might call friendly enemies. That is to say, we respect each other, and sometimes even help each other. Now sit down,

Inspector”—the inevitable cigarette case came out—“have one of these—would you like a drink or anything?”

“No, thank you, Mr. Green. Not just now.”

“Well, then, I’ll spill all the beans, beginning at the start and carrying on to now. And it’s not only the story of the girl Carr. Even I myself am in it—up against the murderer and in danger of being one of the victims, though it doesn’t worry me overmuch.”

“That’s rather a tall statement, Mr. Green,” Pallant protested.

“It’s a tall story. A light—yes. Now listen.”

With Pallant in an armchair, and himself seated on the edge of the library table, Gees told his story, all but the part of it concerned with the crypt and Claire Lawson, and Pallant listened to the end without comment or question. Nor did he speak for some time after Gees had ended the recital, but sat thinking.

“Yes, sir, I see,” he said at last, and conceded the tide without hesitation, now. “You’ve—well, dug the foundations of the case, so to speak. And that letter to the woman Mendez you spoke about?”

Gees produced his wallet and handed over the letter, handling it carefully. “You can test for prints,” he said, “though I’d say it has had too many different fingers on it. You’ll only find bits of mine on the extreme edges. You may find the writer, by the normal methods of inquiry. Obviously a stranger to this district—his previous letter to Mendez was registered from London, and he may be a noticeable figure. I’m making the suggestion—you are in charge of the case.”

“Mr. Green, if I may speak frankly, I have changed my mind since hearing you tell what you know. About you, I mean. To speak still more frankly, I very much resented the instructions my superintendent gave me before I started to come here, and I could see he resented having to give them. But, well, as I said, I have changed my mind.”

“That’s decent of you,” Gees told him, and offered the cigarette case again before lighting another for himself, but Pallant shook his head.

“I conclude, then, you won’t mind if I carry on here?”

“Considering that I should be like a bull in a china shop, and you know all these people on an equal footing, I’m perfectly happy over your carrying on here, sir,” Pallant answered. “Also, you’ve given me enough to keep me busy for awhile. This letter, Dr. Firth, that Dr. Odzendael—I think you said that was his name—and by the time I’ve finished them off I shall probably find plenty more lines that need following without coming in here. Even if I did come in, I don’t see what I could do. I couldn’t watch for anyone tampering with drinks or food as you can,

and with the exception of Miss Lawson there's nobody I could question to advantage, while you appear able to learn all she's likely to know. No, I'm quite prepared to work with you, take your reports and act on them, if it suits you to carry on in that way till we have more definite lines to work on. I've heard of your Kleinert case, of course."

"So have I, quite a lot," Gees said pensively. "Well, Inspector, I'm glad it strikes you that way, and prepared to consider myself under your orders from now on. One point on which you may be able to enlighten me, out of your wider experience, because I can't make any sense of it at all. Why was Anita Mendez killed by this *lakiti*?"

Pallant shook his head. "The same question has already occurred to me, sir," he said. "I can't see any answer, so far."

"Of course, she might have committed suicide, and gone out in the snow to make it look like accident," Gees suggested. "If so, why? She had disposed of Carr quite satisfactorily, from her point of view, and was on the way to disposing of Reed. I never saw her alive, and I'm inclined to think she never knew why I came here—though she may have known, of course—so it's hardly likely that my presence frightened her to suicide. That is, assuming she was responsible for Carr being poisoned and for Reed being partly treated in the same way."

"The most obvious suspect is this Mr. Lawson, sir," Pallant observed. "Did he get the poison from her, and then use it on her to put an end to blackmail? Consider that he put an end to the girl Carr because, as you suggested, he might fear Mr. Reed would marry her."

Gees shook his head. "It bristles," he said, "with apparent irreconcilabilities, I mean. Good word, that—I'll try it on Eve Madeleine. My secretary, that is, Inspector, and I daren't call her that to her face. A Miss Brandon—since we're going to be associated over this case, you will probably meet her some time or other. I'm wasting your time, and we've been at it for an hour. I may have something definite by tomorrow. Have you any instructions for me now, or any suggestions as to what you want done at my end?"

"I'd say, carry on as before, sir," Pallant responded. "I see no other possible lines of approach to the case, for the present."

"Can do. Will do. Now can I offer you any refreshment?"

"No, thank you, sir. It's just on tea time."

"Then why not have some tea? As well here as in the village."

"That's very nice of you, sir. Thank you very much."

"I'll order it for you in here, and leave you to it, and to see what you make of the butler, Gates. I don't consider him in it myself, but if you get

him on your own, and put a few questions, you may learn something, possibly." He went to the fireplace and pressed a bell-push, and then waited till Gates appeared.

"Oh, Gates, could you get Inspector Pallant some tea in here, please? And bring it in yourself, if you can make time. The inspector is interested in the death of Mrs. Lawson's nurse, and you may be able to tell him a little about her."

"Very good, sir, I will bring the tea myself. Would you like toasted scones, Mr. Pallant, or toast? Jam? Cakes?"

"I'll leave it entirely to you," Pallant answered.

"Very good, sir." Gates retired with the phrase.

"I shook him once," Gees observed. "Nearly got him to laugh—accidentally. Consider me at your disposal at any time, Inspector, and don't hesitate to tell me if you want to change my line of action or add to it in any way. Now I'll leave you to Gates."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Green. I feel sure we shall work well together, and I'll certainly bear in mind that point about the press. We don't want them in on this, and the less noise we make, the better for us both, as well as for Mr. Reed."

"Oh, one other thing before I go," Gees said. "There are three different telephone lines to this place. Use this number—the one on that instrument over there, if you want to call me."

"I'll take it down before I go, sir," Pallant promised. "Thank you very much."

Chapter 11

Out of Time

There was, in the way in which Claire Lawson looked up at Gees as he entered the long room, a quality of gaze that was beyond his comprehension. An almost strained intentness, was as near as he could get to definition of her expression. He seated himself at the end of the tea table, and took the cup she poured for him.

“So the police have to come in,” she remarked—and he knew the fact was not the cause of what he had noted as inexplicable.

“In a way,” he answered. “I’m afraid that inspector kept me a long time, but we had to get things clear. I saw Sir Horace Dundas-Morton yesterday evening in London—Reed was there too—you say you have met Sir Horace here, I believe?”

“Yes. He dined here. I have only seen him that one time.”

“And what did you think of him—him and his humms?” Gees asked.

“Rather—well, Anglo-Indian,” she answered. “The conventional type—the type of fiction rather than fact, I mean. Very opinionated, very assertive, and not over-burdened with brains. That’s being frank, as I suppose you wish me to be.”

“The same old Sir Horace,” he observed, “calls me Gordon—a very old friend of my father’s, and many’s the half-crown I had from him in my prep school days. And under that rather foolish exterior he conceals one of the cleverest brains there is—it was a loss to the diplomatic service when he retired. He trades on his humms and his general appearance of being a silly old buffer, and in actual fact misses nothing, but is able to see more and get more and do more by reason of that apparent lack of brains. Those who don’t know his real qualities give themselves away to him without realizing it.”

“I see.” She meditated over it. “And we are to have police in.”

“Thanks to Sir Horace, we are not,” he demurred. “What it amounts to is that I am to carry on as before, while this Inspector Pallant—a very good sort of man, too—while he ostensibly looks into the reasons for Anita Mendez being found dead with fifty pounds in her hand. That fifty pounds had to come out at the inquest, because the gardener who found the body couldn’t be told not to mention it in his evidence, and, naturally, although she died from exposure—which she did not—the police want to know what a woman like her was doing out there at that time of night and in that weather with fifty pounds in her hand. It’s all being kept quite natural and quiet, and until Pallant and I see cause to alter our methods, he works outside while I enjoy your hospitality—and Reed has nothing to bother about.”

She smiled. “Clever Gees!” she said, softly.

“Lucky Gees,” he amended. “It’s through no cleverness of mine that the lord-lieutenant of this county humms at me. Nor that he’s so friendly with Reed. Pure luck, nothing else.”

She shook her head, and made no other reply.

“And you?” he asked. “What have you been doing?”

“Eating, drinking, singing for practice, sleeping, walking,” she answered. “Will you tell me—why did you take that stuff out of the bowl in the crypt? What are you going to do with it?”

“I’d completely forgotten about it being still in the car,” he answered. “What am I going to do with it? For one thing, hand some of it to an analytical chemist I know, get him to see if he can find out what the components are, and then see if it’s possible to extract from it a scent which will have the allure without the danger there is in using the stuff. Because, if he can, it will be almost the one and only scent, and a fortune for whoever makes it.”

“I see. And do you believe that to be possible?”

He shook his head. “I don’t know. I do know that he’ll have to go carefully with it, even when he tries it out in a laboratory all dissociated from anything like that altar in the crypt and what it means—what you know it means, now, as I know. It all depends on whether he can ascertain the elements of the compound, separate them and then experiment with them till he knows which are safe, and whether the absence of the dangerous elements would spoil the scent.”

“And—and away from the altar in the crypt and what it means, as you expressed it, what is the danger of it?” she persisted.

“Will you understand—I think you will, since you experienced it—that under the influence of the green haze you are out of time?” he asked in

reply. "I think you were out of time, when you tried it."

"Yes." She nodded assent as she spoke. "I was."

"Well, that holds good, no matter where you are. I expect you have heard of the illusions certain drugs can produce—all that is as old as de Quincey, and older. The haze that goes with the scent—or it may be the scent itself—is in that class, but its power goes beyond that of any drug. Under its influence you can see realities, not only of to-day, but of all time that has been—see them as pictures blended one into another. As if you saw all of time."

Again she nodded assent. "I saw them," she said.

"What were they, in your case?" he asked.

"Mr. Reed—somebody exactly like him, in a long black robe, at the altar, killing. But it was not in the crypt. It stood in the open, with a ring of stones round it, like the stones at Stonehenge, except that the ring was bigger and complete. Great beasts fighting, lizard-like things that no longer exist, all in a hot steam. A fight going on—a battle, I suppose it was—between men with stone axes and what looked like wooden spears. A man all in mail, riding. All these blended into each other, as if they were all happening at the same time in the same place. And—yes—a fire raging up over me, as if the wing of the Hall were then being burnt down."

"Fragments of the fabric we call time," he commented. "It's very interesting that an ancestor of Reed's was a priest of the old cult, and conducted human sacrifices—for that's what you saw. And the explanation is quite simple. All that has been, still is, but we cannot see it in a normal state, because we are bound at one point—at a succession of points from birth to death—in the fabric we call time. The haze, or the scent that makes the haze—I don't know which of the two—released you while you were in it, and enabled you to see all those things fixed at different points in the fabric. Back to the palaeozoic age, apparently, and forward into mediaeval happenings. Though in reality there is neither back nor forward."

"Neither—?" she asked. "It is rather confusing."

"Consider that all that you do, all that has ever been done—even all that has ever been said or thought—goes on existing. Time along which you are compelled by life to move takes you away from sight of it, but it is there, always. Nothing is lost or destroyed. Time is a vehicle in which you are bound, and as you pass you look out from the windows of the vehicle and see the part of your surroundings that you are passing. The

scent lets you out, and in it you see all, with a sight that ranges over all that the vehicle has passed.”

“Then it is not dangerous, but infinitely valuable,” she suggested.

“It is dangerous, in that it robs you of reason and leaves nothing but uncontrolled impulse,” he dissented. “I think I told you before—in it you go for what you want most and take any means to gain it. While its effects last you are ruled by whatever happens to be your predominant desire, which is why I connect up the use of the altar in the crypt—we both saw and smelt that it had been used recently—connect it up with this attempt to dispose of Reed.”

“Couldn’t you use it to—to find out who is making the attempt?” she asked thoughtfully. “To see along the fabric of time, as you put it, to the point at which the attempt is being made?”

“Good heavens, no!” he exclaimed. “In my only experience of it I completely lost sight of what ought to have been my dominant desire and—” he broke off, remembering the tranced illusion into which that experience had drawn him—and his awakening!

“And—?” she asked, watching his changing expressions.

“I went completely out of time,” he said. “Was taken back in time to a point—none of it was real. That’s all.”

“It must have been very wonderful,” she observed reflectively.

“It was—why do you think that?” The question was abrupt, almost an expression of sudden alarm.

“Your voice, and your expression as you remembered,” she explained, smiling slightly. “As if it were a poignant memory, say.”

Then Gates at the door. “You are wanted on the telephone, sir, in the library. I asked who it was, but all the caller would say was that it was a London call. He would not give his name.”

“Then it can’t be Mr. Reed,” Gees said as he rose. “Excuse me.” He went to the library and took up the receiver with: “Hullo!”

“I would suggest,” the voice said—and he could not recognise it—“that you take a stroll along the drive as far as the road. As if you wanted to enjoy one of those cigarettes of yours in the fresh air—it’s a lovely evening, and I’ve had my tea. There are extensions to that line, I was told, and though I’m reasonably certain no more than the one receiver has been taken off—well!”

“Can do. Now,” Gees said, and put the receiver back. He returned to the long room, and met Claire’s inquiring gaze.

“I feel badly in need of fresh air,” he said, “and think I’ll take a brief saunter outside. I might meet somebody.”

"I understand," she answered. "This room is quite safe, but—you can tell me the rest when you come back, if you wish."

"Certainly I shall wish. Sir Horace picked the right man."

With that he left her, paused outside the front door, and then went slowly on, lighting a cigarette as he walked toward the main road. He had to go out from the lane to find Pallant, who, approaching, nodded at him as if it were a casual meeting.

"I thought it better this way, sir," Pallant explained. "If I'd asked to see you again before leaving, or come back to the Hall, it would have looked too much like co-operation."

"To whom?" Gees asked. "By the way, you change your voice well."

"To that butler, Gates," Pallant answered, and ignored the comment on his voice. "It's, well, banal to the mystery-story point—I read quite a lot of them. Suspecting the butler, I mean."

"Let's sort it all out," Gees suggested, as the two of them walked slowly toward the village. "Have one of my cigarettes."

Pallant took one. "You've missed a lot," he remarked. "Inevitably, seeing the way you're placed. A staff of fifteen inside the Hall, apart from the two that the Lawsons keep in their separate part of it. Six outside men, including the chauffeur. And Gates with—as I see it—the best chance of anyone to play poisoner."

"And why should he play poisoner?" Gees asked rather dryly.

"This, sir, is where I say you've missed a lot. You—and I too, for that matter—had to take Anita Mendez into consideration because of her devotion to the Lawsons. Gates, he tells me, was originally a sort of batman to Henry Lawson, father of this present Bernard Lawson, and went on serving Bernard up to two years ago. You told me Bernard started borrowing off Miss Lawson two years ago, which goes to show that Bernard only parted with Gates because he couldn't afford him any longer. You see the inference, I expect."

"I have, as you say, missed a lot," Gees admitted. "It never occurred to me to inquire into that perfect man's antecedents, but I see I ought to have done it. And that poker face of his may hide anything, while he has unsuspected access to the cellars and crypt."

"What has that to do with it?" Pallant asked quickly.

"The wine cellars," Gees evaded. "Gates draws the corks and serves the wine at meals. Almost certainly mixes the cocktails, too. And if he happened to feel an irresistible urge to put his old master in the new one's place—" he thought, then, of Gates the impeccable falling under

the influence of the Unnamed, and drowned in greenish haze before her altar—"nobody would have a better chance."

"On the face of it, absurd, of course," Pallant observed. "But is it? He might be just as devoted to the Lawsons as Mendez was."

"Just as much," Gees agreed unhesitatingly, and with far more reason than had Pallant for accepting such a theory. He knew it would be useless to put his belief in the evil power that dwelt in the crypt to this man's practical mind, and knew, too, that Gates, equally with Bernard Lawson, might come under the influence of that power.

"I had quite a talk with him," Pallant pursued. "You'd told me Mr. Reed had to some extent let Gates into this, and I let him see that I'm not altogether uninterested over it. He opened out amazingly, professed himself quite devoted to Mr. Reed—implied it, that is to say—and shut up like an oyster when I mentioned Mr. Lawson. Played with me, in fact—or thought he did—very cleverly. I've never met a more old-servantish old servant than Mr. Marmaduke Gates."

"Marmaduke? Gosh!" Gees exclaimed softly.

"Marmaduke," Pallant confirmed it. "I asked him, and he told me."

Gees made no comment, for the moment. He was thinking, then, of the far better opportunities than those of any other that Gates had had for cutting the tyre on the Rolls-Bentley. He had included the incident in his initial recital of the case to Pallant.

He halted, and turned about. "Is that all?" he asked.

"I think so, for the present," Pallant answered meditatively. "Yes, sir, I can think of nothing else. It complicates things, rather. You said this Doctor Odzendael told you that the stuff is used in such minute quantities that it takes an expert to locate it, so I don't see us gaining anything even if we did go through Gates' belongings with a microscope, especially since we're merely including him on our list, not definitely considering him the culprit."

"That is so," Gees agreed. "How I'm to detect him, though, if he is the one—even an analysis of everything I eat and drink would not fix it on him, if he's administering it. I don't see—"

"And if I came in, I should be in no better case than you," Pallant pointed out. "In worse case, really, since he'd be very careful what he did in presence of a police inspector. But I've always found, Mr. Green, that if one plods along, getting on with the job with what one has to work on at the time, a line of approach declares itself. I don't mean one has to trust in luck, for that's foolish, but things open up out of each other.

You've got to get to a point before you can see beyond it, and in the end you complete your case."

"If Tott had been your sort, I wouldn't have resigned," Gees said.

"That's a very high compliment, sir, and I appreciate it," Pallant replied. "For my part, I'm agreeably surprised at the way you fit in, as I shall tell the supe when I make my report. Hope we may have another chance of working together, in fact."

"Eh, you're a good scout," Gees observed, "and I'll do my best to justify your opinion of me. A mere amateur."

"Anyone who has spent two years under Mr. Tott is something more than an amateur," Pallant dissented. "I'm going to leave you now, sir. I shall probably look you up to-morrow after I've seen Doctor Odzendael—I'm looking in on Doctor Firth this evening. If you want me for anything, Nortonsweir 111—the police station in the village."

"Stutter it if I can't say it, eh? Good enough. I'll hope to have some news for you to-morrow—something to give us sight of the next point in the case, at least. S'long for now, Inspector."

"Good afternoon, sir. Thank you for turning up so promptly."

Back in the long room, Gees said: "It was Inspector Pallant—but you knew that before I went out, I think."

Claire nodded. "Anything—anything definite?" she asked.

"No. Nothing more than a line of inquiry on which he's stumbled. I like the man. As Sir Horace said, he's got tact."

"Does that mean I ought to exercise more tact?" she asked.

"If that thought had come to me for one second, I should never have suggested your helping me," he answered. "Nor will it ever come to me. But look there! I'd no idea it was so late."

"Just one more minute, and you'll still have plenty of time for a bath before dinner. I—I've asked Bernard and his wife."

"That leaves three-quarters of the minute. What are you trying to say? There's something else on your mind, I can see."

"Yes. That—last night was—I was not alone. Do you know?"

"Still the same wish-message from the shadow?" he asked.

She inclined her head in assent. "And—this is not easy to tell you, but I couldn't stay any longer in that room—dare not. Whether changing to another will make any difference, I don't know, but—"

"So you've come back next to me," he suggested in the pause.

"The sense that there is someone near, someone on whom I could call at need," she said, nervously. "Oh, please understand, and don't—"

“That’s foolish, Claire,” he said gently. “If there is real need, as you felt it before, you can come to me as you came then, and we can blow all the fear away with a cigarette apiece, as then. I’m glad you have that trust in me, and—you know it is only wish that was thought at you, not knowledge of the future. You still know it?”

“I—you tell me so. I will try to go on believing it.”

“Only time can prove it to you fully, I know. But it is true.”

Again he put all the certainty he could force into the assertion, but it was only a semblance of certainty: as he went up the stairs to his room, he questioned what could harm her, yet knew that the chances of life are many. Nothing that he could foresee—

Could the shadow that troubled her foresee, or was it only wishing?

He waited until, as nearly as he could tell, only five minutes remained before dinner would be served, and then went down to the long room. Bernard Lawson greeted him friendlyly, and Rosamund, after shaking hands with him, took the one glass remaining on the cocktail tray and handed it to him. She did not turn her back: he could see every movement she made quite plainly, without turning to the convex mirror, and was absolutely certain that she did not touch the glass, or hold her hand over it, in any way that would affect its contents. Nor did she bend over the tray, but reached out to take up the glass.

“We began ours,” she remarked, “but I can drink your health just the same—I have more than half of mine left. I’m so glad you’ve come back, and that lovely car of yours makes me green with envy. I saw you drive up in it this afternoon, from my nursery window.”

Gees groaned in spirit, for he knew that, with mention of the nursery, she had got round to that of her baby. She began on it, and forgot to drink his health: he felt relieved when the announcement of dinner gave him a break, and he was able to mention moths to Bernard with a view to starting him on the subject of his hobby.

“Why, yes,” Bernard said. “I shall soon be treacling trees again. Not that I’m idle over it in the winter months. I’ve still got the best part of a hundred slides that haven’t been near my big microscope, up to the present. That’s the most fascinating part of it.”

Leading his man on carefully while dinner lasted, with intervals of talk to both Rosamund Lawson and Claire, Gees found himself receiving lessons in physics, organic chemistry, and the nervous systems of animals. Bernard opened out to display an immense fund of knowledge, proved himself a scientist of no mean order—just the man, Gees felt, to calculate the exact effects of *lakiti*, and measure the almost microscopic doses to

draw a victim on from such slight results of its use as he, Gees, still felt, to the complete paralysis that had ended the lives of Elsie Carr and Anita Mendez. But why, oh why?—if Bernard were the poisoner, had he poisoned Anita, devoted as she had been to him and to his child? Why, for that matter, would Gates want to poison her if he—solemnly pouring wine as needed, noiselessly directing his subordinates to achieve perfect service—were the author of these complete and attempted crimes? Whatever way Gees looked at it, poisoning Anita did not make sense: more than once during dinner—and after, too—Rosamund Lawson sincerely deplored the loss of such a one, whom she knew she could never replace.

Coffee in the long room. Since Gates served it, and each of the four took a cup from the tray, there was no cause for watchfulness. Then Claire went to the piano and sang half a dozen songs. Gees looked out “Request” and showed it her, but she shook her head.

“Please, no,” she said. “Not to-night. It would be ... difficult. Too difficult, with these others.”

She indicated the songs she had sung and put aside. Rosamund Lawson, standing near them, said, “But, Claire, it’s such an easy melody, I thought, like all the really beautiful ones.”

“You sing it, then,” Claire offered, with—almost—pettishness. “I’ll transpose the accompaniment to mezzo for you.”

“My dear! After hearing a voice like yours! Oh, no!”

“Then it goes unsung. Sorry, Mr. Green, but I just couldn’t. Now do we bridge, or talk, or has anyone got a parlour trick to display?”

Gees tried to place the mood that had seized on her, but failed: this was a Claire he did not know. Rosamund sighed.

“I can show you tricks with matches, but you know all of them,” she said. “I’ve done them so often. And the disappearing handkerchief—you know that, too, so I’ve absolutely nothing left.”

“We also know the dropping handkerchief trick,” Bernard said dryly.

Claire laughed, a little too energetically—even a little hysterically, Gees thought. Something had set her nerves astrain—was it a recurring recollection of what that accursed shadow had thought at her?

He said: “I can—no, I can’t though. Haven’t got my properties with me, so it’s out of the question.”

He had been about to say that he could throw shadows on the wall with his hands, make rabbits and camels and donkeys and geese—he had considerable skill at that form of parlour trick. But he stopped the mention

of shadows just in time. Claire was in no fit state to be reminded of anything of the sort. Rosamund asked: "What is it, Mr. Green? Perhaps we could improvise properties out of something."

"Wait a bit, Mrs. Lawson. Sit down in that chair, relax comfortably—lean back, and I'll guarantee to lift you out of it with my two forefingers—and I'll do the same with you next, Lawson."

"You might do it with her, but I'm dead certain you can't with me," Bernard said. "Go ahead, though. You sit down, Rosamund."

Gees operated on them one after the other. One finger struck upward under the chin to lift it, then the other to impel the head forward, and each of them in turn stood up, looking rather foolish. It was a trick that never failed to amuse, in spite of its simplicity.

"You win, Green," Bernard said happily. "I am encouraged, now, to show you all a few mathematical impossibilities. A piece of paper—"

"Not to-night, Bernard," his wife interrupted. "I meant to go back and make sure baby is quite all right at ten o'clock, and it's already past eleven. Ethel Allen is not Anita, remember."

"To-morrow night, then, Green," Bernard invited. "You'll be here to-morrow night, I hope? Don't run away yet, whatever you do."

"I shall hope to be here," Gees answered. "I'm not quite certain."

When they had gone, Claire leaned against the side of the piano and asked: "Have I been good?" Again he saw the expression in her eyes that he could not interpret.

"Very good indeed," he answered. "Quite a cheerful evening."

"And nothing—no need for watching, that I could see. Was there?"

"I saw none, either," he owned.

"And now it's finished, and—" straightening from her leaning posture, she was dangerously close to him—"I don't want to be good, now."

"Neither do I, Claire—Claire!"

"No scent now—reality Dear—so very dear"

"Claire—Oh, you're wonderful! ... But if Gates came in—"

Laughing softly, she tightened the clasp of her arms. "What if he did? I care as little for him as for anyone else but you, to-night."

"No, you're mad, I know now. And I'm none too sane myself."

Again she laughed, with utter happiness in it. "We shall be fixed here, you holding me, the miracle of your kisses—fixed here as a picture in the fabric that is time," she said. "Dear, I shall ache to come back to this picture in the fabric, live it again—I don't care! Don't care what comes

after. I'm quite, quite mad, as you said, and even if the scent began it, there is no scent now. Reality, this madness."

"Now see!" she said, when he had lost count of time. "Midnight, nearly, and I suppose we've got to come back to sanity. I'm your hostess, remember, and facing you to-morrow is going to be very difficult. Am I very cheap, Gees? Just an adventure, kissed and forgotten?"

"You are very dear. I shall keep this hour, Claire, whatever comes after. Keep it—let's not look beyond it, while it lasts—while I hold you and know the sweetness that is you. The wonderful sweetness that is you! Keep me my shrine always, Claire, my little secret place."

"Here, in my heart for ever—you. Shrined and worshipped—you! That's why I wouldn't sing the song for others to hear—do you know?"

"I know, wonder girl. Listen, Claire. I will never willingly hear anyone else sing that song. Do you understand?"

"Dear, you couldn't have told me I'm not cheap to you in any way but that, I know, now. Once more, Gees, before I go. Only once."

She released herself from his hold, and fled swiftly. For that once, he had no chance to open the door for her, but was only in time to stare at it, closed on her. He turned back to the embers of the fire that had died down, and felt that he knew, now, what the strange expression he had twice seen in her face—in her eyes—meant. She would not believe what he had told her, that the thought of the shadow was no more than a wish. She still saw it as knowledge, and so snatched such happiness as she could find in his kisses in the belief that she was near the end of human warmth of loving. Desperation

"Oh, you Claire! Mad Claire! Wonderful Claire!"

It was long past midnight when he turned after opening up curtains and blind from the window of his room and stood tensed, sniffing—the scent was there, not strong, but striking at him, a sensuous fragrance that he knew and feared. He remembered the hand lamp outside the long room, yesterday, and Claire's speaking of strange things if she lost belief in his insistence that the shadow wished rather than knew. He looked at the dimness that was the locked door—was it locked?

No! It swung open, and a greenish wave swept toward him and enveloped him. An opalescent garment that wrapped round him, and the scent of it was desire, a sweetness blended with flame, a throbbing music in his brain and a passion in which cold reason slept. Claire, wraith or reality, stood framed in the doorway, shining in silken tissue, smiling, her eyes half-veiled by their long lashes, yet in them he could see the answer to any question he could have asked with the power of the

scent on him. In the darkness behind her loveliness a shadow eluded his sight and dwelt in the cold of infinite loneliness, a shadow that was there for a moment and then had gone, leaving in his mind the knowledge that he had tried to tell Claire was no more than the shadow's wish—that there was but a little time—a very little time! Claire's arms went round him, her eyes closed, and she echoed the thought he had felt:

"A little time—a very little time!"

"Claire—wonder girl! ... A tender sweetness—you! ..."

Her lips, flower petals laid on his lips. Her heart, an unquiet throbbing on his breast. Her voice, a song of songs—

"For this little time that is out of time—Oh, my heart! Your secret place—your shrine! For a very little time—I know!"

The shadow had gone, and they two were alone, but he, too, knew.

"Sunrise, Claire. The first of many that we shall see together."

Standing before the window, they saw the ever-recurring miracle of a new day's birth, a bluish mist with clarity above it, and in the mist a red ball lifting, lifting, clear of earth's far edge.

"I would have said, perhaps the last I shall see. But that is not so. We shall see many together—yes. Because even if I am a shadow I shall keep near you, watch over you, guard you, if that is allowed."

For answer he tightened his hold on her, fiercely. For he knew that the shadows dwelt ever in a cold twilight, a gloom of bare fields and scentless flowers, and quested hopelessly beyond sight of the sun. She looked up at him, sensing his fear.

"I'll guard you, hold you, dear. Living—mine! Forget that fear."

"If it had been only fear, I should not have ... done strange things. And you know now, as I know. Dear, don't pretend. It is only because you know that you don't despise me. There is no scent now, but daylight and reality. Hold me and forget—there is still a little time."

But he could not quite forget. Fear could not quite spoil this last hour, but it was with him—fear for her, persistent and terrible. Fate marched toward her, stronger than any human hold or guarding. The shadow—lonely, cold shadow!—knew it, and he knew it now.

"Oh, Claire—Claire! Wonder girl!"

"Still that? Not just illusion?"

"Let me tell you. There are many ways of telling.

*"I love your hands,
Your dear hands ..."*

“Coffee, or tea, Mr. Green?”

“Coffee, please, Miss Lawson.”

“Did you sleep well?”

“Witch! Who should know but ... did you?”

“You didn’t snore. You breathed easily.”

“Where shall we go, Claire, when all this—here—is finished?”

“Where shall we go? How do you mean, go?”

“Straight off from the registry office in the car—where?”

“Yes, let’s plan. I know a lone inn on the moor behind Whitby—on the road to Whitby. The sea and the moor—and you!”

“Hot and cold laid on, and electric light?”

“All modern conveniences, and the cook is a genius. Ethna Faversham and I stayed there three days, and I marked the place down in my little book. It’s expensive, but who cares?”

“Not us—or should it be not we? I’m glad you’ve got a material mind, Claire, and not a soul above cooking and modern conveniences.”

“Oh, intensely material! I am a very good cook, myself.”

“You shall prove that. I’ll make a slave of you, you’ll see.”

“Futile threat! As if I could be bound any more closely!”

“You’re sure that inn is good enough for you?”

“If we don’t like it, we can always move on. I think—surroundings won’t be primary considerations, while I get used to my chains.”

“Find another simile, Claire. While you get used to happiness.”

“What else could it be, if I were bound by you? Oh, Gees, if only—”

Knowledge, rather than fear, had come back to her. He knelt beside her chair to hold her, and tried to thrust away the knowledge from himself, but it would not go. A terrible certainty, even here in daylight with her living and warm in his hold.

“Forget it, darling. I’ll guard you—it will not be.”

She said: “I have taken, and given, and all that is mine for ever. I am glad. Of you, of all that has been since I saw you. I am glad.”

He rose to his feet again. Just beyond his sight a shadow drifted, drifted, passed, and was not.

Gates in the doorway. “Inspector Pallant would like to see you, sir. Shall I show him into the library?”

“Yes, please, Gates.”

Claire looked up. “Now we turn to realities, Mr. Green,” she said. “I’m going to be severely practical and interview the housekeeper—do we share the evening with Bernard and Rosamund again?”

“I think we do—please. It is not as if—”

“I know!” She whispered it. “And—I’ll never use the scent again.”

He bent to kiss her. “Heart of me, there is no need of it. Don’t you know, wonder girl?”

“I want always to be that, to you. That you may be glad of your shrine, and I’ll clothe the walls with singing. Help me not to fail you! Teach me—give me some of your strength—make me one with you in spirit. And—sometimes, pray for me.”

“Wonder girl—wonder girl!”

“We must come back to earth! Inspector Pallant is waiting, in the library. If you don’t go, Gates will look in again and remind you.”

He thought, on his way to the library, that if Gates proved responsible for all that had happened here, he would grip that stringy throat and strangle the man with his own hands. But no! That would be too easy a death for such a one. Let him wait in a cell for the hangman’s pinioning, know dread—almost such dread as he, Gees, felt for Claire.

Chapter 12

One Shadow Only

A little less stern in expression, Inspector Pallant stood before the fire in the library—although Reed was not in residence, all the rooms that might be in use, even the drawing room which Gees had seen but had not yet entered beyond its doorway—were kept warmed in case they might be required—and inclined his head slightly.

“Good morning, Mr. Green. Being on my way to Langdon Rivers to see this Dr. Odzendael, I thought I would just look in on you.”

“Quite so,” Gees assented. “Any news from your end?”

“I had a most interesting hour with Dr. Firth last night, but it merely amplified what you had already heard from him. A few medical details you missed out, and they strengthen the assumption that this is cold-blooded murder we’re hunting—as horrible a murder as ever I have read about, let alone come up against.”

“All that and then some,” Gees agreed. “I’m afraid I have nothing for you. So far as the case is concerned, yesterday evening was an absolute blank, and this morning—well, it’s not very late yet.”

“Quite so, sir. Patience, and we’ll uncover everything. Oh, I must tell you too—I’ve got an inkling as to the man who wanted fifty pounds off Anita Mendez, though whether we shall catch him or no is another pair of trouser legs. When I’d finished with Firth, I went along to the ›Greyhound.‹ I happen to know the landlord there.”

“And you chewed the string off a packet,” Gees suggested.

“Only the string.” Pallant permitted himself the luxury of a smile. “Allwood—that’s the landlord of the ›Greyhound‹—Allwood had a man put up there the night Anita Mendez died. A swarthy man with black hair, about two inches short of your height and mine. He looked Jewish, and spoke English in a way that proved he wasn’t. Not exactly

broken English, but he framed his sentences in a quaint way—this is what Allwood told me. He put himself down as British on the usual form that hotel-keepers use, and so saved himself the necessity of putting down where he came from and where he was going, but Allwood says he's perfectly certain the man was not English. Dressed in a black lounge coat and rather dark grey flannel trousers, with brown shoes, and a wide-brimmed—unusually wide brimmed—soft felt hat pinched into four little recesses in the crown, like the old-fashioned Stetson that was half service pattern—in khaki colour, of course. Just like that, the hat was. A Jewish type of face, and yet Allwood didn't think he was a Jew. I tried to describe to him what a Pathan horse-dealer looks like, and he said it fitted this man exactly. He stayed that night, and came to Allwood in the morning to pay for it and the next night too. Cleared out at about two o'clock—Allwood has no idea where he went—cleared out with the little case—something between a suit-case and an attache case, as nearly as I can make out, after a session in the bar. Where, of course, he heard of Anita Mendez' death."

"It fits," Gees said thoughtfully. "When did you see Pathan horse-dealers, if I may be so rude as to inquire?"

"I was born on the frontier," Pallant answered. "They used to come down as far as Lucknow—how much farther I don't know. Looking like kings—and the biggest thieves and liars on earth."

"I know," Gees said. "Oh, feller, you're a man after my own heart! And Allwood couldn't tell you what trail this guy hit?"

"No. He just went out. Signed his form and the register as a British subject, and so evaded putting in where he came from and where he was going. Allwood told me he thought the man—Joseph Cannon, was the alias he used—and Allwood thought him either Italian or Spanish. I put out a call for him with a full description, naturally, but I have very little hope. It's a cold trail by this time."

"And, of course, he's no longer Joseph Cannon," Gees remarked. "Joseph Canono—Señor Miguel Gonzales—anything."

"Well, that's him," Pallant concluded. "I had a very interesting hour with that Dr. Firth—I've met him before, over inquests. It took me no farther, though—I'd had the fact of Anita Mendez having been poisoned from you, and all the details. Still, he was interesting, and now I want to see if I can glean anything more about the girl Carr from this Odzendael. One thing—I don't know Mr. Reed."

"And what does that mean?" Gees asked.

"Did he poison Elsie Carr, and is this—poisoning him—revenge?"

“Inspector, you can cut that right out,” Gees said with absolute certainty. “He did not. Reed is not in it, except as a victim of the poisoning. He’ll recover—I know from the fact that my own hand is very nearly steady again that one does recover, unless the treatment has been carried too far. I shall hear from him this morning, and I’m prepared to bet he’ll tell me his twitching is less noticeable.”

“Firth said that was Odzendael’s view,” Pallant observed. “That Odzendael thinks the girl Carr was doctored to the point at which resistance becomes impossible—and Mendez was killed by one dose only.”

“I’ll add to that,” Gees said. “Anita Mendez killed Carr—the girl struck her, and she took her secret: revenge for an unforgivable insult—so I see it now. But it was the one who is trying to put an end to Reed—whoever that may be—who killed Mendez.”

“Now where do you get that, sir?” Pallant asked. “Deduce it?”

“Mendez had not the direct interest in putting an end to Reed,” Gees answered. He could not give his real reason to the man before him. “She had no direct reason for killing Reed. The devoted servant willing to do anything for her master is not enough, in my opinion, to cause her to use so terrible a means on a man she had no cause to dislike—to use it not for her own advantage, but for that of someone else. I don’t see it as a possibility.”

It was a thin explanation, he knew. Pallant shook his head.

“In that case, you’d have to absolve Gates,” he said, “and I don’t feel a bit like dismissing the man from our list. In fact, sir, you’d have to narrow the field to one suspect only—Mr. Bernard Lawson.”

“Or Mrs. Bernard Lawson—we’ve got two left,” Gees pointed out—though he did not believe Rosamund Lawson capable of anything of the sort. He saw Lawson and Gates as the only two worth watching. “No, I’m not going to eliminate Gates. There’s too much of the still waters about him. All I say is that the one who poisoned Elsie Carr did not poison Anita Mendez. Mendez poisoned Carr, and then herself fell victim to the poison she had used—*lakiti*.”

“And it wasn’t suicide—in your opinion?”

“It was not. The fifty pounds in her hand is proof enough to me that it was not. That fifty pounds came from—” he broke off.

“Gates, or Mr. Bernard Lawson?” Pallant asked.

“You’ve got better facilities for looking into people’s banking accounts than I have,” Gees suggested. “Finding out whether either of those two drew fifty pounds or more in cash lately—in pound notes, I mean. I can’t

tell you where either of them banks—haven't had a chance to inquire, yet, though I have thought of it."

"Quite true, sir," Pallant agreed. "That opens up another line of inquiry. For me, not for you. I'll get to it as soon as I've seen this Dr. Odzendael—and I must be getting along to Langdon Rivers, if I'm to be on time for the appointment Firth made for me."

"And if you want me, you'll get in touch," Gees said as they went together toward the front entrance. "If I want you, Nortonsweir in gets you. Does that hold good all the time?"

"The sergeant in charge will know where to find me, at any time," Pallant told him. "I'm keeping him posted as to my movements."

Standing in the doorway, Gees smiled as he watched the inspector set off along the drive. If it had not been for Sir Horace Dundas-Morton's influence, he knew, Inspector Pallant would never have called an outside amateur "sir" and admitted him to equality in an investigation of this kind. So far, he had done nothing to justify a footing of equality with a professional sleuth, but until Lawson—or Gates—made another move, he saw no chance of locating the poisoner. His left hand was hardly twitching at all, now: if he stayed on, almost certainly he would get another warning of the sort: keep the hand as steady as he could in front of Lawson, and when he was in sight of Gates, too, and one or other might betray himself. Might! However it was done, it would be difficult to prove. An infinitesimal dose—

"Mr. Reed, sir. On the telephone. In the library, sir."

Woodenly unconcerned over it, Gates. Yet why should he be concerned? Gees questioned it even while he resented the man's immobility, and went back to the library to put the receiver to his ear.

"That you, Green? What's the news this morning?"

"Very little, I'm afraid. Many thanks for bringing Sir Horace along. He's made everything easy. His Inspector Pallant has just left after a talk with me, and I'm the whole elephant. I like Pallant."

"Which tells me exactly nothing," Reed snapped out.

"No? Sorry. So far, you need have no fear of publicity, thanks to Sir Horace. Pallant is ostensibly looking into the curious circumstance of Anita having fifty pound notes in her hand when she was found dead from exposure, and getting his information about it—not getting any information so far, rather—outside Nortonsweir-Ferring Hall. Leaving all the inside investigations to me. Comprende?"

"Quite, and I'm very glad indeed to hear it. And you—what news?"

"None, so far. Pallant has unearthed an alternative suspect, but that's him, not me, and I'm not going to tell you the name of that suspect over the wire. Neither am I going to tell you a conclusion I have reached over the two deaths that have already occurred, over the wire, but I have reached one, and it's a very small step forward."

"Green, you're an irritating devil. I've a good mind to come home and see things for myself—have it out with you."

"If you come home without my permission, you won't have it out with me. I shall simply pack and go and leave you to Inspector Pallant—and I'll take a passenger with me! Claire."

"Is that why you went back in such a hurry?" Reed asked acidly.

"Oh, yes! Of course it was!" Gees almost shouted at him. "I took one thousand pounds of your money and sat round making love to Claire! All right, Reed! Take the next train back, and I'll hand you my cheque for one thousand pounds as soon as you get here, and quit."

"Green, I'm sorry. For the love of heaven, don't quit! That means Pallant—damn it, can't you see, man? Congratulations over Claire—she's a sweet girl and you're a damned swift worker, by what you say. I'll stay at ›Brown's‹ till you tell me I can come back—for the love of heaven carry on and keep the police out of Nortonsweir Hall!"

"That is exactly what I want to go on doing," Gees answered sweetly.

"Pallant and I get on very well together—he calls me 'sir' because I know Sir Horace. I suspect the chief constable warned his superintendent—Pallant's superintendent, I mean—about my exalted visiting list. Exalted visiting list, I said. Did you get that?"

"I'd love to punch your head, Green."

"A straight left, eh? How is the left this morning?"

"Definitely less troublesome. Still noticeable, but it's evident that you were quite right. About my getting away, I mean."

"And you want to punch my head! Ungrateful devil! Reed, I'm worried. About Claire. No, I can't tell you over the 'phone, but I am. Look here! If I can persuade her to come to London, will you look after her while I finish things here?"

"Do you mean she's next on the list?" There was real anxiety in Reed's voice as he asked the question.

"No, not that. It's indirect—impossible to tell without seeing you—it would take half an hour to make you understand. But it's just occurred to me. To get her away from here, out of danger, till I can smash the danger and make this place safe for her—and for you."

“That sounds terribly serious, Green. Send her to me by all means, if you see it as best. I’ll take care of her for you. I’m very glad this has happened, though it’s—well, I never dreamed anything of the sort would happen. Yes, send her here. I’ve always liked Claire in a sort of brotherly way, and she’s liked me in a sisterly way. She’s never had an easy time, and deserves some happiness—yes, send her to me, and come and take her away when you can let me come home.”

“Reed, I’ll never punch your head, whatever happens. Give me another call to-morrow morning, and I hope Claire will take the receiver out of your hand to end the talk. Hope I have real news for you, too. Unless I get a real break to-day—till then.”

“Give Claire my love and best wishes. Goodbye, Green.”

“And that is that,” Gees told himself as he put the receiver back on its rest, and tried to feel reassured by such an intended step as this of sending Claire away from the danger he felt was threatening her.

Yet—was it any use? For what she had felt, and what he too felt now, was no danger of poisoning by *lakiti*, no human threat against her. It was a fate that would come on her, no matter where she might be. Because she saw it as a certainty, last night had been—she had even used the scent, knowing how it would sweep them both to consciousness of no more than desire. But for that absolute knowledge, she would not have given, taken She saw herself as doomed, more surely than Iseult had foreseen the end of her loving, and so grasped at what little she might gain before she went out to the cold mist in which dwelt shadows, a seeking and a loneliness in which they drifted ever, parts of being striving for reunion with the spirit from which they had been shorn away, striving for companionship, for the warmth of complete existence as distinct from cold helplessness. He knew—oh, he knew! He had dwelt among the shadows out of time, and he knew!

Was it any use? Could he save her by sending her to Reed, or would the Unnamed strike, claim another victim and so add strength and wit to the poisoner here, the one who made sacrifice to Her—strike even if Claire were under Reed’s care in London, and not here? He questioned, and for answer got only that Claire might be safer in London, but he did not know. Knew only what the shadow had told him, as knowledge, not as wish, that she had but a very little time. She knew it, else she had held back, waited for ... the inn on the moor; sure, enduring companionship, a child of theirs to crown it all

Yes, she knew. He tried not to know as he went to the long room, feeling sure he would find her there. So he found—and held her.

“Claire, you’ve got to go. To London. I’ve been talking to Reed. I want you to go to him, to stay till I come to take you away.”

She said: “Yes? And what will you be doing?” Mischievously.

“What will I be doing? Look at this left hand of mine. As nearly as possible, steady again. Inviting another warning, in the hope that it may put an end to this horror. It is no less than a horror.”

“You mean, you’re going to face it alone, while I luxuriate in all that Sydnor Reed can give me—one of the wealthiest men in England, and one of the kindest. Most generous, in every way, which is why I want to see him married to Ethna. You’re going to face it alone! I am going to be separated from you—do you want to get rid of me?”

“Just as much as you want to get rid of me,” he answered. “Claire, dear, I began all this by being a little in love with you—just a little. Now I’m frightened for you, because I want you in my life. A woman like you wouldn’t have done what you have done unless she meant it as I mean it now—I want to send you to safety. I’m scared for you. Do you understand—cold scared for you?”

“Why?”

“I think you will be far safer with Reed in London than here.”

“If there had been any possibility—any possibility!—of averting what must be, I would never have risked lighting the herbs and losing myself and you in the scent. You know it too. Gees, you know it!”

“I won’t know it—won’t believe it! Go to London, Claire.”

“But you do believe it—know it as I do. If I go to London, it is just so many of the hours as I have left—the little time I have left!—in separateness from you. Do you realise you have become my life? And I know, Gees, even more surely than you know. It wouldn’t matter if you could move me into any place—into the brazen tower where Danae found her shower of gold—it wouldn’t make any difference. That’s why, for everything. And whatever comes after, I have been all yours, and I’m glad.

“Shameless woman!” He summoned up a laugh, somehow. “Claire, you are all mine. That’s why I want you to be sensible, go to London, and get out of this—this atmosphere of threat. I have no fear for myself in it—I’m coming through, and know it. But you—go to London.”

She said: “Very well, then. I’ll go to-morrow. It’s too late to pack and go to-day. I’ll go tomorrow.”

“You will go to-day, Claire,” he bade her incisively.

“I will not!” Her voice hardened on the declaration. “The gods that threaten me—devils if they are not gods—they offer me to-night here,

and I will have it! To-morrow, not to-day! Gees, it's cold daylight, and I'm an utter fool. Beneath your contempt. But I will not go to-day! Unless—don't you want to see that inn on the moor, Gees, take me there and tell me the fear was no more than fear?"

"Just as I'll never willingly hear that song, so I'll never willingly see that road to Whitby without you," he answered. "If you won't go to-day, then stay—my selfish self wants you to stay, wants all that your staying means. That's bald truth, Claire—hear it!"

"Bald truth for me—it makes no difference whether I stay or go," she said, rather sombrely. "I have so little time—so very little time! I know it—you know too. This—London—is just an attempt at evasion of the knowledge. We shall never see that inn."

"Claire—you've no right to say such a thing!"

"No? When you know it too? Unless—what had your policeman to tell you? Did he sneer about the presence in the crypt?"

"Telling him about it would be like teaching algebra to a sheep," he answered. "In fact, I rather left him cold when I told him that Anita Mendez poisoned Elsie Carr, but the one behind it all poisoned Anita Mendez. I couldn't give him reason enough for the statement."

"Have you time enough—I won't keep you if you want to go—have you time enough to explain that to me?" she asked. "You—Oh, go on teaching me! I'll sit at your big feet—I love all of you, Gees."

It came to his mind that this was the first time either of them had used that word. He said: "There was one shadow—only one. You saw one shadow in the cold—is that not so?"

"One shadow," she confirmed him. "It told me—"

"A lie, I still hope," he interrupted, though he could not feel real hope. "Only one. Not only one lie, but only one shadow. Only one. And not the shadow drawn from the entity that was Elsie Carr, but a part of the human completeness that was Anita Mendez. Do you see?"

She shook her head. "I do not see," she answered. "Tell me."

"Yes. What would have made Pallant smile, if I'd tried to tell him. It's difficult, even, to explain it to you. Just this, Claire. That there is a shadow—that you and I have seen it and felt its thought—is proof to me that the cult of the Unnamed is being practised here, as your experience of the presence in the crypt also proves it. Now, so far as Elsie Carr is concerned, there are two possibilities: one is that she was not killed as a victim to the cult at all, but that Anita simply poisoned her out of revenge, in which case there would be no shadow driven out when she died; the other is that Anita made Elsie Carr her victim, was a priestess

of the cult, and took Elsie to herself as part of it, in which case the shadow that was part of Elsie's personality would be set free, or rather reunited to complete the life that was hers, when Anita died. For that is the way of it. Destruction of the one who has made shadows in the practice of the cult frees the shadows, and thus, if Anita practised it, Elsie was set free before you had that experience in the crypt."

"Yet there is a shadow," she said. "You know it."

"Anita's," he answered simply. "Either Anita initiated someone else into the cult, someone who is still alive to practise it, as the shadow we have both seen proves, or else she knew nothing of it, simply killed Elsie out of revenge, and that one who is practising it got to know what she had done, and forced from her the knowledge of the poison and a supply of it as well. Then killed her with it, as a measure of safety from suspicion, or as a sacrifice to the Unnamed, or out of mere hatred. Almost certainly as a sacrifice, as I see it."

"And that—does it make things easier for you, or more difficult?"

He shook his head. "Neither, at present," he answered. "When the end of all this comes, and I can point with certainty to the one who is attempting to poison Reed and frighten me by means of *lakiti*, that one will have to face the charge of murder as well as that of attempted murder, for that one—I say it with certainty—killed Anita."

"You won't be able to prove it—or will you?" she asked.

"My dear, there are not two people using *lakiti* here. Pin the use of it on that one, whoever it is, and the murder charge is as good as proved. And I need say nothing at all about what we found in the crypt. If I did, I should be considered a fit subject for treatment by Dr. Odzendael. All that side of it is between you and me, Claire."

"Then if—no, not if, but when—when what I know happens, Gees, you must destroy whoever killed Anita. Because, if you don't, I shall become a shadow in the cold, an incompleteness—"

"Hush, Claire! You and I are going to find that inn on the moor and forget all this. Put it quite behind us ..."

So he said, and tried to put conviction into the words. But in his heart he knew Claire would never again see the inn on the moor. The thought of the shadow had been, not wish, but sight of a part of the fabric that is time which as yet was hidden from him, a point that Claire had not yet reached ...

Chapter 13

Sabotage and Scent

There was an hour to go before lunch when Gees came round the burnt-out wing of the Hall, after a visit to the garages, walking slowly and frowning in deep thought—futile thought, to a certain extent. He paused to gaze at the ivy-covered confusion of shattered brickwork that had been the southern wing of the Georgian structure, and tried to estimate the position of the crypt under the mass, from which years of rain and wind and frost had almost eradicated the traces of fire. In the middle, possibly: the twists of the underground passages made it difficult to tell. Perhaps back toward the junction of the ruin with the central portion of the Hall: after the last turn to the left beyond which Claire had guided him, they had walked only a few steps before coming to the arched doorway. But he could not be sure. He questioned whether he could remember all the turns they had taken, if he tried to find the crypt without her guidance.

Meanwhile, there was something else to demand his attention. Entering by the front door—he had left it ajar when he went out, and it had not been closed on him—he went to the library and pressed a bell-push. Presently appeared Perkins, the parlourmaid, and Gees asked: “Could you tell Gates I should like to see him, please?”

“Certainly, sir,” she answered, and went out. Then came Gates, imperturbable, uninterested, not servile, but courteous.

“Got a minute or two to spare, Gates?”

“Yes, sir. What is it you want of me?”

“Just come along with me, and I’ll show you.”

“Very good, sir.”

Gates followed through the entrance hall, round the ruined wing, and into the range of stables which served as garage. There were three cars

in the converted stalls, in addition to the Rolls-Bentley, which had again been polished up to showroom standard. One was a Rolls, one a sports Lagonda, and the third a small Morris saloon. At this last Gees thrust a pointing finger.

"Whose is it?" he asked.

"Mr. Lawson's, sir," Gates answered gravely.

"I thought so." It bore a good deal of the winter's mud, while the Rolls and Lagonda were as clean as the Rolls-Bentley. "I believe you know why I'm here, Gates. Mr. Reed told you, to some extent."

"Yes, sir. Told me he had every confidence in you, too."

"Very kind of him. The confidence, I mean, not the telling. Now just come round here and look at this, will you?"

Gates followed him along the near side of his car, and, reaching inside to release the hand-brake, he let the car drop back on the sloping floor for half a wheel's turn, and then pulled the brake on again. Moving forward until he was level with the near front wheel, he put his finger on the tyre, and looked Gates full in the face.

"Yes, sir, a very nasty cut," the butler said composedly.

"If you look at the two tyres on the spare wheels at the back," Gees told him, "you'll see the top one is new. When I left here to go to London the day before yesterday, the tyre on that wheel burst just as I was turning into the main road at the end of the lane."

"Indeed, sir." Gates sounded hardly interested over it.

"Just so, I assure you. It was just such a cut as you can see in this tyre. The near front, which means that if it goes when one is travelling at speed—anything over fifty, that is—it would mean an accident. Probably bad injury to the driver, and possibly death."

"Would it, sir? I've never driven a car myself."

"I suppose anyone can get into these garages, during the day?"

"Yes, sir. Farrar—the chauffeur, that is—locks them at night, but during the day they are as they are now. You mean, sir—?"

"Exactly! Although I didn't look at the tyres when I drove the car in here, I'm certain that cut has been made since I stabled it. The size and nature of it are too like the cut in the other tyre for it to have been done accidentally. And you know why I am here."

"In other words, sir, you accuse me of cutting the tyre."

"I do not! I point out to you, since Mr. Reed thinks it worth while to take you into his confidence, that somebody here has a very great interest in putting an end to my activities, and thinks it can be done by slashing

my tyres and getting me to pile myself into a ditch when I next take the car out. Does this man Farrar know why I am here?"

"No, sir. I am quite sure Mr. Reed would not tell him."

"Mr. and Mrs. Lawson know. Miss Lawson knows. Dr. Firth knows, and so does that Dr. Odzendael. Anyone else, to your knowledge?"

"Except for myself, I should say nobody, sir."

"I am not telling any of those others about this—only you, Gates."

"I appreciate your confidence, sir, and will respect it. I will tell Farrar to see that you have a new tyre fitted at once."

"Not so I. Leave it. If that wheel is changed, I'm prepared to bet that whatever tyre is put on the front near side will be treated just like this, ready for me to burst it on a run and slaughter myself. No. Don't get any new tyres yet. Ask Farrar to change that wheel for me, as if I meant to get this cut repaired, and we'll see what happens."

"Very good, sir. I'll tell Farrar before lunch, in case you need the car this afternoon. Is that all, sir?"

"For the present—yes. Except you will note that I had to let the car run back to expose that cut. If I had taken a casual look round the tyres before driving out, the cut would have been in contact with the floor of the garage, and I should not have noticed it. Somebody let the car drop back down the inclined floor for half the turn of a wheel, made the cut, and then pushed the car forward again. There was a certain amount of thought in the way it was done."

"Yes, sir. I quite understand what you mean."

"That's all, Gates."

"Very good sir. Thank you, sir."

He inclined his head respectfully, and went out. Gees, following, felt fairly sure that his tyres would be left alone, now, whether Gates or any other had made the cuts. It would be apparent to whoever had done the damage that the car would not be driven out until close inspection had been made of all four wheels, and that there was no chance of causing an accident in this way. In addition, there was the risk of being caught at it. A third attempt might prove unlucky.

He had gone out, in the first place, to get the big electric torch that he always carried in the car. Now, with the torch in his pocket, he followed Gates round to the front entrance, and went along to the small door in the wall, between the entrances to the dining room and the library, and, opening it, saw again the worn stone stairway down which he had followed Claire. He went down, and found a switch at the foot of the stair which he pulled down, revealing the way to the wine cellar. He

passed the array of bottles, took the turn to the right, then left at the junction of two passages, right again—and found himself back in the wine cellar! Yet he felt sure he had followed the way Claire had led him the first time he had come down here.

He started again. Right, left to the crossing of the two passages, then to the right, and left again—and he was back in the wine cellar at the end by which he had left it. Then it occurred to him that, when he had turned the switch, he had put on lights for all the passages along which he had walked: when he had come down with Claire, they had had only the light of the lamp she carried, and probably he was missing some unlighted way which would take him to the crypt. With that realization he faced about and set off again, to see that he had not turned sharply enough beyond the wine cellar: there was an inconspicuous turn to the right, unlighted, just before the one he had taken, and, taking it this time, he presently found himself in the hewn cutting in solid rock, with the deal plank door of the crypt in front of him.

He pushed the door open, and entered the place. For his first visit, there had been the light of a lamp of considerable power, one with a bulb that rayed in all directions. Now he had only his torch, throwing a single beam, so that beyond its narrow ray the crypt was in darkness. By that light he passed the pillars in the middle of the floor, and came to the altar. On it stood the little golden bowl, with, beside it, a tiny cup, one that might have belonged to a doll's tea service, and the cup was half full of pounded herbs from the bowl. He stood regarding it in the shaft of light from his torch—the plank door creaked on its hinges, and pattering footsteps sounded receding from its far side. Then Gees faced about, threw the ray on the closed door, and raced toward it. He flung it open and, bending lest his head should strike the roof of the passage, went haring toward the first turn.

Never, even on a running track, had he made better time, he knew. Yet when he came to the wine cellar and halted to listen, for guidance as to the way in which his quarry had gone, he could hear no sound at all. The one who had eluded him might be hiding somewhere in this maze of passages, or might have known of a shorter way to the ground floor and thus have escaped him altogether, by now. If he had thought to ask Claire for the hand lamp, and had been able to see in all directions as when he had come down with her—but it was too late for everything but swearing, and the position was too serious for that.

He went back to the crypt. That one who had fled might have dropped something—anything—in so hurried a flight, and thus might have pro-

vided a means of identification. But there was nothing, either in the passages or in the crypt itself, though he swung his torch to search all the stone flooring. He went behind the horned altar, and there, in savage disappointment, mere impishness, took out his cigarette lighter and ignited the pounded herbs in the tiny cup.

Like the fabled djinn escaping from his bottle the greenish haze poured upward, struck against the roof, and swayed and wreathed and curled to fill all the crypt. The scent of it came to Gees as he stood facing the symbol of the Unnamed, paradisaal, will destroying—a shaft of the haze reached down to envelop him as if it had been a living entity, folded him in an embrace of terrible, unearthly sweetness. Then he was aware of a Hate, a bodiless power of malignity that bound him to statue-stillness, a Hate so awful that it struck at his reason, even at his soul. Fixed and physically powerless, he fought it, just managed to think and half-visualize a Cross on the greenish luminance to which the darkness, beyond the ray of his torch, had given place.

With that, he could move again. Like one drunk he staggered past the end of the horned altar, past the four pillars, and out from the crypt. Some part of him longed to stay, to bathe in the sweetness of the scent, draw it into himself like an elixir of intensified life, and that although he knew the Hate waited over the horned altar to destroy him. Before him, yet not directly before him, went a shadow, ever just beyond his sight, drifting, a hopeless futility of half-being that thought a laugh at him. A cold laugh, if there were such a thing—a laugh in which was no mirth, but a bitterness and an irony.

He came to the wine cellar alone, free of the shadow and its laugh. Finding the staircase was no trouble, and he switched off the light at its foot before going up to emerge to the central corridor of the Hall near the library door. Gates came out from the dining-room.

“Gates, have you seen anybody—anybody at all, in this corridor during the last half-hour or thereabouts?”

“No, sir.” It might have been the most expected of all questions, by the man’s way of answering. He evinced no surprise whatever.

“Where is Miss Lawson, do you know?”

“I do not, sir. She may have gone to her own room after lunch, or she may be in the long room. I couldn’t say, sir.”

“After lunch?” Gees let his stupefaction sound in the question.

“Yes, sir. Miss Lawson waited a quarter of an hour for you, sir, and then concluded you had gone down to the village or something.”

Then Gees looked at his wrist watch, and saw the hands pointing to a quarter past three. He said: "Yes, she would, of course," and realized that under the influence of that accursed scent he had been out of time. As once before, he had lost a section of his life: the Hate that had bound him to fixity as he stood before Its symbol—Her symbol—had robbed him of two hours, and they had passed as if they had been two moments and no more. He asked: "Do you know where Mr. and Mrs. Lawson happen to be at this time of day, Gates?"

"I do not, sir. They may have gone out in their car, or they may be in their rooms. I do not think Mr. Lawson went to London to-day, sir."

"Ah! Thank you, Gates. Did you ask the chauffeur to change that wheel for me? Farrar, I think you said was his name."

"Yes, sir. And I took the liberty of telling him to order a new tyre for you at the same time. Mr. Reed would wish that, I know, sir."

"Very good of him—and of you too. That's all, thank you, Gates."

"Not at all, sir. Thank you, sir."

Gees watched him go his way. So perfect—so impossibly perfect! And those thin soles to his shoes would have made just that pattering along the passages between the crypt and the wine cellar

Lighting the herbs in the cup had been the height of folly, Gees knew now. He had done it under the influence of mere savage, silly impulse, and by it had lost two hours, while at the same time he had warned whoever had placed the little cup on the altar of his own knowledge of the purpose for which those herbs were used. It was easily possible that, in the period of time he had lost, the one who had placed the cup there had come down to the crypt again and seen him—perhaps, in the revealment that the scent gave, read his mind as he read the thoughts of the shadows. At the best he had gained nothing by his folly: at the worst he had lost—what? And where was Claire? Was she still unharmed?

Pallant was right: Gates would bear close watching—Gates who had served Bernard Lawson up to two years ago, and now might be slave to the Unnamed—who might have fled from the crypt and gone pattering along the passages that he would know even more surely than Claire knew them. Lawson, big and heavy, could not have trodden so lightly—or could he? Would he not have taken care to tread lightly, to take short, quick steps, rather than pound along in a way that would help to declare his identity? Big though he was, there was agility about him, an easy quickness of movement: when Gees had done that two-finger lifting on him the night before, he had balanced on his feet as lightly as

any gigolo. And the crypt door, swinging to close as soon as released, might have masked the full sound of those running feet.

He, Gees, had been a fool. A clumsy, angry fool! Betrayed his knowledge to his quarry, made things more difficult for himself ...

Fear-took him when he entered the long room, and saw no sign of Claire. What had happened to her since lunch? He went up to his own room and knocked on the communicating door between it and hers, but got no reply of any sort. Now he grew really afraid for her, knew a chill of apprehension as he recollected the virulence of the Hate he had felt as brooding over the altar in the crypt, striking at him and—perhaps even now—through him at Claire. Again he went down to the long room, and felt almost weak with relief at sight of her, unharmed.

“I’ve been looking for you,” he said, rather inanely.

She smiled. “I gave up looking for you,” she remarked, “and went to see Rosamund and the baby—to tell her I should be leaving for London to-morrow and suggest that she and Bernard should have both lunch and dinner with you while you are here—unless Mr. Reed comes back before you go. She seemed quite pleased at the idea.”

“Thank you, Claire. It is quite a good idea, too.” He felt that it would give him more chance to study Bernard Lawson—and give Bernard more chances of betraying himself, if he were the one who had somehow given that first dose of *lakiti*, and meant to give a second.

“I’m glad you approve. And the baby was lovely. I could see you thought Rosamund terribly boring about it, but she’s a wonderful mother. I think Bernard feels himself left out in the cold, sometimes.”

“I shall feel happier when you are in London, Claire.”

“My dear”—grave-eyed, she looked full at him—“we both know—we have accepted the knowledge, and I put it out of my mind.”

He said, doggedly: “I do not accept it. Good is stronger than evil. You said—sometimes pray for you. It isn’t sometimes, Claire, but all the time, and I’ll keep my faith that prayer is worth while.”

“Yes, but—we pray, and we get given what is best. Gees, neither you nor I can see what is best in the big plan of things. Down in the crypt, while you waited among the hollies, I saw all of time that has been—I told you some of it. And the Ultimate Purpose which weaves the fabric we call time uses us atoms as threads—perhaps It even uses that presence I felt over the altar to cut the threads in accordance with Its design. We know so very little. Remember Swinburne: ‘Gives a star and takes a sun away.’ Except that he whined over it, wouldn’t accept Ultimate Purpose as Ultimate Good. There is no scent now, Gees. I’m sane and reasoning,

accepting whatever comes as best—for you! I wasn't sane last night, but now that I am I don't regret one moment of it—I love every moment that we lived. Part of the fabric, built into it—woven in, and fixed there for ever. If it should be all, I think I shall be let go back to it. So I accept the knowledge that whatever I do, wherever I go, makes no difference. And I am not afraid. What I have had and given cannot be taken away from me or given back to me."

"There is so much more to take and give, Claire."

"Say that we don't know. Just that. There are a thousand chances in every day of life, and—we don't know. One thing—two things I do know. One is that all we lived last night was woven in the fabric of time before we two knew it—we had to come to that point, know it as part of the weaving—live as I had not lived, till then. The other, that you will never lose me. I shall always be near you, a prayer for you, perhaps given power to stand between you and harm. So much you mean to me, my dear. Because I know there is so very little time left, I tell you these things without any reserve, without any fear."

She took his left hand and held it against her breast. Again she said: "Without any fear," and then a hint of laughter showed in her eyes. "And you're not watching either the windows or the mirrors. Your police inspector has just come to the front door, and if I hadn't told you Gates would have come in on us. Your hand is very nearly still again—much more nearly still than my heart against it—do you know?"

"Wonder girl!"

"When you come back I shall have tea waiting for you. Half an hour?"

"Less, if I can make it." He withdrew his hand and faced about in time to see Gates open the door. Imperturbable Gates!

"Inspector Pallant would like to see you, sir. In the library."

That even voice! That stringy neck, and the suggestion the man gave of stealth, of—of power hidden behind his mask of immobility!

"Well, sir, it's as I said," Pallant opened cheerfully. "One point leads on to the next. I had a long talk with Dr. Odzendael—I should say he had the long talk, and I listened while he did Swedish exercises with his ankles. You know, of course—yes, you know, because you told me—that the girl Elsie Carr alternated between fits of mad frenzy and exhaustion in the later stages before her death."

"That is so," Gees agreed. "Odzendael explained it to me, told me that *lakiti* is an excitant, an over-stimulant, one might call it."

"Queer stuff altogether," Pallant observed reflectively. "That business of affecting one limb only, the one nearest to the artery that feeds the

brain. The twitching part of it, I mean. He told me all about that. And then told me that in her mad fits the girl displayed a feeling, one that I'd call a murderous hate, for one special person."

"That one being—?" Gees asked, and waited.

"Gates." Pallant spoke the one word, and watched for effects.

"Now why didn't he tell me that?" Gees reflected aloud.

"Because, when I come in with a warrant card, he can regard it as an official inquiry, and need keep nothing back," Pallant explained. "You were unofficial, and though he told you the case history to some extent, he wouldn't betray even a mad patient's confidence. He views me as the law—which is where we police have an advantage over any unofficial inquirer. You see the difference, sir."

"Quite so. How much of it are you telling me?"

"I see no reason why I shouldn't tell you all of it, sir. And there isn't much, at that. In those fits she raved against Gates, never against anyone else. Dr. Odzendael showed me some of it that he put down on paper at the time. It doesn't make sense. It's a series of threats to kill Gates, some of it quite obscene—the sort of words you might think no decent girl would know. Hints, now and then, that Mr. Reed didn't look on her as a servant—I needn't dot the i's of that part of what the doctor had put on paper. And no real reason—Dr. Odzendael told me he couldn't discover any reason—for her antipathy to Gates. His conclusion is that the man tried to stand between her and Mr. Reed, keep her away from him. Which may have been the case."

"Things are piling up against Gates," Gees remarked soberly.

"Why—have you anything fresh against him?" Pallant asked.

"No." Gees shook his head. His adventures in the crypt, and the identity of the one who had fled from it, would mean nothing to Pallant, he knew. It would be useless to recite the incident, worse than useless if he attempted to make a practical-minded police inspector believe what he himself believed. "I may be unjust to Gates in saying that."

"And I'm wondering what on earth is either of us to do." Pallant sounded decidedly troubled over it. "What can we do? If Gates is the cause at the back of it all, I don't see the slightest chance of his giving himself away either to you or to me. And yet there must be some way of trapping him—or whoever else is responsible, if he isn't."

Gees thought it over. He said: "Elsie Carr's antipathy to him proves nothing. In madness, people turn against those who mean most to them in sanity, very often. Inspector, you only started in on this yesterday. Supposing we carry on as we are, for the present?"

“Is it going to get us anywhere, sir?” Pallant asked irritably.

“You appear to have no other suggestion,” Gees pointed out. “Meanwhile the effects of what was given me are fast wearing off—it was one slight dose, and if I sit tight here it is almost certain to be repeated with a view to getting rid of me—frightening me away. I’m on the watch for something of the sort all the time, now, and may find out how it is done and who is doing it. If that doesn’t come off, it might be advisable to get Mr. Reed back here, take the risk of watching for a further attempt on him. That is, unless either you or I see another line of approach opening up in some direction.”

“Yes, we could do that,” Pallant admitted thoughtfully. “I’ve thought—it’s such a blind darkness of a case—I’ve thought of coming right out into the open as a last resort, overhauling everybody’s belongings in the place—those separate rooms of Mr. and Mrs. Lawson’s as well as the rest, on the chance of finding something. But in a place this size it would take twenty or thirty men to do a job like that properly, and it would be going flat against what Sir Horace Dundas-Morton wants done for Mr. Reed’s sake. On top of that, I don’t think it would bring us one inch nearer the end of the case. We should draw blank.”

“We might save Reed by doing it,” Gees observed, “but if we did that, convinced our man that it isn’t safe to go on poisoning him, we should put paid to any chance of discovering who is responsible for the two murders already committed. That’s a dead certainty.”

“I’ve got to agree with you, sir. I’ve never tackled a case I liked less than this. Here’s our man under our nose, as you might say, and neither you nor I can get his scent.”

The final word reminded Gees that, only an hour or two earlier, he had had more scent than he wanted, and had been very near sight of the one who had meant to use it. He said: “Another day, or less, may bring us to sight of who is doing this, let alone scent.”

“In other words, sir, you want me to trust to luck?” Pallant sounded irritably impatient over it, and looked resentful as well.

“Suggest a way more likely to give us results,” Gees retorted.

“If I so much as hinted at calling in the Yard,” Pallant said, “Sir Horace would take good care that I didn’t make many more suggestions before retiring, because that would put every newspaper in the country on to such a case as this. And yet I never felt more like handing over to a Yard man. I feel—blindfolded, with my hands tied.”

“It is like that—just like that,” Gees sympathized. “Look here! Give us both till tomorrow, and if nothing happens by then I’ll get Reed to

come back—he's willing enough, when I tell him he may—get him to come back, and you and he and I can hold a three-cornered conference, see if three heads are better than two. Do you agree to it?"

"Till midday to-morrow—yes," Pallant assented, and looked a trifle relieved over it. "That will give him time to get back to-morrow and for the three of us to get together and see if he'll consent to untie my hands. If not, I shall warn him, I'm going all out without his consent."

"As how?" Gees asked, with the faintest tinge of irony.

"Good heavens!" Pallant exclaimed softly. "If I knew that, wouldn't I be going all out now? All right, sir, midday to-morrow for sight of something definite to work on, or else you get Mr. Reed back here."

With that, he went his way, obviously puzzled and a little angry. He marched, rather than walked, along the drive and on until the bend beyond the gateway hid his pose of stiff defiance.

"They don't like amateurs," Gees murmured to himself as he turned from watching the inspector's progress.

Chapter 14

An Amateur's Omissions

Back in the long room Claire asked: "Shall I ring for tea now?"
"Can it wait a few more minutes?" Gees asked in reply.
"Just as you wish. You have more to do, you mean."

"Things I ought to have thought to do before this. I'm blundering, Claire, missing things. One of them—you remember telling me of a third way down to the cellars and all the rest, from the other wing?"

"Yes. Through a storeroom. I took care that it was locked while you were away, as you asked. Locked it myself."

"Is it still locked?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Gates asked for the key this morning, while you were talking to the police inspector. He wanted pickles."

"Yes. Any stick will do if one wants to beat a carpet. Pickles. Now I wonder—another thing I ought not to have left undone—could you lend me the electric hand lamp you took when we went down to the crypt? I want to go down there—alone—for a minute or two."

"It's in a chest in the hall—I'll get it for you."

He went out with her to the entrance hall. As she handed the lamp to him, she gazed at him rather anxiously.

"Must you go down alone?" she asked.

"Yes, Claire. Not for anything I know would I let you go down there again, and I'm quite sure of finding my way alone."

"Wait." She drew out a thin gold chain that had lain under her frock, and detached from it a tiny ivory cross. "Take this with you."

He dropped the cross into his breast pocket. "I shall be minutes only," he said. "When I come back, remind me to hand this to you again. You need protection far more than I do, I know."

"That is why I got it out and put it on, after dressing this morning. Because—life means so much more to me, now."

"I know, wonder girl. And—not only to you."

When he neared the crypt, he smelt the scent very faintly. It was no stronger within the place, no more than a tang on the stillness, so slight as to have no power—or perhaps, he thought, the ivory amulet in his pocket had a greater power. He went straight to the horned altar, held up the lamp to get clear sight of its flat top—and the tiny cup was no longer there! Going round to the side of the altar next the wall, he saw that the golden bowl had been put back in the recess in which he had first seen it. An hour or less had passed since he had gone up from here and spoken to Gates, and in that time someone had come down, taken away the cup which, had he himself taken it instead of yielding to the senseless impulse under which he had lighted the herbs in it, might have told either him or Pallant—or both of them—all that they wanted to know. He had missed a chance, possibly the chance of them all: if it came to such a search as Pallant had suggested as a last resort, in all probability the cup would be hidden or destroyed. Even if they found it, he knew, he could not get Pallant to see it as significant. That pounded herbs had been burned in it as a sort of incense would mean nothing to the police inspector—to any police inspector! One might try the scent on Pallant, of course ...

Remained the fact that he, Gees, had been guilty of a bad lapse from common-sense pursuit of his aim. And now, remembering yet another lapse, he retraced his steps, not to the long room as yet, but to the library. There he asked for trunk inquiries, got the number of ›Brown's Hotel,‹ and asked for the connection. He got it with hardly any delay.

"I want to speak to Mr. Sydnor Reed, please. Mr. Gordon Green calling."

"If you will hold on, sir, I will see if Mr. Sydnor Reed is in."

Then: "Mr. Reed speaking. Who wants me?"

"Green, from Nortonsweir. To ask you—have you among your possessions a plain gold bowl, weighing sixteen to twenty ounces?"

"I have not. Why—have you found one?"

"More or less. Have you ever owned such a thing?"

"No. There's a silver-gilt cup on the dining-room sideboard—I expect you've seen it. But a gold bowl of that weight—no."

"I've noticed the cup—yes. Do you know if anyone here would be likely to own a gold bowl of that weight?"

"I have never seen or heard of anything of the sort at the Hall. Can you tell me any more about it—where you found it, if you did find it, and—well, what you were looking for when you found it?"

"Sorry, but I can't tell you any more over the telephone. How is the hand going on to-day?"

"Definitely better—I have hopes of it getting quite back to normal, now. And now I think of it, is Claire coming to join me here?"

"Not to-day. To-morrow, perhaps—unless I have to call you back here by to-morrow. I'll know about that by noon or a bit later."

"You mean"—Reed sounded eager over it—"you see a chance of my being able to come back to-morrow, Green?"

"Oh, yes! The same sort of chance that a ship's navigator sees when the compass won't work and his chart is blown overboard. That sort of chance. It'll mean that the steering wheel is taken out of my hands, if it happens, and you'll like coming back less than you care for staying where you are. Remember Sir Horace telling me I'm an amateur. I am, and the professionals want to take over—I've got till midday to-morrow, and no longer. Now do you understand?"

"Quite. Shall I have another talk with Sir Horace?"

"No. Wait on events. You shall know as soon as I know myself. Everything that I know myself. Patience till to-morrow—good-bye."

Reed said: "Good-bye, if that's all you can tell me," rather disconsolately, and Gees replaced the receiver and went to the long room.

He asked: "Had you ever seen the bowl we found at the back of the altar, until then, Claire? Seen it there or anywhere else?"

"Why, no! And till you asked that it never occurred to me to question who put it there. Mr. Reed would know about it, surely."

"He doesn't. I've just asked him. He'd never heard of it."

"Anita, perhaps," she suggested thoughtfully.

"Someone who is not Anita knows it is there," he said. "It had been taken out and put on top of the altar to-day. And there was also a tiny cup, like a doll's teacup, white china, beside it."

"I had a doll's tea service in white china, when I was small."

"Yes? Do you know what became of it?"

"It was in an old trunk with some other childish possessions and one day Bernard remembered it, and asked if he might have the cups and saucers for something to do with his moths—to hold solutions he used

for the dissections part of his moth-hunting. Six cups and five saucers—I let him have them all. Not that—it doesn't prove anything as far as he's concerned. He leaves things about anywhere."

"Nothing proves anything, in this affair," he said rather bitterly.

"I know how you must feel about it, and wish I could help. But at least I can ring for tea, now. Or have you still things to do?"

He shook his head. "Sorry if I sound disgruntled, Claire. It's with myself, not you. Impatience, and there's the fear for you as well. I know—don't get up, I'll ring—I know for an absolute certainty that if I could pin down for destruction the one who makes shadows here, you would be safe again. So I am impatient over it."

She said: "This is a miracle for me, Gees. I think I told you I never knew my mother. I was not very old when my father died. I care for Bernard far more than he cares for me, and his is a careless caring—he remembers me if he wants anything. And—nobody else from whom I could take. All my life it has been my part to give."

"I gathered something of the sort from a remark Reed made," he said.

"He has been kinder to me than anyone else, more generous, more thoughtful. A friend in the very best sense of the word. But till I met you, and apart from him and his kindness, all my life—"

She ceased speaking as Perkins entered with the tea tray, and waited till they were alone again. Then she said: "You came, and gave to me. The strange part of it is that I have no shame over having asked. Perhaps, if you could give me safety, I might feel I couldn't face you, might see that no woman worth calling one would do what I have done. I neither see nor feel like that, for my very little time."

"When you realize that safety, Claire, go on asking. Because, in your asking, you give all I could ask of you. Wonder girl."

"Tea, Gees. I know now exactly how you like it. There! So I would try always to give, exactly as you'd wish—everything."

"Not 'I would,' wonder girl, but 'I will.'"

"While I live, my dear, and after—I will."

"And ask too, Claire. Always. Else, there would be no completeness. Equality—I think you have grown to that since yesterday."

She shook her head. "Two verses of Browning that I do remember. Let them tell you, better than any words of my own." And, after a pause for thought, in which he waited, and knew past question that she had changed, grown, since yesterday, she quoted:

*“And yet thou art the nobler of us two:
 What dare I dream of, that thou canst not do,
 Outstripping my ten small steps with one stride?
 I’ll say then, here’s a trial and a task—
 Is it to bear?—if easy, I’ll not ask:
 Though love fail, I can trust on in thy pride.*

*“Pride?—when those eyes forestall the life behind
 The death I have to go through!—when I find,
 Now that I want thy help most, all of thee!
 What did I fear? Thy love shall hold me fast
 Until the little minute’s sleep is past
 And I wake saved.—And yet it will not be!”*

He got up suddenly and went to the window opposite the tea table. With his back to her he said: “No, it wasn’t Pallant. The postman, perhaps. Not that I expect any letters. Do you?”

“That was a very great gift, Gees,” she answered softly. “I saw.”

“Then”—he came back and seated himself again—“you hadn’t any business to see! Let’s be sensible, Claire. Reasoning beings, not children making bogies and cowering before them.”

“Quite sensible,” she agreed. “I’m not, you know, but I’ll try.”

“You’re dear, infinitely dear, wonder girl. But—you upset me for the moment, with that quotation. The singing music of your voice, as much as the words. I could go on listening to your voice—”

“I thought you wanted to be sensible,” she interrupted, smiling.

“Well, that is. Cold fact. Fact, anyhow. But I wanted to say—Claire, I’ve taken Reed’s money, and I’ve made such ghastly mistakes that I’m not earning it. That little cup, and the finger-prints I might have found on it? But not that—us two. You made me believe, last night—not believe, though, but know—made me know what you believe, that you’re very near the end of human things. Why?”

“Because I know it. You know it, too. Knew it when ...”

“Yes, or else that ‘when’ wouldn’t have been possible—for either of us. But—sensibly, now—on what does either of us know it? No more than a thought struck at us by a nothingness—a shadow.”

“A shadow, but not a nothingness,” she dissented.

“Very well, then, a shadow—and we both know that shadows can exist,” he said soberly. “Let’s go a step farther. All the trouble that has been here has been material, ugly poisoning, done by some material agency—on the face of it, whatever you or I may think as existing at the back

of it, nothing to do with shadows. Material hate, or attempt at material gain—what you like, but not immaterial, shadow work.”

“I agree,” she said evenly. “Yes, that is so. But you yourself said, and I believe, that only somebody under the influence of what you call the Unnamed, the presence I felt over the altar, would be fiendish enough to contrive such a death for any human being.”

“I’ll give you that,” he answered. “But—this is the point I’m trying to make for you, wonder girl. Neither you nor I have had belief or knowledge, or whatever you like to call it, that you are to be a victim of that poisoning. We have been dreading some fate that we cannot possibly foresee, something striking at you out of the near future, independently or any poisoner bent on killing Reed and frightening me. I might just as well fear to walk out of this room because the roof of the entrance hall might fall on me and squash me. I might as well fear to drink this tea, because I might get a seizure and crush the cup to slivers, and stab myself with one of them. My dear, don’t you see? Every human being who lives is not sure of the next moment of life—I might cease to breathe while I’m talking to you, and be dead.”

She came and knelt beside him. “It isn’t any use, Gees. Tell me—remember and tell me! Am I all yours?”

“We know, wonder girl. I see no need to tell you. You know!”

“So hold me! So kiss me, my dear! ... In cold daylight, tell me. Because being sensible isn’t any use. For my very little time—a very little time!—forgive me for being foolish, and be good to me.”

“You see, it is as I told you—don’t you hate people who say ‘I told you so’? But it is as I told you—for the first time in my life, really, I’m asking everything, not giving everything. Asking everything from you, and not in the least ashamed as I ought to be.”

“O, wonder girl! All you can ask is already yours.”

“Now I’m going to ring, and be all respectable—am I respectable, Gees?—be all respectable while Perkins takes the tray out. And then I’m going to sing to you again. You’re strong, you know, and able to bear even that. And I want to sing to you.”

“I’ll be so strong you won’t know it’s me. One moment, while I ring for the esteemed Perkins. And you can put your hair straight—take your choice of the mirrors. Claire—wonder girl!”

“I’m going to put my hair straight. You be respectable!”

“Not I! I’d sooner kiss Perkins. Q. E. D.”

“Yes—which is absurd. Hush, here she is!”

He listened. Claire's voice filled all the long room, as the scent had filled the crypt. A perfection of sound:

*"I pass the place where once her steps had passed;
A crumbling wall, a little heap of stone.
Just as she stood, the sun upon her cast
A shadow—and the shadow has not gone.*

*"I thought I could not bear to come again
Back to this place, tear-blinded and alone;
Yes, it has waked anew the half-lulled pain ...
This crumbling wall ... this little heap of stone ...*

*"Just as she passed here on a June's hot day
(She held those crimson roses in her hand)
And here we loitered from the world away—
This little glade, that seemed like Fairyland.*

*"I dare not linger; I must also pass
Far from this place, fare on my way alone ...
The snow has covered all the waving grass ...
The crumbling wall ... the little heap of stone."*

He said: "O, Claire! And I'll have that voice of yours in my life! The voice, and you. I will not be respectable!"

"Is it as bad as that? I thought you'd like that song."

"Your voice would make any song worth remembering. But I don't want to remember the words. Claire, just once more, to spoil me completely and prove that you don't do all the asking, sing 'Request'."

"My lord commands. His slave obeys."

"If so, I'll get up and go out, and you can sing it to yourself."

"Dear, the little secret place is yours for ever—all of me. You know. Gees, I give! Ask—always ask, and let me know the happiness of giving. The songs you want to hear—everything."

Again he listened: "Beneath the tender sweetness of your breast ..."

"Those eyes of yours, Claire? Did you rake pieces down out of the sky in a summer twilight? How did you get them, wonder girl?"

"I stole a paint-box, and mixed the colours to suit myself. Gees, you're not such a fool as to think I got those eyes honestly, are you?"

"I dunno. You're capable of anything, wonder girl."

"I'll never get tired of hearing you call me that."

"Oh, yes, you will! When I shout—'wonder girl, are you going to be all day over the eggs and bacon?' Or when I yell 'Wonder girl, if you don't

hurry up and stop fooling with that lipstick, I'll scrag you!' you'll begin wondering seriously. I mean it."

"I don't care, Gees. I just don't care. Isn't senseless fooling lovely? I believe you've got a gift for it."

"I've got so many gifts that you wouldn't know the difference between me and an official presentation—by the mayor and corporation. Corporation mostly embodied in the mayor, behind the official chain. Never mind. Can I be a bigger idiot than I am, or can't I?"

"Don't worry, dear. You are. Aoh! I didn't deserve that!"

"You did! You deserve all that and then some. Wonder girl, we're fooling. Fooling is good for us. Therefore, we're fooling."

"The dog is the friend of man. Therefore, man cherishes the dog. Therefore, the dog is the friend of man. Therefore, man cherishes the dog. Yah! Gees, I'm perfectly, completely mad. What about you?"

"I'd get a certificate to any asylum, and it's your fault. You're drunk, on tea. So am I. No, I won't have another cup—you didn't offer me one. If you had, I wouldn't have accepted it. Oh, wonder girl! Yah! You said 'Yah' first. I believe it. Claire, pull me back to sanity. It's daylight, and Perkins may come in at any moment."

"Gees, you fool, I love you to be foolish. Remember, the dog is the friend of man. Therefore, man cherishes the—"

"Yes, but you said all that before. Say something fresh, Claire."

"Listen, fool! There isn't a wiser man in the world than you, and there isn't one more foolish. There may be some who could give more, but there isn't one from whom I'd ask so much. There may be others who could ask more, but there isn't one—I mean, this, Gees—there isn't one to whom I'd give anything, having known you. I have nothing left to give. I am—you know, Gees—you know! Futile, telling you."

"Yet a fool wants to be told," he said, and held her as she knelt.

"Does he? Then I am not me, but you. I don't care what you think. I tell you, I don't care, whatever you think! I am alive and yours—when I am a shadow in the cold, I shall still be yours. But if there may still be one hour of this human warmth, one touch of you as real before I go out to the cold—I know, Gees, and I want it! I don't care what you think of me—I want it!"

"Claire—will you forget that fear? I ask it, dear."

"I can't forget it. Fate is very near—very near! Else would I, a thinking woman, tempt you? Would I make myself cheap, as you know I am cheap? Would I tell you, ask of you? Don't you know?"

“I won’t know ... Claire. Wonder girl!”

“To the very end, that to you. I pray and ask it. To the very end, your wonder girl. Yours, Gees ... And that will be Perkins.”

He said: “I’ve always believed in giving sensible people sensible names,” as Perkins entered with a letter on a salver, and Claire shook a small fist at him, and choked back laughter.

Chapter 15

The Glass Too Many

Dressed, and ready to go down for cocktails before dinner, Gees took from its envelope the letter Perkins had brought to him in the long room, and read it a second time:

37 Little Oakfield Street,
S.W.1.

Feb. 21st.

Dear Mr. Green,

I am tired of it.

Of sitting here day after day, reading novels, sometimes taking down such reports as you dictate, typing them—and then reading more novels. When you are here, I have the delirious excitement of making tea (when you are not, I go out to a teashop) and that is about all the variety I get—from reading novels—in the course of any one day.

Tired of it. I do not wish to inconvenience you in any way, though, apart from such incidents as that of Mr. Reed's visit and my taking down the statement you wanted him to make, I do not see what difference my presence here, or my absence from here, can make to you. I appreciate the consideration you have always shown me, and want to be equally considerate. Therefore, I shall await your return, and then trust you to find someone equally decorative—I am quoting you in saying that—and far more pleased over doing nothing day after day. I will not—this is again quoting the type of phrasing you

would yourself use—let you down by walking out on you. If, on your return, you can select an equally decorative and more patient occupant for this room, I will thank you for my release from it as already I thank you for your many kindnesses to me while I have been in your employ. May I suggest that the employment terminates on March 16th? I shall then be able to make plans for getting away for Easter, as I hope to do.

I could not have said all this to you, and therefore write it. Type it, rather. I have had it in mind to tell you for some months, and now end the series of puttings-off.

One other thing, a curious dream I had last night. I do not know if you will attach any importance to it, but it has so much impressed itself on my mind that I want you to know of it. You, and yet it was not you, were in some very great peril through stepping backward. Peril of your life, even—and yet it was not you. But it was you, all the same. I don't pretend to explain the apparent contradiction, you and yet not you, stepping backward, nor could I see in the dream why you—and not you—stepped backward. Quite possibly you will think this very silly—my making any reference to nothing more than a dream. Whether it means drawing back from some decision, or actual drawing back from some threat of danger—or nothing at all—I do not know. I felt impelled to tell you of it, and that is quite half my reason for writing this—notice to quit, on March 16th, if you can find my successor by that time and so let me go.

You see, I must widen my horizons. This sitting here doing nothing day after day is soul-destroying. My sincere regard to you.

Eve Madeleine Brandon.

He said: “Oh, yes, Eve Madeleine! In fact, Oh yeah! A spot of diplomacy is indicated—when I get back. Don't step backward—no. Go straight ahead, seize the opportunity, explore the avenue, turn the stone. Neglect no chance, grasp the nettle, catch at the fleeting moment, be up and doing—and don't step backward! I won't. No sah!”

He went down, for it wanted only ten minutes to dinner time. On the way he reflected over the letter; it was he, and yet it was not he, who had put himself in danger through stepping backward, in Eve Madeleine's dream. She was not so nearly in touch with him that the dream meant anything: she was so much a part of his office and all that he saw as his life that some way of preventing her from resigning must be found: he must make work for her, give her more interest in these cases of his. She had not forgotten that he had kept the end of the case of MacMorn, the first maker of shadows he had encountered, to himself. Let her more fully into these cases, give her interest—

He stopped, with the handle of the long room door grasped. He had forgotten to bring down the little ivory cross Claire had handed to him when he went down to the crypt. Ah, well! She had forgotten it too, and there was no chance that could injure her in the mere everyday inconsequences of cocktails and dinner with Bernard and Rosamund Lawson. He could make some excuse, run up and fetch the cross after dinner

So he entered the room. One glass remained on the tray, he saw. Bernard smiled at him, and said: "I'm going to try those mathematical absurdities on you to-night, Green. I've got paper and pencil."

"Sounds good to me. I'm sorry if I'm late."

Gees moved forward, until he had his back to the table on which the cocktail tray had been placed, and the convex mirror on the wall almost directly in front of him—not so much in front of him that his sight of the mirror on the far wall was in any way prevented or distorted. "I seem to make a habit of coming down late. Do forgive me, all of you."

"Of course we forgive you!" Rosamund Lawson turned her back to her husband and Claire, and stood over the cocktail tray. She faced about. "Mr. Green, your glass. And to-night I will drink your health."

He took the glass from her and, reaching up, placed it at the back of the mantel. Then he said: "Thank you. And now your handkerchief?"

She stared at him, paling, frozen to stillness. Bernard Lawson asked: "What do you mean, Green? Her handkerchief? She hasn't dropped it. Put it away before you do drop it, Rosamund."

"I want it," Gees said. "There was one mirror too many for you, Rosamund Lawson. Give me that handkerchief! I want it."

Then Claire reached out and took the handkerchief from Rosamund Lawson's helpless hand, for she too had seen, in the mirror on the far wall, how Rosamund had wiped round the edge of the glass with the

handkerchief before taking it up. Rosamund, chalk-white with terror, now, said: "Give me that back! Give it back, I say!"

But Claire reached out to Gees, who took the handkerchief and put it in his pocket. He thought, then, that Odzendael had one simple test for *lakiti*, and the handkerchief was moist, not dry.

Then Rosamund Lawson came alive. Her hands crooked so that her fingers were like claws. Bernard stood back, helplessly wondering, while with her face gone beast-like Rosamund moved toward Claire, not Gees. She said, in a voice not recognizable as hers—a mere croak of hatred and unthinking rage in defeat: "You bitch! You spying bitch!"

Claire backed away from her, stepped backward. It was not till after that Gees remembered Eve Madeleine's letter. Claire stepped backward from the sharp-nailed fingers that might have torn her face. She stumbled on the kerb of the fireplace, recovered with one foot on the tiling, back against the bars of the grate. A gassy flame licked out at the flimsy edge of her dinner frock—and Rosamund Lawson was between her and Gees. In less than a second, it seemed, Claire was a pillar of flame. She did not cry out, made no sound.

Gees took Rosamund Lawson by her shoulder and flung her. She fell against an easy chair and moaned. Bernard stood struck to fixity, frightened, for the moment helpless. Gees took flaming Claire in his arms, knelt to thrust her down on the hearthrug and, ripping it from under Bernard's feet, sent him staggering toward the doorway, where Gates looked in, his imperturbability ruined for this once.

Gees got the hearthrug round Claire, somehow, extinguished the flame by its aid—he rolled her over and over until he knew the fire was stifled, and then lifted her in his arms.

"Gates," he said, as the butler hovered, halfway between the door and the fireplace. "Dr. Firth, at once. A bad case of burning, tell him. Then Nortonsweir in. Ask for Inspector Pallant, and tell him to bring two men with him. He'll understand."

"Very good, sir. Shall I—"

"Get the doctor at once. At once! Then Pallant. I'm taking Miss Lawson up to her room. Send women to attend to her. Get that doctor! Hurry it! Blast you, man—*move!*"

He saw Gates begin to run. Saw Bernard Lawson lift his wife to her feet, and heard her sick moaning. Then he went up the staircase with Claire—still, helpless Claire!—in his arms, and entered her room next his own—somebody opened the door for him, some woman, but neither

then nor later did he know who it was. He saw her turn back the bed-clothes, and laid Claire down. When he would have unwrapped the hearthrug from her, he saw charred fragments of rag and naked flesh, and so wrapped her in the rug again, to wait for Firth. He must keep the burns from the air Firth would know what to do

A deathly quiet. Gees saw Claire's long lashes lie down over her closed eyes. Thus, he remembered, he had seen her eyes closed in utter happiness. There were women in the room, frightened women. He said: "I saved her eyes—her dear eyes!"

And knew the tears were streaming from his own eyes as he waited for Firth, helplessly, fearing ... Claire, not he, had stepped backward. He knew the full interpretation of Eve Madeleine's dream, now.

Back in the suite that Pelham Reed—long dead, now—had devoted to the use of the woman who was not his wife, and the child—man, now—who was his son, Bernard Lawson stood over his wife Rosamund, his hands in his pockets, his expression one of grim determination. She sat beside the little bed in which their child slept, undisturbed by their presence, innocence unaware of guilt. She held in her closed right hand a pair of nail scissors, of which the points were stained yellowish brown. They were sticky, treachery with the stuff that stained them, but Bernard did not know that she held them.

He said: "I want to know, Rosamund. Claire, quite possibly, may not recover. Do you understand? What was that about the handkerchief to make Gees want it? I'm your husband. Tell me, now."

She answered. "It begins with Anita. Quite possibly—I heard that man Green—that devil Green!—tell Gates he wanted the police inspector and two men to come here. Which means only one thing. It can mean only one thing. She deceived me. I trusted in her, and she deceived me. I did all she showed me I must do, and—that devil Green saw! Claire saw. It is the finish of all things. I did it for you, and for Bernard Henry here. Because you are Pelham Reed's son, as much as Sydnor Reed is his son. He has everything, you nothing. I did it for you and our son. Do you hear? Not at any time for myself. For you two."

He asked, calmly: "Yes? What did you do, Rosamund?"

She answered: "It began with Anita. Did you know she killed Elsie Carr? Elsie struck her, and for a woman like Anita there could be no forgiveness for that. I found out how Anita killed her. Little doses of it—you give little doses, and nobody suspects. It is a nervous trouble, not anything to suspect. It grows and grows, dose after dose, and at the end you go mad as Elsie did—die! That's all. I knew, and taxed

Anita with it. She said that was not all, and got me to go with her to an underground room, down under the burnt-out wing of the Hall. She burnt incense and made a scent, showed me how to make the scent. I saw in it all that I could ever ask, and was shown how to get all that I wanted—for you and Bernard Henry. She showed me. Not Anita, but a wonderful being who came out of the scent—I think she came out of the scent—and appeared to me over the altar with points—”

He broke in: “What damned nonsense are you talking, Rosamund?”

“But it isn’t nonsense!” she persisted. “All this happened. Anita taught me as I’m telling you. And the being in the scent claimed life, human life, as payment for all she would give me. For all that she promised to give me. She wanted life, took her power from human life, she told me, and I gave her Anita. Because I daren’t give her Sydnor Reed too soon. Giving him was to be my reward for serving her, for making the haze in which she appeared over the altar—”

“Rosamund, you’re mad!” he broke in. “Quite mad!”

“I’m not. If it had not been for that man Green—that devil Green and Claire, you would never have known anything of all this. I’m only telling you because Green sent for the inspector and two policemen—and I know what that means. I haven’t so much time in which to tell you all of it—how I planned to make Sydnor Reed the next sacrifice after Anita, and leave you and the baby to inherit everything—”

“Shut up, Rosamund! You’re mad! As mad as Elsie Carr was—I won’t listen to such damned nonsense. Shut up, woman!”

“Why? Why should I shut up? Can’t you face realities? Haven’t we pinched and scraped ever since you married me? Hasn’t Sydnor Reed seen it, seen your little forced economies—mine too!—while he could spend what money he would without thought? Aren’t we cramped into these six rooms that he can’t take from us because of your father’s will—your father as well as his!—while he, one man, has all of Nortonsweir Hall? Hasn’t he gloated at the thought of his father’s other son cut down to a gentlemanly poverty, while he is squire and apes lord bountiful to everyone but us? Assuredly I would have sent him the way I sent Anita—O, Mother from of Old, you have betrayed me!”

“Are you telling me you killed Anita, Rosamund?” he demanded.

“Bernard, will you kiss me?” Her voice was honey-sweet.

“Listen, Rosamund! Are you telling me you killed Anita?”

“Won’t you kiss me, Bernard? You kissed me when you begot your son, don’t you remember? Or don’t you want to remember? I am your wife, your son’s mother. What I have done, has been done for you two.”

He said, heavily: "If all this is true, I'd sooner kiss the posts of hell before I pass the gate. You! Rosamund, tell me this isn't true! Tell me it's a bad dream—waken me! It can't be true!"

"If She had not betrayed me, you would never have known," she said.

"She? Claire, you mean? That handkerchief she took?"

"Not Claire. But the handkerchief was poison-steeped—Green knew it. He has it now. There is no escape for me. He is a devil, and all that I did for you and our baby has become my hell—he made it."

There came a light tap on the door, and she looked toward it. Ethel Allen was there, come for a last look at the baby before going to bed, but Rosamund thought of men who would come for her. She clenched her hand, drove the yellow-brown-stained points of the nail scissors into her palm, and waited, looking up at her husband.

"Remember, Bernard, it was for you. All for you and our child I tried to—to kill—Ahh-h-h!"

Neither he nor the girl waiting outside the door ever forgot her shriek. Her face contorted to even more beast-like semblance than when she had driven Claire back on the flame, her arms and legs jerked horribly—and stilled. For *lakiti*, in undiluted form as she had had it on the scissor-points, kills almost instantly, yet in the killing inflicts on its victim an eternity of agony. With the long, awful shriek, at which the baby awakened, whimpering, Rosamund Lawson died.

E. C. V.

Dr. Firth said: "That is all I can do, for the present."

Gees asked: "Has she recovered consciousness? May I see her?"

"You may see her, but she is still unconscious. I am ex—using tannin. There will probably be suppuration, and if so I must spray the burns again. To seal them away from the air, you understand. The danger is that of shock—it always is in these cases."

"You're staying here? Not leaving her, I mean?"

"I can stay, for the present. How did this happen, Mr. Green?"

"I thought she was quite safe, there," Gees said, rather dazedly. "Else, I would have gone back and got her the little ivory cross."

Gates came along the corridor, to where Gees and Firth stood outside the door of Claire's room. He said to Gees: "Inspector Pallant is down in the hall, sir. With—with two policemen. I told him you wanted him to fetch two policemen."

"What is all this, Mr. Green?" Firth asked.

But Gees turned to go downstairs without answering. Then Gates, human for once, asked the doctor: "How is Miss Lawson, sir?"

Firth shook his head. He answered: "Shock. Twelve hours—perhaps a little more—perhaps less. You being in charge of the place, had better know. I see no hope at all for her."

"Thank you for telling me, sir."

Gates went down the staircase rather hurriedly, and, pausing at ground-floor level, saw that there was nobody in the big entrance hall. Gees and the inspector and the two policemen had gone, somewhere. Gates sat himself down on the lowest stair, covered his face with his hands, and wept, like his master, Miss Claire had always been kind to him, thoughtful of him, and he had seen her clothed in flame before Gees could thrust Mrs. Lawson aside and reach her. The tears trickled between this man's fingers, and for a time he shook with sobbing.

"He's wrong—he must be wrong! She—she can't die!"

"Gates, man! Stop it, or you'll break me down too. Look here!"

Gates sprang to his feet on the instant, and took the hand Gees held out to him, winced at the pressure on it.

"Yes, sir? What can I do for you, sir?"

"For one thing, believe that life means hope. It does. I want you to get on to trunk inquiries and ask for the number of >Brown's Hotel. I got it to-day, but I've forgotten it—Mr. Reed is staying there. Tell him from me to hire a car if he can't get a train—to waste not one minute over getting back here. Is that clear?"

"I will do it at once, sir. Thank you, sir."

Pallant said: "We were too late. She used it on herself?"

Gees asked: "Who used what on herself?" He could not think clearly: for the moment he had forgotten that such a person as Rosamund Lawson existed. Yet here was Pallant, with two men ...

"Mrs. Lawson, sir. She used the poison on herself, by the look of the corpse. She's dead. I wonder—her husband—"

"No. You can acquit him. I feel sure he ... knew nothing. You see, Inspector"—Gees forced himself to reason—"a poisoner always works alone. More than any other type of killer, a poisoner works alone. Bernard Lawson knew nothing, suspected nothing. I am sure."

They faced each other in the entrance hall. Perkins came almost noiselessly from the direction of the library, passed them, and went up the big staircase. Pallant said: "If Dr. Firth is still here, I want him to see the corpse. Is he still here, do you know, sir?"

“He told me he’d stay. I expect”—he pointed—“up there. And Mr. Reed will come back. I told Gates to tell him to come back.”

Pallant looked at his two men. He said: “I think you two had better not go quite yet. Where can they wait in case I want them, Mr. Green?”

“In the library—where you and I talked. Take them there, and I’ll go and tell Firth you want him. I—I’m sorry that woman is dead.”

He did not explain the last sentence, nor did Pallant question it. When he saw the inspector begin conducting his two men toward the library, he went up the staircase and saw Firth come out from Claire’s room. He wanted to ask a question, but could not put it in words.

Firth said: “You may go in, if you like. She is still unconscious, though. There will be—she will not feel any pain.”

“You mean—?” Gees did not complete the question.

“Yes. I told Gates. You had better know too.”

Gees realized then that he had known it even when he had carried Claire out from the long room and up the staircase. Then he remembered why he had come in quest of Firth.

“Inspector Pallant wants you,” he said. “I think you’ll find him in the library. If not, his men in there will know where he is. Not if you have anything more to do here.” He nodded at Claire’s room doorway. “That comes before—before Pallant’s reason for wanting you.”

“I can do nothing more here, for the time,” Firth told him. “I’ll see what Pallant wants, and then come back.”

Gees saw him go toward the staircase head, and then entered Claire’s room. Perkins, seated beside the bed, looked up at him as he came to stand beside her. The flame, sweeping up Claire’s back, had struck on her hair, and behind her head it was shrivelled and ashy-ended. He had got her down and wrapped the rug round her in time to save her face from injury, and some little curls about her ears and forehead were untouched. There was a bottle on the table by the head of the bed, and the spray that Firth had used. And a travelling clock, its hands pointing to half-past eight. Had so little time gone by since, in the long room, Claire had stepped backward? Now, she lay very still, in a peace like that of death, her dark eyes closed.

He said: “If she wakens, let me know at once, Perkins. In the long room, if I’m not up here in my own. Let me know at once.”

“Yes, sir, I will. The doctor said she might wake.”

Gees went out. Half-past eight. He had had no lunch that day, and no dinner, but he felt neither hunger nor fatigue. He went down to the

long room, and saw on the mantel the glass Rosamund had given him. Her handkerchief was still in his pocket. Odzendael had a simple test ... Gates said: "I spoke to Mr. Reed, sir. He's starting at once, by car. But you've had no dinner, sir. Couldn't I get you something?"

"No, thank you, Gates. Not just now. I'm ... waiting ..."

Chapter 16

The Second Dawn

The clock in the entrance hall struck one as Reed stripped off his heavy overcoat and Gates took it from him. He said: "The man who drove me here is outside in the car. I want you to get him everything he wants, and find him a room for the night—just a minute, though. You told me Miss Lawson was very badly injured—burnt. Is she—?"

He did not end it, for he saw some part of the answer in his man's face. Gates answered: "Dr. Firth told me, sir. There is no hope for her. But—not only that, sir. Inspector Pallant is in the library, and—I'd rather he told you everything, sir, if you don't mind. Not—not me. I couldn't. If you don't mind, sir."

"Where is Mr. Green?"

"He went up to—to look at Miss Claire again, sir."

"Tell him to come to the library when he comes down. All right, Gates—I'll go and see Inspector Pallant. Don't forget the man in the car outside. Fetch me some whisky to the library, after."

"The decanter is already in there, sir."

Reed went on to the library, and Pallant, who had sent his two men away, stood up at his entry. He asked: "What have you to tell me, inspector? This accident to Miss Lawson—was it an accident?"

"It—I think it had better pass as one, sir," Pallant answered slowly. "Yes, an accident. Arising out of—of Mr. Green discovering who had been trying to poison you—and him."

"So that's why he wanted me to come back! And—who was it? Not in a thousand years can you make me believe it was Miss Lawson!"

"No, sir, I won't try. It was Mrs. Bernard Lawson."

"Rosamund? Oh, don't be such a silly ass, man!"

"I'm sorry, sir. Mr. Green has given me her handkerchief, and told me Dr. Odzendael can prove it is steeped in this poison—*lakiti*, it's called. He also gave me the glass with a cocktail in it, and he saw Mrs. Bernard Lawson wipe the handkerchief all round the edge of the glass before giving it to him. It needs only the slightest trace of this *lakiti*—I interviewed Dr. Odzendael, and he told me—only the slightest trace, such as would come off that handkerchief, to bring about the gradual poisoning she was aiming at."

Reed went to the table by the fireplace, poured himself half a tumbler of neat whisky, and drank it as it if had been water. He felt no heat nor any other effect from it. After a while he asked: "Where is Mrs. Lawson? Have you arrested her?"

"No, sir. She committed suicide before I got here—used the poison on herself, it appears. Got to it while Mr. Green was attending to Miss Lawson, and died instantly—"

"Stop, man! This is nightmare—madness! Claire—and Rosamund too! What are you—where is Mr. Green?"

"I'm not sure, sir, but I expect with Miss Lawson."

But then Gees opened the door and entered. Gates had told him of Reed's return, and Claire had given no sign of waking.

"So you—" Reed began, with a vindictive note in the exclamation as he looked at Gees. Then he broke off. "Inspector Pallant has been telling me," he said, more quietly. "And—Claire?"

"May die in unconsciousness," Gees answered, equally quietly. "I have had time to think. You have not, I see. Has Pallant told you about—about Mrs. Lawson?"

Reed sat down, heavily. "Yes. Dead," he answered. "Rosamund."

"Do you want me to go, or can you talk about it?" Gees asked.

"I want to—yes. The man who drove me back was magnificent. A born driver. Drove me back—to this! What were you saying, Green?"

"That you'd better get some sleep, if you can."

"No. No! I want to—to get it clear in my mind. He said—Pallant here—he said Rosamund was trying to poison me—and to poison you too. That you had a handkerchief. Is it true?"

"Quite true. And she's dead, and Claire is dying—fast."

"Yes?" The query sounded quite unemotional. "And—and what happens next? Go on, man, if you've got any more horrors to tell."

He poured himself a second half-tumbler of whisky, sipped at it, and put it down. Then he said: "I'm sorry, Green. It isn't exactly an—an everyday situation, is it? I think I'm being rather silly."

"You've been badly shocked. That's obvious. I'd recommend you to splash what you've got in that glass from the syphon."

"Perhaps you gentlemen would rather talk alone," Pallant said.

"No," Reed dissented. "You are—what's the phrase, Green? Yes, the arbiter of my fate. That's it, Inspector, the arbiter of my fate. As to whether this screams in all the papers in a day or two, and I spend the rest of my life hiding from people who want to sympathise."

"That is what I meant when I told you I'd had time to think," Gees said. "I see no reason why you should face that additional trouble. If necessary, I could see Sir Horace Dundas-Morton again for you. But you, Inspector—it rests to a very great extent with you."

"I suppose it does, sir," Pallant agreed calmly.

"For one thing," Gees went on, "you can't bring anyone to trial. You can get an inquest verdict of suicide while her mind was temporarily disturbed on Mrs. Lawson. You can, if you choose to bring it out, practically prove that she tried to give me a doze of *lakiti*, but even then you're up against the fact that an accused person is entitled to be regarded as innocent until proved guilty—and the dead can't plead, you know. Rosamund Lawson committed suicide in a fit of frantic, unbalanced remorse over having been responsible for Claire Lawson's fatal injuries. You could, even, burn that handkerchief. You can't prove who soaked it in *lakiti*. In my opinion, you won't be able to find any *lakiti* anywhere about this place. And if you don't see your way to keeping as much as possible out of the papers, Sir Horace Dundas-Morton won't love you. He's my friend and Mr. Reed's too. You see?"

"If I do go all out, I don't see myself getting any glory out of a case like this," Pallant observed gloomily.

"While if you don't go all out," Gees reminded him, "you save putting Sir Horace's back up, and I'm fairly sure Mr. Reed will see that you don't lose by the exercise of your discretion."

"I think, sir"—Pallant addressed Reed—"you need have no fear over leaving it all to me. I will save you all I can."

Gees turned toward the door. "I have been away too long," he said. "She may waken." And went out, closing the door on himself.

Reed drew in a long breath. Pallant got up, went to the fireplace and, taking Rosamund Lawson's handkerchief from his pocket, dropped it in the heart of the fire that he himself had made up while he waited here for Reed's return. The lace and linen burned with a greenish flame, and soon was no more than a fluff of ash.

Reed said: "As a magistrate, I could get you in bad trouble for destroying evidence like that, Inspector."

"It was one I picked up in the road," Pallant answered. "I thought I'd keep it and get it washed out for my wife, but it's better burnt and out of the way. You never know what you may find on stray handkerchiefs. Microbes—all sorts of things."

"Thank you, my friend. I shall not forget this."

E. C. V.

"Doctor, the night is nearly over, and she's still alive. Is there nothing you can do—no way of saving her?"

"No human power or skill can make any difference, Mr. Green. The shock has been too great for her. If you wish—she may waken, as I told you—if you wish to be with her in case that happens. And—she has but a very little time, now."

"A very little time." Her own words—Gees remembered how she had spoken them. He entered her room and saw the bottle and spray and little clock on the table, and Perkins, watchful, still. When he had noted the hands of the clock, he went to the window and drew back the curtains. The blind whirred up, and he saw how a thin rain beat against the window panes, and trickled down like slow tears.

When he faced about, he saw that Claire's eyes had opened. Perhaps daylight, reaching her, had wakened her. He went to bend down toward her, met the steady gaze of her eyes. He whispered: "Claire—darling!" "Sit here, Gees." Her voice was very faint, but its cadences had lost none of the music he knew. "I have been in ... a great darkness. Is that ... is it dawn again?"

"Dawn again, wonder girl—yes."

"Not—not like the first dawn we watched. Gees, I know ... I was in a great darkness, and ... the shadow we saw was there in the cold. But it ... passed. I think ... passed to its own place."

"Claire, darling, there will be no more shadows in the cold."

"I ... I'm glad. And I need ... need have no fear when ... I want to tell you, too ... it wasn't because of the scent ... dear."

"Not because of the scent, Claire?" He could not understand.

"No. Because ... I loved you."

"Darling—wonder girl!"

"To the ... very end. Once, Gees ... once more, to last me a ... a very long time ... kiss me."

"O, wonder girl—Claire."

She said no more, but lay looking up at him, with that in her eyes which told him of her love, and of a great content. So, as he leaned down toward her, she died.

Chapter 17

Fragments

Before the fireplace in the long room, standing on a hearthrug that Gees saw now for the first time, Sydnor Reed held out a pink slip of paper and said: “The completion of our contract, I think.”

Gees took the slip, glanced at the amount and signature, and then looked steadily at Reed.

“Do you mind if I put this in the fire?” he asked.

“Isn’t that rather an insult?” Reed asked in reply, very coldly.

“It is not meant that way, I assure you. If I could have saved Claire—but I didn’t save her. Probably you won’t understand.”

“Yes, I think I do, now. To prove that I do—put a match to it, and use it to light the fuse. Then you’ll know I appreciate your point of view, and I shall know you understand my blowing up the crypt.”

In the corner of the room nearest the door, the carpet had been rolled back, and now an open trapdoor in the floor was visible with, issuing from it, a snaky black cord of which the end was held from slipping back by a chair leg. Gees folded the thousand-pound cheque to make a spill of it, thrust one end into the fire until the paper was well alight, and then went to the black cord and held the flame against its end. It fizzed and hissed, burning out the core of the fuse: he put the burnt-out end under the chair leg again, and watched the slow travel of the fizzing glow toward the trapdoor’s edge.

“In ten minutes,” he said, “and I know archaeologists who would give their ears to know a perfect horned altar was in existence, and see it. I almost wish I hadn’t told you all that story, now.”

“Too late for wishing,” Reed said sombrely. “And it won’t be ten minutes, but less than five, now. That slow fuse gives place to instantaneous about three feet beyond the edge of the trapdoor.”

"I wonder if it will be possible to see anything from the windows here?" Gees went to the window opposite the fireplace as he spoke, and stood looking out at the ivied ruin of the burnt-out wing of the Hall, and Reed joined him. He turned his head momentarily to ask: "You brought the little gold bowl away, of course?"

"Good Lord, no! I left it in that hole in the altar."

"Ah, well! You can go down after it, if you like. I won't!"

Less than a minute after he had spoken, they heard a dull, booming sound from the direction of the opened trapdoor. Simultaneously with it, the middle part of the tumbled ruins heaved up, like the breast of some vast giant who had taken a deep breath, and then settled again, dragging down the ivy a good yard lower than it had been before.

"If ever Macaulay's Maori comes digging here, the remains of that bowl will puzzle him," Gees remarked. "I think I'll go, now, Reed."

"You'll have lunch with me, surely?"

"I would with pleasure if I felt like lunch, but I don't. That inquest rather upset me—giving evidence over—over what is still a very raw wound to me. I'm a disappointing devil, I know."

"If it hadn't been for you—" Reed said, and did not end it.

"I'll go and get my car out. I've already put my suitcase in it, so—this is good-bye. Perhaps I'll feel better when I see the long road ahead. The sun's coming out again, too."

Reed held out his hand. "You—Claire—I can't say it, Green, but try to understand all I would say—if I could. God bless you, man."

"And what better could you say?" Gees asked, and smiled wryly. "I know. May life smile on you. Good-bye."

Out in the garage, he had opened the car door when the sound of rapid footfalls on the concrete paving of the yard made him pause to look round—with a momentary recollection of feet that had pattered away from the door of the crypt. Gates, facing him, looked troubled; again he had shed his mask of calm, and was more man than butler.

"Mr. Green! Surely you're not going without your lunch, sir?"

"Sorry, Gates. It's very good of you to bother about me. But I don't want lunch—couldn't eat any if I tried. So I'm not trying. May I—with very many thanks for all your kindnesses—"

He tried to hand over three pound notes which he had got out from his pocket. But Gates shook his head.

"If you'll be so good as to overlook my rudeness, sir, I'd rather not. I'd rather have the honour of shaking hands with you, sir, and wishing you all the very best, if I might, instead."

“Well, well, well! I can’t complain, because I’ve just done the same thing myself. All good wishes to you, Gates. Look me up if ever you come to London, and I’ll make you feel you’re welcome.”

E. O. V.

“A cigarette, Miss Brandon?”

“Thank you. Do you want me to begin typing this case to-night, or will it do to-morrow?”

“It can save you from novel-reading to-morrow. I hope—but did you take it down soullessly, or get all the implications of the story?”

“I think I realised it all, Mr. Green.” She spoke very coldly.

“Ah! I had a special reason for dictating it to you immediately I got back here. Did you, in taking it down, realise Claire Lawson?”

“Your view of her—yes. It can only be that, of course. I do realise that she began looking on herself as fated, very soon after you went to Nortonsweir. And then my dream—I see now why it was not you who invited disaster by stepping backward. Someone very near you. Nearer, I think, than you would tell me in dictating.”

“Quite right, Miss Brandon. So near, that in your dream you saw her as me. I don’t see it as disloyal to say that. I regard you as completely in my confidence, about everything.”

“I’m very glad to know it, Mr. Green.”

“So am I. Now tell me one thing. Do you blame her?”

“I don’t understand. Blame—?”

“Leave it. I’ve one other thing to discuss with you—”

“Not quite yet,” she interrupted. “The only time when any one person has a right to blame another is when that one person is capable of so far entering into the other’s mind as to comprehend all the driving forces. That’s rather muddled, but it means in effect that I have no right to blame anyone for any act, unless I can be that one at the time of the commission of the act. That is, never. I may know and say the act is wrong. That’s different altogether.”

“Most lucid—not a bit muddled,” he commented.

“As for this case,” she pursued thoughtfully. “If I had been in her place, cared for a man and known myself fated as she knew, I should have done exactly what she did—what I divine she did, as well as what you have told me.”

“That’s what I hoped you’d say,” he told her. “Another woman’s view point. But then, you’ve got a kinder outlook than most women, probably. Now the other point—the sixteenth of March.”

“My last day here, you mean.”

“Not by a good many, I hope. Which is one reason for my dictating all this case of Nortonsweir-Ferring. I want to bring you more completely into these cases of mine, give you more to do in them, as soon as a chance shows. This is the third time—yes, it is the third—that I’ve come back from an utter fantasy, a set of immaterial unbelievabilities, say, and found you here as a corrective—an incentive to sanity. I suppose I could find someone equally decorative—as you rubbed it in that letter of yours—but I wouldn’t get that combined with your—your insight to me, the quality you have which makes me feel you as much more than a secretary. I want to make you more than that, widen your horizon—as you put it—by giving you more responsibility, if and when the next case comes along. So—can I tear up that resignation of yours and forget it?”

For awhile she sat silent, thinking. Then:

“Suppose we shelve it till after my Easter holiday? Then, if necessary, I could give you time to find a—decorative—successor to me.”

“I wish I’d never made that remark! Can’t we shelve the subject altogether? Not the subject of decorativeness, but of your resigning.”

She sighed, softly.

“I shall be able to tell you better after Easter,” she said.

THE END