

WELLS
CAROLYN

THE GOLD BAG

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I. THE CRIME IN WEST SEDGWICK

Though a young detective, I am not entirely an inexperienced one, and I have several fairly successful investigations to my credit on the records of the Central Office.

The Chief said to me one day: "Burroughs, if there's a mystery to be unravelled; I'd rather put it in your hands than to trust it to any other man on the force.

"Because," he went on, "you go about it scientifically, and you never jump at conclusions, or accept them, until they're indubitably warranted."

I declared myself duly grateful for the Chief's kind words, but I was secretly a bit chagrined. A detective's ambition is to be, considered capable of jumping at conclusions, only the conclusions must always prove to be correct ones.

But though I am an earnest and painstaking worker, though my habits are methodical and systematic, and though I am indefatigably patient and persevering, I can never make those brilliant deductions from seemingly unimportant clues that Fleming Stone can. He holds that it is nothing but observation and logical inference, but to me it is little short of clairvoyance.

The smallest detail in the way of evidence immediately connotes in his mind some important fact that is indisputable, but which would never have occurred to me. I suppose this is largely a natural bent of his brain, for I have not yet been able to achieve it, either by study or experience.

Of course I can deduce some facts, and my colleagues often say I am rather clever at it, but they don't know Fleming Stone as well as I do, and don't realize that by comparison with his talent mine is insignificant.

And so, it is both by way of entertainment, and in hope of learning from him, that I am with him whenever possible, and often ask him to "deduce" for me, even at risk of boring him, as, unless he is in the right mood, my requests sometimes do.

I met him accidentally one morning when we both chanced to go into a basement of the Metropolis Hotel in New York to have our shoes shined.

It was about half-past nine, and as I like to get to my office by ten o'clock, I looked forward to a pleasant half-hour's chat with him. While waiting our turn to get a chair, we stood talking, and, seeing a pair of shoes standing on a table, evidently there to be cleaned, I said banteringly:

"Now, I suppose, Stone, from looking at those shoes, you can deduce all there is to know about the owner of them."

I remember that Sherlock Holmes wrote once, "From a drop of water, a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other," but when I heard Fleming Stone's reply to my half-laughing challenge, I felt that he had outdone the mythical logician. With a mild twinkle in his eye, but with a perfectly grave face, he said slowly,

"Those shoes belong to a young man, five feet eight inches high. He does not live in New York, but is here to visit his sweetheart. She lives in Brooklyn, is five feet nine inches tall, and is deaf in her left ear. They went to the theatre last night, and neither was in evening dress."

"Oh, pshaw!" said I, "as you are acquainted with this man, and know how he spent last evening, your relation of the story doesn't interest me."

"I don't know him," Stone returned; "I've no idea what his name is, I've never seen him, and except what I can read from these shoes I know nothing about him."

I stared at him incredulously, as I always did when confronted by his astonishing "deductions," and simply said,

“Tell this little Missourian all about it.”

“It did sound well, reeled off like that, didn’t it?” he observed, chuckling more at my air of eager curiosity than at his own achievement. “But it’s absurdly easy, after all. He is a young man because his shoes are in the very latest, extreme, not exclusive style. He is five feet eight, because the size of his foot goes with that height of man, which, by the way, is the height of nine out of ten men, any way. He doesn’t live in New York or he wouldn’t be stopping at a hotel. Besides, he would be down-town at this hour, attending to business.”

“Unless he has freak business hours, as you and I do,” I put in.

“Yes, that might be. But I still hold that he doesn’t live in New York, or he couldn’t be staying at this Broadway hotel overnight, and sending his shoes down to be shined at half-past nine in the morning. His sweetheart is five feet nine, for that is the height of a tall girl. I know she is tall, for she wears a long skirt. Short girls wear short skirts, which make them look shorter still, and tall girls wear very long skirts, which make them look taller.”

“Why do they do that?” I inquired, greatly interested.

“I don’t know. You’ll have to ask that of some one wiser than I. But I know it’s a fact. A girl wouldn’t be considered really tall if less than five feet nine. So I know that’s her height. She is his sweetheart, for no man would go from New York to Brooklyn and bring a lady over here to the theatre, and then take her home, and return to New York in the early hours of the morning, if he were not in love with her. I know she lives in Brooklyn, for the paper says there was a heavy shower there last night, while I know no rain fell in New York. I know that they were out in that rain, for her long skirt became muddy, and in turn muddied the whole upper of his left shoe. The fact that only the left shoe is so soiled proves that he walked only at her right side, showing that she must be deaf in her left ear, or he would have walked part of the time on that side. I know that they went to the theatre in New York, because he is still sleeping at this hour, and has sent his boots down to be cleaned, instead of coming down with them on his feet to be shined here. If he had been merely calling on the girl in Brooklyn, he would have been home early, for they do not sit up late in that borough. I know they went to the theatre, instead of to the opera or a ball, for they did not go in a cab, otherwise her skirt would not have become muddied. This, too, shows that she wore a cloth skirt, and as his shoes are not patent leathers, it is clear that neither was in evening dress.”

I didn’t try to get a verification of Fleming Stone’s assertions; I didn’t want any. Scores of times I had known him to make similar deductions and in cases where we afterward learned the facts, he was invariably correct. So, though we didn’t follow up this matter, I was sure he was right, and, even if he hadn’t been, it would not have weighed heavily against his large proportion of proved successes.

We separated then, as we took chairs at some distance from each other, and, with a sigh of regret that I could never hope to go far along the line in which Stone showed such proficiency, I began to read my morning paper.

Fleming Stone left the place before I did, nodding a good-by as he passed me, and a moment after, my own foot-gear being in proper condition, I, too, went out, and went straight to my office.

As I walked the short distance, my mind dwelt on Stone’s quick-witted work. Again I wished that I possessed the kind of intelligence that makes that sort of thing so easy. Although unusual, it is, after all, a trait of many minds, though often, perhaps, unrecognized and undeveloped by its owner. I dare say it lies dormant in men who have never had occasion to realize its value. Indeed, it is of no continuous value to anyone but a detective, and nine detectives out of ten do not possess it.

So I walked along, envying my friend Stone his gift, and reached my office just at ten o’clock as was my almost invariable habit.

“Hurry up, Mr. Burroughs!” cried my office-boy, as I opened the door. “You’re wanted on the telephone.”

Though a respectful and well-mannered boy, some excitement had made him a trifle uncereemonious, and I looked at him curiously as I took up the receiver.

But with the first words I heard, the office-boy was forgotten, and my own nerves received a shock as I listened to the message. It was from the Detective Bureau with which I was connected, and the superintendent himself was directing me to go at once to West Sedgwick, where a terrible crime had just been discovered.

“Killed!” I exclaimed; “Joseph Crawford?”

“Yes; murdered in his home in West Sedgwick. The coroner telephoned to send a detective at once and we want you to go.”

“Of course I’ll go. Do you know any more details?”

“No; only that he was shot during the night and the body found this morning. Mr. Crawford was a big man, you know. Go right off, Mr. Burroughs; we want you to lose no time.”

Yes; I knew Joseph Crawford by name, though not personally, and I knew he was a big man in the business world, and his sudden death would mean excitement in Wall Street matters. Of his home, or home-life, I knew nothing.

“I’ll go right off,” I assured the Chief, and turned away from the telephone to find Donovan, the office-boy, already looking up trains in a timetable.

“Good boy, Don,” said I approvingly; “what’s the next train to West Sedgwick, and how long does it take to get there?”

“You kin s’lect the ten-twenty, Mr. Burruz, if you whirl over in a taxi an’ shoot the tunnel,” said Donovan, who was rather a graphic conversationalist. “That’ll spill you out at West Sedgwick ‘bout quarter of ‘leven. Was he moidered, Mr. Burruz?”

“So they tell me, Don. His death will mean something in financial circles.”

“Yessir. He was a big plute. Here’s your time-table, Mr. Burruz. When’ll you be back?”

“Don’t know, Don. You look after things.”

“Sure! everything’ll be took care of. Lemme know your orders when you have ‘em.”

By means of the taxi Don had called and the tunnel route as he had suggested, I caught the train, satisfied that I had obeyed the Chief’s orders to lose no time.

Lose no time indeed! I was more anxious than any one else could possibly be to reach the scene of the crime before significant clues were obliterated or destroyed by bungling investigators. I had had experience with the police of suburban towns, and I well knew their two principal types. Either they were of a pompous, dignified demeanor, which covered a bewildered ignorance, or else they were overzealous and worked with a misdirected energy that made serious trouble for an intelligent detective. Of course, of the two kinds I preferred the former, but the danger was that I should encounter both.

On my way I diverted my mind, and so partly forgot my impatience, by endeavoring to “deduce” the station or occupation of my fellow passengers.

Opposite me in the tunnel train sat a mild-faced gentleman, and from the general, appearance of his head and hat I concluded he was a clergyman. I studied him unostentatiously and tried to find some indication of the denomination he might belong to, or the character of his congregation, but as I watched, I saw him draw a sporting paper from his pocket, and turning his hand, a hitherto unseen diamond flashed brilliantly from his little finger. I hastily, revised my judgment, and turning slightly observed the man who sat next me. Determined to draw only logical inferences, I scrutinized his coat, that garment being usually highly suggestive to our best regulated detectives. I noticed that while the left sleeve was unworn and in good condition, the right sleeve was frayed at the inside edge, and excessively smooth and shiny on the inner forearm. Also the top button of the coat was very much worn, and the next one slightly.

“A-ha!” said I to myself, “I’ve nailed you, my friend. You’re a desk-clerk, and you write all day long, standing at a desk. The worn top button rubs against your desk as you stand, which it would not do were you seated.”

With a pardonable curiosity to learn if I were right, I opened conversation with the young man. He was not unwilling to respond, and after a few questions I learned, to my chagrin, that he was a photographer. Alas for my deductions! But surely, Fleming Stone himself would not have guessed a photographer from a worn and shiny coat-sleeve. At the risk of being rudely personal, I made some reference to fashions in coats. The young man smiled and remarked incidentally, that owing to certain circumstances he was at the moment wearing his brother's coat.

"And is your brother a desk clerk?" inquired I almost involuntarily:

He gave me a surprised glance, but answered courteously enough, "Yes;" and the conversation flagged.

Exultantly I thought that my deduction, though rather an obvious one, was right; but after another furtive glance at the young man, I realized that Stone would have known he was wearing another's coat, for it was the most glaring misfit in every way.

Once more I tried, and directed my attention to a middle-aged, angular-looking woman, whose strong, sharp-featured face betokened a prim spinster, probably at the head of a girls' school, or engaged in some clerical work. However, as I passed her on my way to leave the train I noticed a wedding-ring on her hand, and heard her say to her companion, "No; I think a woman's sphere is in her own kitchen and nursery. How could I think otherwise, with my six children to bring up?" After these lamentable failures, I determined not to trust much to deduction in the case I was about to investigate, but to learn actual facts from actual evidence.

I reached West Sedgwick, as Donovan had said, at quarter before eleven. Though I had never been there before, the place looked quite as I had imagined it. The railway station was one of those modern attractive structures of rough gray stone, with picturesque projecting roof and broad, clean platforms. A flight of stone steps led down to the roadway, and the landscape in every direction showed the well-kept roads, the well-grown trees and the carefully-tended estates of a town of suburban homes. The citizens were doubtless mainly men whose business was in New York, but who preferred not to live there.

The superintendent must have apprised the coroner by telephone of my immediate arrival, for a village cart from the Crawford establishment was awaiting me, and a smart groom approached and asked if I were Mr. Herbert Burroughs.

A little disappointed at having no more desirable companion on my way to the house, I climbed up beside the driver, and the groom solemnly took his place behind. Not curiosity, but a justifiable desire to learn the main facts of the case as soon as possible, led me to question the man beside me.

I glanced at him first and saw only the usual blank countenance of the well-trained coachman.

His face was intelligent, and his eyes alert, but his impassive expression showed his habit of controlling any indication of interest in people or things.

I felt there would be difficulty in ingratiating myself at all, but I felt sure that subterfuge would not help me, so I spoke directly.

"You are the coachman of the late Mr. Crawford?"

"Yes, sir."

I hadn't really expected more than this in words, but his tone was so decidedly uninviting of further conversation that I almost concluded to say nothing more. But the drive promised to be a fairly long one, so I made another effort.

"As the detective on this case, I wish to hear the story of it as soon as I can. Perhaps you can give me a brief outline of what happened."

It was perhaps my straightforward manner, and my quite apparent assumption of his intelligence, that made the man relax a little and reply in a more conversational tone.

"We're forbidden to chatter, sir," he said, "but, bein' as you're the detective, I s'pose there's no harm. But it's little we know, after all. The master was well and sound last evenin', and this mornin' he was found dead in his own office-chair."

“You mean a private office in his home?”

“Yes, sir. Mr. Crawford went to his office in New York ‘most every day, but days when he didn’t go, and evenin’s and Sundays, he was much in his office at home, sir.”

“Who discovered the tragedy?”

“I don’t rightly know, sir, if it was Louis, his valet, or Lambert, the butler, but it was one or t’other, sir.”

“Or both together?” I suggested.

“Yes, sir; or both together.”

“Is any one suspected of the crime?”

The man hesitated a moment, and looked as if uncertain what to reply, then, as he set his jaw squarely, he said:

“Not as I knows on, sir.”

“Tell me something of the town,” I observed next, feeling that it was better to ask no more vital questions of a servant.

We were driving along streets of great beauty. Large and handsome dwellings, each set in the midst of extensive and finely-kept grounds, met the view on either aide. Elaborate entrances opened the way to wide sweeps of driveway circling green velvety lawns adorned with occasional shrubs or flower-beds. The avenues were wide, and bordered with trees carefully set out and properly trimmed. The streets were in fine condition, and everything betokened a community, not only wealthy, but intelligent and public-spirited. Surely West Sedgwick was a delightful location for the homes of wealthy New York business men.

“Well, sir,” said the coachman, with unconcealed pride, “Mr. Crawford was the head of everything in the place. His is the handsomest house and the grandest grounds. Everybody respected him and looked up to him. He hadn’t an enemy in the world.”

This was an opening for further conjecture as to the murderer, and I said: “But the man who killed him must have been his enemy.”

“Yes, sir; but I mean no enemy that anybody knew of. It must have been some burglar or intruder.”

Though I wanted to learn such facts as the coachman might know, his opinions did not interest me, and I again turned my attention to the beautiful residences we were passing.

“That place over there,” the man went on, pointing with his whip, “is Mr. Philip Crawford’s house—the brother of my master, sir. Them red towers, sticking up through the trees, is the house of Mr. Lemuel Porter, a great friend of both the Crawford brothers. Next, on the left, is the home of Horace Hamilton, the great electrician. Oh, Sedgwick is full of well-known men, sir, but Joseph Crawford was king of this town. Nobody’ll deny that.”

I knew of Mr. Crawford’s high standing in the city, and now, learning of his local preeminence, I began to think I was about to engage in what would probably be a very important case.

II. THE CRAWFORD HOUSE

“Here we are, sir,” said the driver, as we turned in at a fine stone gateway. “This is the Joseph Crawford place.”

He spoke with a sort of reverent pride, and I afterward learned that his devotion to his late master was truly exceptional.

This probably prejudiced him in favor of the Crawford place and all its appurtenances, for, to me, the estate was not so magnificent as some of the others we had passed. And yet, though not so large, I soon realized that every detail of art or architecture was perfect in its way, and that it was really a gem of a country home to which I had been brought.

We drove along a curving road to the house, passing well-arranged flower beds, and many valuable trees and shrubs. Reaching the porte cochere the driver stopped, and the groom sprang down to hand me out.

As might be expected, many people were about. Men stood talking in groups on the veranda, while messengers were seen hastily coming or going through the open front doors.

A waiting servant in the hall at once ushered me into a large room.

The effect of the interior of the house impressed me pleasantly. As I passed through the wide hall and into the drawing-room, I was conscious of an atmosphere of wealth tempered by good taste and judgment.

The drawing-room was elaborate, though not ostentatious, and seemed well adapted as a social setting for Joseph Crawford and his family. It should have been inhabited by men and women in gala dress and with smiling society manners.

It was therefore a jarring note when I perceived its only occupant to be a commonplace looking man, in an ill-cut and ill-fitting business suit. He came forward to greet me, and his manner was a trifle pompous as he announced, “My name is Monroe, and I am the coroner. You, I think, are Mr. Burroughs, from New York.”

It was probably not intentional, and may have been my imagination, but his tone seemed to me amusingly patronizing.

“Yes, I am Mr. Burroughs,” I said, and I looked at Mr. Monroe with what I hoped was an expression that would assure him that our stations were at least equal.

I fear I impressed him but slightly, for he went on to tell me that he knew of my reputation as a clever detective, and had especially desired my attendance on this case. This sentiment was well enough, but he still kept up his air and tone of patronage, which however amused more than irritated me.

I knew the man by hearsay, though we had never met before; and I knew that he was of a nature to be pleased with his own prominence as coroner, especially in the case of so important a man as Joseph Crawford.

So I made allowance for this harmless conceit on his part, and was even willing to cater to it a little by way of pleasing him. He seemed to me a man, honest, but slow of thought; rather practical and serious, and though overvaluing his own importance, yet not opinionated or stubborn.

“Mr. Burroughs,” he said, “I’m very glad you could get here so promptly; for the case seems to me a mysterious one, and the value of immediate investigation cannot be overestimated.”

“I quite agree with you,” I returned. “And now will you tell me the principal facts, as you know them, or will you depute some one else to do so?”

“I am even now getting a jury together,” he said, “and so you will be able to hear all that the witnesses may say in their presence. In the meantime, if you wish to visit the scene of the crime, Mr. Parmalee will take you there.”

At the sound of his name, Mr. Parmalee stepped forward and was introduced to me. He proved to be a local detective, a young man who always attended Coroner Monroe on occasions like the present; but who, owing to the rarity of such occasions in West Sedgwick, had had little experience in criminal investigation.

He was a young man of the type often seen among Americans. He was very fair, with a pink complexion, thin, yellow hair and weak eyes. His manner was nervously alert, and though he often began to speak with an air of positiveness, he frequently seemed to weaken, and wound up his sentences in a floundering uncertainty.

He seemed to be in no way jealous of my presence there, and indeed spoke to me with an air of comradeship.

Doubtless I was unreasonable, but I secretly resented this. However I did not show my resentment and endeavored to treat Mr. Parmalee as a friend and co-worker.

The coroner had left us together, and we stood in the drawing-room, talking, or rather he talked and I listened. Upon acquaintance he seemed to grow more attractive. He was impulsive and jumped at conclusions, but he seemed to have ideas, though they were rarely definitely expressed.

He told me as much as he knew of the details of the affair and proposed that we go directly to the scene of the crime.

As this was what I was impatient to do, I consented.

"You see, it's this way," he said, in a confidential whisper, as we traversed the long hall: "there is no doubt in any one's mind as to who committed the murder, but no name has been mentioned yet, and nobody wants to be the first to say that name. It'll come out at the inquest, of course, and then—"

"But," I interrupted, "if the identity of the murderer is so certain, why did they send for me in such haste?"

"Oh, that was the coroner's doing. He's a bit inclined to the spectacular, is Monroe, and he wants to make the whole affair as important as possible."

"But surely, Mr. Parmalee, if you are certain of the criminal it is very absurd for me to take up the case at all."

"Oh, well, Mr. Burroughs, as I say, no name has been spoken yet. And, too, a big case like this ought to have a city detective on it. Even if you only corroborate what we all feel sure of, it will prove to the public mind that it must be so."

"Tell me then, who is your suspect?"

"Oh, no, since you are here you had better investigate with an unprejudiced mind. Though you cannot help arriving at the inevitable conclusion."

We had now reached a closed door, and, at Mr. Parmalee's tap, were admitted by the inspector who was in charge of the room.

It was a beautiful apartment, far too rich and elaborate to be designated by the name of "office," as it was called by every one who spoke of it; though of course it was Mr. Crawford's office, as was shown by the immense table-desk of dark mahogany, and all the other paraphernalia of a banker's work-room, from ticker to typewriter.

But the decorations of walls and ceilings, the stained glass of the windows, the pictures, rugs, and vases, all betokened luxurious tastes that are rarely indulged in office furnishings. The room was flooded with sunlight. Long French windows gave access to a side veranda, which in turn led down to a beautiful terrace and formal garden. But all these things were seen only in a hurried glance, and then my eyes fell on the tragic figure in the desk chair.

The body had not been moved, and would not be until after the jury had seen it, and though a ghastly sight, because of a bullet-hole in the left temple, otherwise it looked much as Mr. Crawford must have looked in life.

A handsome man, of large physique and strong, stern face, he must have been surprised, and killed instantly; for surely, given the chance, he would have lacked neither courage nor strength to grapple with an assailant.

I felt a deep impulse of sympathy for that splendid specimen of humanity, taken unawares, without having been given a moment in which to fight for his life, and yet presumably seeing his murderer, as he seemed to have been shot directly from the front.

As I looked at that noble face, serene and dignified in its death pallor, I felt glad that my profession was such as might lead to the avenging of such a detestable crime.

And suddenly I had a revulsion of feeling against such petty methods as deductions from trifling clues.

Moreover I remembered my totally mistaken deductions of that very morning. Let other detectives learn the truth by such claptrap means if they choose. This case was too large and too serious to be allowed to depend on surmises so liable to be mistaken. No, I would search for real evidence, human testimony, reliable witnesses, and so thorough, systematic, and persevering should my search be, that I would finally meet with success.

"Here's the clue," said Parmelee's voice, as he grasped my arm and turned me in another direction.

He pointed to a glittering article on the large desk.

It was a woman's purse, or bag, of the sort known as "gold-mesh." Perhaps six inches square, it bulged as if overcrowded with some feminine paraphernalia.

"It's Miss Lloyd's," went on Parmelee. "She lives here, you know—Mr. Crawford's niece. She's lived here for years and years."

"And you suspect her?" I said, horrified.

"Well, you see, she's engaged to Gregory Hall he's Mr. Crawford's secretary—and Mr. Crawford didn't approve of the match; and so—"

He shrugged his shoulders in a careless fashion, as if for a woman to shoot her uncle were an everyday affair.

But I was shocked and incredulous, and said so.

"Where is Miss Lloyd?" I asked. "Does she claim ownership of this gold bag?"

"No; of course not," returned Parmelee. "She's no fool, Florence Lloyd isn't! She's locked in her room and won't come out. Been there all the morning. Her maid says this isn't Miss Lloyd's bag, but of course she'd say that."

"Well, that question ought to be easily settled. What's in the bag?"

"Look for yourself. Monroe and I ran through the stuff, but there's nothing to say for sure whose bag it is."

I opened the pretty bauble, and let the contents fall out on the desk.

A crumpled handkerchief, a pair of white kid gloves, a little trinket known as a "vanity case," containing a tiny mirror and a tinier powder puff; a couple of small hair-pins, a newspaper clipping, and a few silver coins were all that rewarded my trouble.

Nothing definite, indeed, and yet I knew if Fleming Stone could look at the little heap of feminine belongings, he would at once tell the fair owner's age, height, and weight, if not her name and address.

I had only recently assured myself that such deductions were of little or no use, and yet, I could not help minutely examining the pretty trifles lying on the desk. I scrutinized the handkerchief for a monogram or an initial, but it had none. It was dainty, plain and fine, of sheer linen, with a narrow hem. To me it indicated an owner of a refined, feminine type, and absolutely nothing more. I couldn't help thinking that even Fleming Stone could not infer any personal characteristics of the lady from that blank square of linen.

The vanity case I knew to be a fad of fashionable women, and had that been monogrammed, it might have proved a clue. But, though pretty, it was evidently not of any great value, and was merely such a trifle as the average woman would carry about.

And yet I felt exasperated that with so many articles to study, I could learn nothing of the individual to whom they belonged. The gloves were hopeless. Of a good quality and a medium size, they seemed to tell me nothing. They were but slightly soiled, and apparently might have been worn once or twice. They had never been cleaned, as the inside showed no scrawled hieroglyphics. But all of these conclusions pointed nowhere save to the average well-groomed American woman.

The hair-pins and the silver money were equally bare of suggestion, but I hopefully picked up the bit of newspaper.

"Surely this newspaper clipping must throw some light," I mused, but it proved to be only the address of a dyeing and cleaning establishment in New York City.

"This is being taken care of?" I said, and the burly inspector, who up to now had not spoken, said:

"Yes, sir! Nobody touches a thing in this: room while I'm here. You, sir, are of course an exception, but no one else is allowed to meddle with anything."

This reminded me that as the detective in charge of this case, it was my privilege—indeed, my duty—to examine the papers and personal effects that were all about, in an effort to gather clues for future use.

I was ignorant of many important details, and turned to Parmelee for information.

That young man however, though voluble, was, inclined to talk on only one subject, the suspected criminal, Miss Florence Lloyd.

"You see, it must be her bag. Because who else could have left it here? Mrs. Pierce, the only other lady in the house, doesn't carry a youngish bag like that. She'd have a black leather bag, more likely, or a— or a—"

"Well, it really doesn't matter what kind of a bag Mrs. Pierce would carry," said I, a little impatiently; "the thing is to prove whether this is Miss Lloyd's bag or not. And as it is certainly not a matter of conjecture, but a matter of fact, I think we may leave it for the present, and turn our attention to other matters."

I could see that Parmelee was disappointed that I had made no startling deductions from my study of the bag and its contents, and, partly owing to my own chagrin at this state of affairs, I pretended to consider the bag of little consequence, and turned hopefully to an investigation of the room.

The right-hand upper drawer of the double-pedestalled desk was open. Seemingly, Mr. Crawford had been engaged with its contents during the latter moments of his life.

At a glance, I saw the drawer contained exceedingly valuable and important papers.

With an air of authority, intentionally exaggerated for the purpose of impressing Parmelee, I closed the drawer, and locked it with the key already in the keyhole.

This key was one of several on a key-ring, and, taking it from its place, I dropped the whole bunch in my pocket. This action at once put me in my rightful place. The two men watching me unconsciously assumed a more deferential air, and, though they said nothing, I could see that their respect for my authority had increased.

Strangely enough, after this episode, a new confidence in my own powers took possession of me, and, shaking off the apathy that had come over me at sight of that dread figure in the chair, I set methodically to work to examine the room.

Of course I noted the position of the furniture, the state of the window-fastenings, and such things in a few moments. The many filing cabinets and indexed boxes, I glanced at, and locked those that had keys or fastenings.

The inspector sat with folded hands watching me with interest but saying nothing. Parmalee, on the other hand, kept up a running conversation, sometimes remarking lightly on my actions, and again returning to the subject of Miss Lloyd.

"I can see," he said, "that you naturally dislike to suspect a woman, and a young woman too. But you don't know Miss Lloyd. She is haughty and wilful. And as I told you, nobody has mentioned her yet in this connection. But I am speaking to you alone, and I have no reason to mince matters. And you know Florence Lloyd is not of the Crawford stock. The Crawfords are a fine old family, and not one of them could be capable of crime. But Miss Lloyd is on the other side of the house, a niece of Mrs. Crawford; and I've heard that the Lloyd stock is not all that could be desired. There is a great deal in heredity, and she may not be responsible..."

I paid little attention to Parmalee's talk, which was thrown at me in jerky, desultory sentences, and interested me not at all. I went on with my work of investigation, and though I did not get down on my knees and examine every square inch of the carpet with a lens, yet I thoroughly examined all of the contents of the room. I regret to say, however, that I found nothing that seemed to be a clue to the murderer.

Stepping out on the veranda, I looked for footprints. The "light snow" usually so helpful to a detective had not fallen, as it was April, and rather warm for the season. But I found many heel marks, apparently of men's boots; yet they were not necessarily of very recent date, and I don't think much of foot-print clues, anyhow.

Then I examined the carpet, or, rather, the several rugs which ornamented the beautiful polished floor.

I found nothing but two petals of a pale yellow rose. They were crumpled, but not dry or withered, and could not have been long detached from the blossom on which they grew.

Parmalee chanced to have his back toward me as I spied them, and I picked them up and put them away in my pocket-book without his knowledge. If the stolid inspector saw me, he made no sign. Indeed, I think he would have said nothing if I had carried off the big desk itself. I looked round the room for a bouquet or vase of flowers from which the petals might have fallen, but none was there.

This far I had progressed when I heard steps in the hall, and a moment later the coroner ushered the six gentlemen of his jury into the room.

III. THE CORONER'S JURY

It was just as the men came in at the door, that I chanced to notice a newspaper that lay on a small table. I picked it up with an apparent air of carelessness, and, watching my chance, unobserved by Parmalee, I put the paper away in a drawer, which I locked.

The six men, whom Coroner Monroe named over to me, by way of a brief introduction, stepped silently as they filed past the body of their late friend and neighbor.

For the jurymen had been gathered hastily from among the citizens of West Sedgwick who chanced to be passing; and as it was after eleven o'clock, they were, for the most part, men of leisure, and occupants of the handsome homes in the vicinity.

Probably none of them had ever before been called to act on a coroner's jury, and all seemed impressed with the awfulness of the crime, as well as imbued with a personal sense of sorrow.

Two of the jurors had been mentioned to me by name, by the coachman who brought me from the station. Horace Hamilton and Lemuel Porter were near-by neighbors of the murdered man, and; I judged from their remarks, were rather better acquainted with him than were the others.

Mr. Hamilton was of the short, stout, bald-headed type, sometimes called aldermanic. It was plainly to be seen that his was a jocund nature, and the awe which he felt in this dreadful presence of death, though clearly shown on his rubicund face, was evidently a rare emotion with him. He glanced round the room as if expecting to see everything there materially changed, and though he looked toward the figure of Mr. Crawford now and then, it was with difficulty, and he averted his eyes as quickly as possible. He was distinctly nervous, and though he listened to the remarks of Coroner Monroe and the other jurors, he seemed impatient to get away.

Mr. Porter, in appearance, was almost the exact reverse of Mr. Hamilton. He was a middle-aged man with the iron gray hair and piercing dark eyes that go to make up what is perhaps the handsomest type of Americans. He was a tall man, strong, lean and sinewy, with a bearing of dignity and decision. Both these men were well-dressed to the point of affluence, and, as near neighbor and intimate friends of the dead man, they seemed to prefer to stand together and a little apart from the rest.

Three more of the jurors seemed to me not especially noticeable in any way. They looked as one would expect property owners in West Sedgwick to look. They listened attentively to what Mr. Monroe said, asked few or no questions, and seemed appalled at the unusual task they had before them.

Only one juror impressed me unpleasantly. That was Mr. Orville, a youngish man, who seemed rather elated at the position in which he found himself. He fingered nearly everything on the desk; he peered carefully into the face of the victim of the crime, and he somewhat ostentatiously made notes in a small Russia leather memorandum book.

He spoke often to the coroner, saying things which seemed to me impertinent, such as, "Have you noticed the blotter, Mr. Coroner? Very often, you know, much may be learned from the blotter on a man's desk."

As the large blotter in question was by no means fresh, indeed was thickly covered with ink impressions, and as there was nothing to indicate that Mr. Crawford had been engaged in writing immediately before his death, Mr. Orville's suggestion was somewhat irrelevant. And, too, the jurors were not detectives seeking clues, but were now merely learning the known facts.

However, Mr. Orville fussed around, even looking into the wastebasket, and turning up a corner of a large rug as if ferreting for evidence.

The others exhibited no such minute curiosity, and, after a few moments, they followed the coroner out of the room.

Then the doctor and his assistants came to take the body away, and I went in search of Coroner Monroe, eager for further information concerning the case, of which I really, as yet, knew but little.

Parmalee went with me and we found Mr. Monroe in the library, quite ready to talk with us.

“Mr. Orville seems to possess the detective instinct himself,” observed Mr. Parmalee, with what seemed like a note of jealousy in his tone.

“The true detective mind,” returned Mr. Monroe, with his slow pomposity, “is not dependent on instinct or intuition.”

“Oh, I think it is largely dependent on that,” I said, “or where does it differ from the ordinary inquiring mind?”

“I’m sure you will agree with me, Mr. Burroughs,” the coroner went on, almost as if I had not spoken, “that it depends upon a nicely adjusted mentality that is quick to see the cause back of an effect.”

To me this seemed a fair definition of intuition, but there was something in the unctuous roll of Mr. Monroe’s words that made me positive he was quoting his somewhat erudite speech, and had not himself a perfectly clear comprehension of its meaning.

“It’s guessing,” declared Parmalee, “that’s all it is, guessing. If you guess right, you’re a famous detective; if you guess wrong, you’re a dub. That’s all there is about it.”

“No, no, Mr. Parmalee,”—and Mr. Monroe slowly shook his finger at the rash youth—“what you call guessing is really divination. Yes, my dear sir, it is actual divination.”

“To my mind,” I put in, “detective divination is merely minute observation. But why do we quibble over words and definitions when there is much work to be done? When is the formal inquest to be held, Mr. Monroe?”

“This afternoon at two o’clock,” he replied.

“Then I’ll go away now,” I said, “for I must find an abiding place for myself in West Sedgwick. There is an inn, I suppose.”

“They’ll probably ask you to stay here,” observed Coroner Monroe, “but I advise you not to do so. I think you’ll be freer and less hampered in your work if you go to the inn.”

“I quite agree with you,” I replied. “But I see little chance of being invited to stay here. Where is the family? Who are in it?”

“Not many. There is Miss Florence Lloyd, a niece of Mr. Crawford. That is, she is the niece of his wife. Mrs. Crawford has been dead many years, and Miss Lloyd has kept house for her uncle all that time. Then there is Mrs. Pierce, an elderly lady and a distant relative of Mr. Crawford’s. That is all, except the secretary, Gregory Hall, who lives here much of the time. That is, he has a room here, but often he is in New York or elsewhere on Mr. Crawford’s business.”

“Mr. Crawford had an office both here and in New York?” I asked.

“Yes; and of late years he has stayed at home as much as possible. He went to New York only about three or four days in the week, and conducted his business from here the rest of the time. Young Hall is a clever fellow, and has been Mr. Crawford’s righthand man for years.”

“Where is he now?”

“We think he’s in New York, but haven’t yet been able to locate him at Mr. Crawford’s office there, or at his club. He is engaged to Miss Lloyd, though I understand that the engagement is contrary to Mr. Crawford’s wishes.”

“And where is Miss Lloyd,—and Mrs. Pierce?”

“They are both in their rooms. Mrs. Pierce is prostrated at the tragedy, and Miss Lloyd simply refuses to make her appearance.”

“But she’ll have to attend the inquest?”

“Oh, yes, of course. She’ll be with us then. I think I won’t say anything about her to you, as I’d rather you’d see her first with entirely unprejudiced eyes.”

“So you, too, think Miss Lloyd is implicated?”

“I don’t think anything about it, Mr. Burroughs. As coroner it is not my place to think along such lines.”

“Well, everybody else thinks so,” broke in Parmalee. “And why? Because there’s no one else for suspicion to light on. No one else who by any possibility could have done the deed.”

“Oh, come now, Mr. Parmalee,” said I, “there must be others. They may not yet have come to our notice, but surely you must admit an intruder could have come into the room by way of those long, open windows.”

“These speculations are useless, gentlemen,” said Mr. Monroe, with his usual air of settling the matter. “Cease then, I beg, or at least postpone them. If you are walking down the avenue, Mr. Parmalee, perhaps you’ll be good enough to conduct Mr. Burroughs to the Sedgwick Arms, where he doubtless can find comfortable accommodations.”

I thanked Mr. Monroe for the suggestion, but said, straightforwardly enough, that I was not yet quite ready to leave the Crawford house, but that I would not detain Mr. Parmalee, for I could myself find my way to the inn, having noticed it on my drive from the train.

So Parmalee went away, and I was about to return to Mr. Crawford’s office where I hoped to pursue a little uninterrupted investigation.

But Mr. Monroe detained me a moment, to present me to a tall, fine-looking man who had just come in.

He proved to be Philip Crawford, a brother of Joseph, and I at once observed a strong resemblance between their two faces.

“I am glad to meet you, Mr. Burroughs,” he said. “Mr. Monroe tells me you are a clever and experienced detective, and I trust you can help us to avenge this dastardly crime. I am busy with some important matters just now, but later I shall be glad to confer with you, and be of any help I can in your investigation.”

I looked at Mr. Philip Crawford curiously. Of course I didn’t expect him to give way to emotional grief, but it jarred on me to hear him refer to his brother’s tragic death in such cold tones, and with such a businesslike demeanor.

However, I realized I did not know the man at all, and this attitude might be due to his effort in concealing his real feelings.

He looked very like his brother Joseph, and I gathered from the appearance of both men, and the manner of Philip, that the Crawford nature was one of repression and self-control. Moreover, I knew nothing of the sentiments of the two brothers, and it might easily be that they were not entirely in sympathy.

I thanked him for his offer of help, and then as he volunteered no further observations, I excused myself and proceeded alone to the library.

As I entered the great room and closed the door behind me, I was again impressed by the beauty and luxury of the appointments. Surely Joseph Crawford must have been a man of fine calibre and refined tastes to enjoy working in such an atmosphere. But I had only two short hours before the inquest, and I had many things to do, so for the moment I set myself assiduously to work examining the room again. As in my first examination, I did no microscopic scrutinizing; but I looked over the papers on and in the desk, I noted conditions in the desk of Mr. Hall, the secretary, and I paid special attention to the position of the furniture and windows, my thoughts all directed to an intruder from outside on Mr. Crawford’s midnight solitude.

I stepped through the long French window on to the veranda, and after a thorough examination of the veranda, I went on down the steps to the gravel walk. Against a small rosebush, just off the walk, I saw a small slip of pink paper. I picked it up, hardly daring to hope it might be a clue, and I saw it was a trolley transfer, whose punched holes indicated that it had been issued the evening before. It might or might not be important as evidence, but I put it carefully away in my note-book for later consideration.

Returning to the library I took the newspaper which I had earlier discovered from the drawer where I had hidden it, and after one more swift but careful glance round the room, I went away, confident that I had not done my work carelessly.

I left the Crawford house and walked along the beautiful avenue to the somewhat pretentious inn bearing the name of Sedgwick Arms.

Here, as I had been led to believe, I found pleasant, even luxurious accommodations. The landlord of the inn was smiling and pleasant, although landlord seems an old-fashioned term to apply to the very modern and up-to-date man who received me.

His name was Carstairs, and he had the genial, perceptive manner of a man about town.

"Dastardly shame!" he exclaimed, after he had assured himself of my identity. "Joseph Crawford was one of our best citizens, one of our finest men. He hadn't an enemy in the world, my dear Mr. Burroughs—not an enemy! generous, kindly nature, affable and friendly with all."

"But I understand he frowned on his ward's love affair, Mr. Carstairs."

"Yes; yes, indeed. And who wouldn't? Young Hall is no fit mate for Florence Lloyd. He's a fortune-hunter. I know the man, and his only ambition is the aggrandizement of his own precious self."

"Then you don't consider Miss Lloyd concerned in this crime?"

"Concerned in crime? Florence Lloyd! why, man, you must be crazy! The idea is unthinkable!"

I was sorry I had spoken, but I remembered too late that the suspicions which pointed toward Miss Lloyd were probably known only to those who had been in the Crawford house that morning. As for the townspeople in general, though they knew of the tragedy, they knew very little of its details.

I hastened to assure Mr. Carstairs that I had never seen Miss Lloyd, that I had formed no opinions whatever, and that I was merely repeating what were probably vague and erroneous suspicions of mistakenly-minded people.

At last, behind my locked door, I took from my pocket the newspaper I had brought from Mr. Crawford's office.

It seemed to me important, from the fact that it was an extra, published late the night before.

An Atlantic liner had met with a serious accident, and an extra had been hastily put forth by one of the most enterprising of our evening papers. I, myself, had bought one of these extras, about midnight; and the finding of a copy in the office of the murdered man might prove a clue to the criminal.

I then examined carefully the transfer slip I had picked up on the Crawford lawn. It had been issued after nine o'clock the evening before. This seemed to me to prove that the holder of that transfer must have been on the Crawford property and near the library veranda late last night, and it seemed to me that this was plain common-sense reasoning, and not mere intuition or divination. The transfer might have a simple and innocent explanation, but until I could learn of that, I should hold it carefully as a possible clue.

IV. THE INQUEST

Shortly before two o'clock I was back at the Crawford house and found the large library, where the inquest was to be held, already well filled with people. I took an inconspicuous seat, and turned my attention first to the group that comprised, without a doubt, the members of Mr. Crawford's household.

Miss Lloyd—for I knew at a glance the black-robed young woman must be she—was of a striking personality. Tall, large, handsome, she could have posed as a model for Judith, Zenobia, or any of the great and powerful feminine characters in history. I was impressed not so much by her beauty as by her effect of power and ability. I had absolutely no reason, save Parmalee's babblings, to suspect this woman of crime, but I could not rid myself of a conviction that she had every appearance of being capable of it.

Yet her face was full of contradictions. The dark eyes were haughty, even imperious; but the red, curved mouth had a tender expression, and the chin, though firm and decided-looking, yet gave an impression of gentleness.

On the whole, she fascinated me by the very mystery of her charm, and I found my eyes involuntarily returning again and again to that beautiful face.

She was dressed in a black, trailing gown of material which I think is called China crepe. It fell around her in soft waving folds and lay in little billows on the floor. Her dark hair was dressed high on her head, and seemed to form a sort of crown which well suited her regal type. She held her head high, and the uplift of her chin seemed to be a natural characteristic.

Good birth and breeding spoke in every phase of her personality, and in her every movement and gesture. I remembered Parmalee's hint of unworthy ancestors, and cast it aside as impossible of belief. She spoke seldom, but occasionally turned to the lady at her side with a few murmured words that were indubitably those of comfort or encouragement.

Her companion, a gray-haired, elderly lady, was, of course, Mrs. Pierce. She was trembling with the excitement of the occasion, and seemed to depend on Florence Lloyd's strong personality and affectionate sympathy to keep her from utter collapse.

Mrs. Pierce was of the old school of gentlewomen. Her quiet, black gown with its crepe trimmings, gave, even to my masculine eye an effect of correct and fashionable, yet quiet and unostentatious mourning garb.

She had what seemed to me a puzzling face. It did not suggest strength of character, for the soft old cheeks and quivering lips indicated no strong self-control, and yet from her sharp, dark eyes she now and again darted glances that were unmistakably those of a keen and positive personality.

I concluded that hers was a strong nature, but shaken to its foundation by the present tragedy. There was, without doubt, a great affection existing between her and Miss Lloyd, and yet I felt that they were not in each other's complete confidence.

Though, for that matter, I felt intuitively that few people possessed the complete confidence of Florence Lloyd. Surely she was a wonderful creature, and as I again allowed myself to gaze on her beautiful face I was equally convinced of the possibility of her committing a crime and the improbability of her doing so.

Near these two sat a young man who, I was told, was Gregory Hall, the secretary. He had been reached by telephone, and had come out from New York, arriving shortly after I had left the Crawford house.

Mr. Hall was what may be termed the average type of young American citizens. He was fairly good-looking, fairly well-groomed, and so far as I could judge from his demeanor, fairly well-bred. His dark hair was commonplace, and parted on the side, while his small, carefully arranged mustache was commonplace also. He looked exactly what he was, the trusted secretary of a financial magnate,

and he seemed to me a man whose dress, manner, and speech would always be made appropriate to the occasion or situation. In fact, so thoroughly did he exhibit just such a demeanor as suited a confidential secretary at the inquest of his murdered employer, that I involuntarily thought what a fine undertaker he would have made. For, in my experience, no class of men so perfectly adapt themselves to varying atmospheres as undertakers.

Philip Crawford and his son, an athletic looking young chap, were also in this group. Young Crawford inherited to a degree the fine appearance of his father and uncle, and bade fair to become the same kind of a first-class American citizen as they.

Behind these people, the ones most nearly interested in the procedure, were gathered the several servants of the house.

Lambert, the butler, was first interviewed.

The man was a somewhat pompous, middle-aged Englishman, and though of stolid appearance, his face showed what might perhaps be described as an intelligent stupidity.

After a few formal questions as to his position in the household, the coroner asked him to tell his own story of the early morning.

In a more clear and concise way than I should have thought the man capable of, he detailed his discovery of his master's body.

"I came down-stairs at seven this morning," he said, "as I always do. I opened the house, I saw the cook a few moments about matters pertaining to breakfast, and I attended to my usual duties. At about half-past seven I went to Mr. Crawford's office, to set it in order for the day, and as I opened the door I saw him sitting in his chair. At first I thought he'd dropped asleep there, and been there all night, then in a moment I saw what had happened."

"Well, what did you do next?" asked the coroner, as the man paused.

"I went in search of Louis, Mr. Crawford's valet. He was just coming down the stairs. He looked surprised, for he said Mr. Crawford was not in his room, and his bed hadn't been slept in."

"Did he seem alarmed?"

"No, sir. Not knowing what I knew, he didn't seem alarmed. But he seemed agitated, for of course it was most unusual not finding Mr. Crawford in his own room."

"How did Louis show his agitation?" broke in Mr. Orville.

"Well, sir, perhaps he wasn't to say agitated,—he looked more blank, yes, as you might say, blank."

"Was he trembling?" persisted Mr. Orville, "was he pale?" and the coroner frowned slightly at this juror's repeated inquisitiveness.

"Louis is always pale," returned the butler, seeming to make an effort to speak the exact truth.

"Then of course you couldn't judge of his knowledge of the matter," Mr. Orville said, with an air of one saying something of importance.

"He had no knowledge of the matter, if you mean Mr. Crawford's death," said Lambert, looking disturbed and a little bewildered.

"Tell your own story, Lambert," said Coroner Monroe, rather crisply. "We'll hear what Louis has to say later."

"Well, sir, then I took Louis to the office, and we both saw the—the accident, and we wondered what to do. I was for telephoning right off to Doctor Fairchild, but Louis said first we'd better tell Miss Florence about it."

"And did you?"

"We went out in the hall, and just then Elsa, Miss Lloyd's maid, was on the stairs. So we told her, and told her to tell Miss Lloyd, and ask her for orders. Well, her orders was for us to call up Doctor Fairchild, and so we did. He came as soon as he could, and he's been in charge ever since, sir."

“A straightforward story, clearly told,” observed the coroner, and then he called upon Louis, the valet. This witness, a young Frenchman, was far more nervous and excited than the calm-mannered butler, but the gist of his story corroborated Lambert’s.

Asked if he was not called upon to attend his master at bedtime, he replied,

“Non, M’sieu; when Monsieur Crawford sat late in his library, or his office, he dismiss me and say I may go to bed, or whatever I like. Almost always he tell me that.”

“And he told you this last night?”

“But yes. When I lay out his clothes for dinner, he then tell me so.”

Although the man seemed sure enough of his statements he was evidently troubled in his mind. It might have been merely that his French nature was more excitable than the stolid indifference of the English butler. But at the same time I couldn’t help feeling that the man had not told all he knew. This was merely surmise on my part, and I could not persuade myself that there was enough ground for it to call it even an intuition. So I concluded it best to ask no questions of the valet at present, but to look into his case later.

Parmalee, however, seemed to have concluded differently. He looked at Louis with an intent gaze as he said, “Had your master said or done anything recently to make you think he was despondent or troubled in any way?”

“No, sir,” said the man; but the answer was not spontaneous, and Louis’s eyes rolled around with an expression of fear. I was watching him closely myself, and I could not help seeing that against his will his glance sought always Florence Lloyd, and though he quickly averted it, he was unable to refrain from furtive, fleeting looks in her direction.

“Do you know anything more of this matter than you have told us?” inquired the coroner of the witness.

“No, sir,” replied Louis, and this time he spoke as with more certainty. “After Lambert and I came out of Mr. Crawford’s office, we did just exactly as Lambert has tell you.”

“That’s all, Louis.... But, Lambert, one other matter. Tell us all you know of Mr. Joseph Crawford’s movements last evening.”

“He was at dinner, as usual, sir,” said the butler, in his monotonous drawl. “There were no guests, only the family. After dinner Mr. Crawford went out for a time. He returned about nine o’clock. I saw him come in, with his own key, and I saw him go to his office. Soon after Mr. Porter called.”

“Mr. Lemuel Porter?” asked the coroner.

“Yes, sir,” said the butler; and Mr. Porter, who was one of the jurors, gravely nodded his head in acquiescence.

“He stayed until about ten, I should say,” went on the butler, and again Mr. Porter gave an affirmative nod. “I let him out myself,” went on Lambert, “and soon after that I went to the library to see if Mr. Crawford had any orders for me. He told me of some household matters he wished me to attend to to-day, and then he said he would sit up for some time longer, and I might go to bed if I liked. A very kind and considerate man, sir, was Mr. Crawford.”

“And did you then go to bed?”

“Yes, sir. I locked up all the house, except the office. Mr. Crawford always locks those windows himself, when he sits up late. The ladies had already gone to their rooms; Mr. Hall was away for the night, so I closed up the front of the house, and went to bed. That’s all I know about the matter, sir—until I came down-stairs this morning.”

“You heard no sound in the night—no revolver shot?”

“No, sir. But my room is on the third floor, and at the other end of the house, sir. I couldn’t hear a shot fired in the office, I’m sure, sir.”

“And you found no weapon of any sort in the office this morning?”

“No, sir; Louis and I both looked for that, but there was none in the room. Of that I’m sure, sir.”

“That will do, Lambert.”

“Yes, sir; thank you, sir.”

“One moment,” said I, wishing to know the exact condition of the house at midnight. “You say, Lambert, you closed up the front of the house. Does that mean there was a back door open?”

“It means I locked the front door, sir, and put the chain on. The library door opening on to the veranda I did not lock, for, as I said, Mr. Crawford always locks that and the windows in there when he is there late. The back door I left on the night latch, as Louis was spending the evening out.”

“Oh, Louis was spending the evening out, was he?” exclaimed Mr. Orville. “I think that should be looked into, Mr. Coroner. Louis said nothing of this in his testimony.”

Coroner Monroe turned again to Louis and asked him where he was the evening before.

The man was now decidedly agitated, but by an effort he controlled himself and answered steadily enough:

“I have tell you that Mr. Crawford say I may go wherever I like. And so, last evening I spend with a young lady.”

“At what time did you go out?”

“At half after the eight, sir.”

“And what time did you return?”

“I return about eleven.”

“And did you then see a light in Mr. Crawford’s office?”

Louis hesitated a moment. It could easily be seen that he was pausing only to enable himself to speak naturally and clearly, but it was only after one of those darting glances at Miss Lloyd that he replied:

“I could not see Mr. Crawford’s office, because I go around the other side of the house. I make my entree by the back door; I go straight to my room, and I know nothing of my master until I go to his room this morning and find him not there.”

“Then you didn’t go to his room last night on your return?”

“As I pass his door, I see it open, and his light low, so I know he is still below stair.”

“And you did not pass by the library on your way round the house?”

Louis’s face turned a shade whiter than usual, but he said distinctly, though in a low voice, “No, sir.”

An involuntary gasp as of amazement was heard, and though I looked quickly at Miss Lloyd, it was not she who had made the sound. It was one of the maidservants, a pretty German girl, who sat behind Miss Lloyd. No one else seemed to notice it, and I realized it was not surprising that the strain of the occasion should thus disturb the girl.

“You heard Louis come in, Lambert?” asked Mr. Monroe, who was conducting the whole inquiry in a conversational way, rather than as a formal inquest.

“Yes, sir; he came in about eleven, and went directly to his room.”

The butler stood with folded hands, a sad expression in his eyes, but with an air of importance that seemed to be inseparable from him, in any circumstances.

Doctor Fairchild was called as the next witness.

He testified that he had been summoned that morning at about quarter before eight o’clock. He had gone immediately to Mr. Crawford’s house, was admitted by the butler, and taken at once to the office. He found Mr. Crawford dead in his chair, shot through the left temple with a thirty-two calibre revolver.

“Excuse me,” said Mr. Lemuel Porter, who, with the other jurors, was listening attentively to all the testimony. “If the weapon was not found, how do you know its calibre?”

“I extracted the bullet from the wound,” returned Doctor Fairchild, “and those who know have pronounced it to be a ball fired from a small pistol of thirty-two calibre.”

“But if Mr. Crawford had committed suicide, the pistol would have been there,” said Mr. Porter; who seemed to be a more acute thinker than the other jurymen.

“Exactly,” agreed the coroner. “That’s why we must conclude that Mr. Crawford did not take his own life.”

“Nor would he have done so,” declared Doctor Fairchild. “I have known the deceased for many years. He had no reason for wishing to end his life, and, I am sure, no inclination to do so. He was shot by an alien hand, and the deed was probably committed at or near midnight.”

“Thus we assume,” the coroner went on, as the doctor finished his simple statement and resumed his seat, “that Mr. Crawford remained in his office, occupied with his business matters, until midnight or later, when some person or persons came into his room, murdered him, and went away again, without making sufficient noise or disturbance to arouse the sleeping household.”

“Perhaps Mr. Crawford himself had fallen asleep in his chair,” suggested one of the jurors,—the Mr. Orville, who was continually taking notes in his little book.

“It is possible,” said the doctor, as the remark was practically addressed to him, “but not probable. The attitude in which the body was found indicates that the victim was awake, and in full possession of his faculties. Apparently he made no resistance of any sort.”

“Which seems to show,” said the coroner, “that his assailant was not a burglar or tramp, for in that case he would surely have risen and tried to put him out. The fact that Mr. Crawford was evidently shot by a person standing in front of him, seems to imply that that person’s attitude was friendly, and that the victim had no suspicion of the danger that threatened him.”

This was clear and logical reasoning, and I looked at the coroner in admiration, until I suddenly remembered Parmalee’s hateful suspicion and wondered if Coroner Monroe was preparing for an attack upon Miss Lloyd.

Gregory Hall was summoned next.

He was self-possessed and even cool in his demeanor. There was a frank manner about him that pleased me, but there was also a something which repelled me.

I couldn’t quite explain it to myself, but while he had an air of extreme straightforwardness, there was also an indefinable effect of reserve. I couldn’t help feeling that if this man had anything to conceal, he would be quite capable of doing so under a mask of great outspokenness.

But, as it turned out, he had nothing either to conceal or reveal, for he had been away from West Sedgwick since six o’clock the night before, and knew nothing of the tragedy until he heard of it by telephone at Mr. Crawford’s New York office that morning about half-past ten. This made him of no importance as a witness, but Mr. Monroe asked him a few questions.

“You left here last evening, you say?”

“On the six o’clock train to New York, yes.”

“For what purpose?”

“On business for Mr. Crawford.”

“Did that business occupy you last evening?”

Mr. Hall looked surprised at this question, but answered quietly

“No; I was to attend to the business to-day. But I often go to New York for several days at a time.”

“And where were you last evening?” pursued the coroner.

This time Mr. Hall looked more surprised still, and said

“As it has no bearing on the matter in hand, I prefer not to answer that rather personal question.”

Mr. Monroe looked surprised in his turn, and said: “I think I must insist upon an answer, Mr. Hall, for it is quite necessary that we learn the whereabouts of every member of this household last evening.”

“I cannot agree with you, sir,” said Gregory Hall, coolly; “my engagements for last evening were entirely personal matters, in no way connected with Mr. Crawford’s business. As I was not in

West Sedgwick at the time my late employer met his death, I cannot see that my private affairs need be called into question.”

“Quite so, quite so,” put in Mr. Orville; but Lemuel Porter interrupted him.

“Not at all so. I agree with Mr. Monroe, that Mr. Hall should frankly tell us where he spent last evening.”

“And I refuse to do so,” said Mr. Hall, speaking not angrily, but with great decision.

“Your refusal may tend to direct suspicion toward yourself, Mr. Hall,” said the coroner.

Gregory Hall smiled slightly. “As I was out of town, your suggestion sounds a little absurd. However, I take that risk, and absolutely refuse to answer any questions save those which relate to the matter in hand.”

Coroner Monroe looked rather helplessly at his jurors, but as none of them said anything further, he turned again to Gregory Hall.

“The telephone message you received this morning, then, was the first knowledge you had of Mr. Crawford’s death?”

“It was.”

“And you came out here at once?”

“Yes; on the first train I could catch.”

“I am sorry you resent personal questions, Mr. Hall, for I must ask you some. Are you engaged to Mr. Crawford’s niece, Miss Lloyd?”

“I am.”

This answer was given in a low, quiet tone, apparently without emotion of any kind, but Miss Lloyd showed, a different attitude. At the words of Gregory Hall, she blushed, dropped her eyes, fingered her handkerchief nervously, and evinced just such embarrassment as might be expected from any young woman, in the event of a public mention of her betrothal. And yet I had not looked for such an exhibition from Florence Lloyd. Her very evident strength of character would seem to preclude the actions of an inexperienced debutante.

“Did Mr. Crawford approve of your engagement to his niece?” pursued Mr. Monroe.

“With all due respect, Mr. Coroner,” said Gregory Hall, in his subdued but firm way, “I cannot think these questions are relevant or pertinent. Unless you can assure me that they are, I prefer not to reply.”

“They are both relevant and pertinent to the matter in hand, Mr. Hall; but I am now of the opinion that they would better be asked of another witness. You are excused. I now call Miss Florence Lloyd.”

V. FLORENCE LLOYD

A stir was perceptible all through the room as Miss Lloyd acknowledged by a bow of her beautiful head the summons of the coroner.

The jurors looked at her with evident sympathy and admiration, and I remembered that as they were fellow-townsmen and neighbors they probably knew the young woman well, and she was doubtless a friend of their own daughters.

It seemed as if such social acquaintance must prejudice them in her favor, and perhaps render them incapable of unbiased judgment, should her evidence be incriminating. But in my secret heart, I confess, I felt glad of this. I was glad of anything that would keep even a shadow of suspicion away from this girl to whose fascinating charm I had already fallen a victim.

Nor was I the only one in the room who dreaded the mere thought of Miss Lloyd's connection with this horrible matter.

Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Porter were, I could see, greatly concerned lest some mistaken suspicion should indicate any doubt of the girl. I could see by their kindly glances that she was a favorite, and was absolutely free from suspicion in their minds.

Mr. Orville had not quite the same attitude. Though he looked at Miss Lloyd admiringly, I felt sure he was alertly ready to pounce upon anything that might seem to connect her with a guilty knowledge of this crime.

Gregory Hall's attitude was inexplicable, and I concluded I had yet much to learn about that young man. He looked at Miss Lloyd critically, and though his glance could not be called quite unsympathetic, yet it showed no definite sympathy. He seemed to be coldly weighing her in his own mental balance, and he seemed to await whatever she might be about to say with the impartial air of a disinterested judge. Though a stranger myself, my heart ached for the young woman who was placed so suddenly in such a painful position, but Gregory Hall apparently lacked any personal interest in the case.

I felt sure this was not true, that he was not really so unconcerned as he appeared; but I could not guess why he chose to assume an impassive mask.

Miss Lloyd had not risen as it was not required of her, and she sat expectant, but with no sign of nervousness. Mrs. Pierce, her companion, was simply quivering with agitation. Now and again she would touch Miss Lloyd's shoulder or hand, or whisper a word of encouragement, or perhaps wring her own hands in futile despair.

Of course these demonstrations were of little avail, nor did it seem as if Florence Lloyd needed assistance or support.

She gave the impression not only of general capability in managing her own affairs, but of a special strength in an emergency.

And an emergency it was; for though the two before-mentioned jurors, who had been intimate friends of her uncle, were doubtless in sympathy with Miss Lloyd, and though the coroner was kindly disposed toward her, yet the other jurors took little pains to conceal their suspicious attitude, and as for Mr. Parmalee, he was fairly eager with anticipation of the revelations about to come.

"Your name?" said the corner briefly, as if conquering his own sympathy by an unnecessarily formal tone.

"Florence Lloyd," was the answer.

"Your position in this house?"

"I am the niece of Mrs. Joseph Crawford, who died many years ago. Since her death I have lived with Mr. Crawford, occupying in every respect the position of his daughter, though not legally adopted as such."

"Mr. Crawford was always kind to you?"

“More than kind. He was generous and indulgent, and, though not of an affectionate nature, he was always courteous and gentle.”

“Will you tell us of the last time you saw him alive?”

Miss Lloyd hesitated. She showed no embarrassment, no trepidation; she merely seemed to be thinking.

Her gaze slowly wandered over the faces of the servants, Mrs. Pierce, Mr. Philip Crawford, the jurors, and, lastly, dwelt for a moment on the now anxious, worried countenance of Gregory Hall.

Then she said slowly, but in an even, unemotional voice: “It was last night at dinner. After dinner was over, my uncle went out, and before he returned I had gone to my room.”

“Was there anything unusual about his appearance or demeanor at dinner-time?”

“No; I noticed nothing of the sort.”

“Was he troubled or annoyed about any matter, that you know of?”

“He was annoyed about one matter that has been annoying him for some time: that is, my engagement to Mr. Hall.”

Apparently this was the answer the coroner had expected, for he nodded his head in a satisfied way.

The jurors, too, exchanged intelligent glances, and I realized that the acquaintances of the Crawfords were well informed as to Miss Lloyd’s romance.

“He did not approve of that engagement?” went on the coroner, though he seemed to be stating a fact, rather than asking a question.

“He did not,” returned Miss Lloyd, and her color rose as she observed the intense interest manifest among her hearers.

“And the subject was discussed at the dinner table?”

“It was.”

“What was the tenor of the conversation?”

“To the effect that I must break the engagement.”

“Which you refused to do?”

“I did.”

Her cheeks were scarlet now, but a determined note had crept into her voice, and she looked at her betrothed husband with an air of affectionate pride that, it seemed to me, ought to lift any man into the seventh heaven. But I noted Mr. Hall’s expression with surprise. Instead of gazing adoringly at this girl who was thus publicly proving her devotion to him, he sat with eyes cast down, and frowning—positively frowning—while his fingers played nervously with his watch-chain.

Surely this case required my closest attention, for I place far more confidence in deductions from facial expression and tones of the voice, than from the discovery of small, inanimate objects.

And if I chose to deduce from facial expressions I had ample scope in the countenances of these two people.

I was particularly anxious not to jump at an unwarrantable conclusion, but the conviction was forced upon me then and there that these two people knew more about the crime than they expected to tell. I certainly did not suspect either of them to be touched with guilt, but I was equally sure that they were not ingenuous in their testimony.

While I knew that they were engaged, having heard it from both of them, I could not think that the course of their love affair was running smoothly. I found myself drifting into idle speculation as to whether this engagement was more desired by one than the other, and if so, by which.

But though I could not quite understand these two, it gave me no trouble to know which I admired more. At the moment, Miss Lloyd seemed to me to represent all that was beautiful, noble and charming in womanhood, while Gregory Hall gave me the impression of a man crafty, selfish and undependable. However, I fully realized that I was theorizing without sufficient data, and determinedly I brought my attention back to the coroner’s catalogue of questions.

“Who else heard this conversation, besides yourself, Miss Lloyd?”

“Mrs. Pierce was at the table with us, and the butler was in the room much of the time.”

The purport of the coroner’s question was obvious. Plainly he meant that she might as well tell the truth in the matter, as her testimony could easily be overthrown or corroborated.

Miss Lloyd deliberately looked at the two persons mentioned. Mrs. Pierce was trembling as with nervous apprehension, but she looked steadily at Miss Lloyd, with eyes full of loyalty and devotion.

And yet Mrs. Pierce was a bit mysterious also. If I could read her face aright, it bore the expression of one who would stand by her friend whatever might come. If she herself had had doubts of Florence Lloyd’s integrity, but was determined to suppress them and swear to a belief in her, she would look just as she did now.

On the other hand the butler, Lambert, who stood with folded arms, gazed straight ahead with an inscrutable countenance, but his set lips and square jaw betokened decision.

As I read it, Miss Lloyd knew, as she looked, that should she tell an untruth about that talk at the dinner-table, Mrs. Pierce would repeat and corroborate her story; but Lambert would refute her, and would state veraciously what his master had said. Clearly, it was useless to attempt a false report, and, with a little sigh, Miss Lloyd seemed to resign herself to her fate, and calmly awaited the coroner’s further questions.

But though still calm, she had lost her poise to some degree. The lack of responsive glances from Gregory Hall’s eyes seemed to perplex her. The eager interest of the six jurymen made her restless and embarrassed. The coroner’s abrupt questions frightened her, and I feared her self-enforced calm must sooner or later give way.

And now I noticed that Louis, the valet, was again darting those uncontrollable glances toward her. And as the agitated Frenchman endeavored to control his own countenance, I chanced to observe that the pretty-faced maid I had noticed before, was staring fixedly at Louis. Surely there were wheels within wheels, and the complications of this matter were not to be solved by the simple questions of the coroner. But of course this preliminary examination was necessary, and it was from this that I must learn the main story, and endeavor to find out the secrets afterward.

“What was your uncle’s response when you refused to break your engagement to Mr. Hall?” was the next inquiry.

Again Miss Lloyd was silent for a moment, while she directed her gaze successively at several individuals. This time she favored Mr. Randolph, who was Mr. Crawford’s lawyer, and Philip Crawford, the dead man’s brother. After looking in turn at these two, and glancing for a moment at Philip Crawford’s son, who sat by his side, she said, in a lower voice than she had before used,

“He said he would change his will, and leave none of his fortune to me.”

“His will, then, has been made in your favor?”

“Yes; he has always told me I was to be sole heiress to his estate, except for some comparatively small bequests.”

“Did he ever threaten this proceeding before?”

“He had hinted it, but not so definitely.”

“Did Mr. Hall know of Mr. Crawford’s objection to his suit?”

“He did.”

“Did he know of your uncle’s hints of disinheritance?”

“He did.”

“What was his attitude in the matter?”

Florence Lloyd looked proudly at her lover.

“The same as mine,” she said. “We both regretted my uncle’s protest, but we had no intention of letting it stand in the way of our happiness.”

Still Gregory Hall did not look at his fiancée. He sat motionless, preoccupied, and seemingly lost in deep thought, oblivious to all that was going on.

Whether his absence from Sedgwick at the time of the murder made him feel that he was in no way implicated, and so the inquiry held no interest for him; or whether he was looking ahead and wondering whither these vital questions were leading Florence Lloyd, I had no means of knowing. Certainly, he was a man of most impassive demeanor and marvellous self-control.

“Then, in effect, you defied your uncle?”

“In effect, I suppose I did; but not in so many words. I always tried to urge him to see the matter in a different light.”

“What was his objection to Mr. Hall as your husband?”

“Must I answer that?”

“Yes; I think so; as I must have a clear understanding of the whole affair.”

“Well, then, he told me that he had no objection to Mr. Hall, personally. But he wished me to make what he called a more brilliant alliance. He wanted me to marry a man of greater wealth and social position.”

The scorn in Miss Lloyd’s voice for her uncle’s ambitions was so unmistakable that it made her whole answer seem a compliment to Mr. Hall, rather than the reverse. It implied that the sterling worth of the young secretary was far more to be desired than the riches and rank advocated by her uncle. This time Gregory Hall looked at the speaker with a faint smile, that showed appreciation, if not adoration.

But I did not gather from his attitude that he did not adore his beautiful bride-to-be; I only concluded that he was not one to show his feelings in public.

However, I couldn’t help feeling that I had learned which of the two was more anxious for the engagement to continue.

“In what way was your uncle more definite in his threat last night, than he had been heretofore?” the coroner continued.

Miss Lloyd gave a little gasp, as if the question she had been dreading had come at last. She looked at the inexorable face of the butler, she looked at Mr. Randolph, and then flashed a half-timid glance at Hall, as she answered,

“He said that unless I promised to give up Mr. Hall, he would go last night to Mr. Randolph’s and have a new will drawn up.”

“Did he do so?” exclaimed Gregory Hall, an expression almost of fear appearing on his commonplace face.

Miss Lloyd looked at him, and seemed startled. Apparently his sudden question had surprised her.

Mr. Monroe paid no attention to Mr. Hall’s remark, but said to Miss Lloyd, “He had made such threats before, had he not?”

“Yes, but not with the same determination. He told me in so many words, I must choose between Mr. Hall or the inheritance of his fortune.”

“And your answer to this?”

“I made no direct answer. I had told him many times that I had no intention of breaking my engagement, whatever course he might choose to pursue.”

Mr. Orville was clearly delighted with the turn things were taking. He already scented a sensation, and he scribbled industriously in his rapidly filling note-book.

This habit of his disgusted me, for surely the jurors on this preliminary inquest could come to their conclusions without a detailed account of all these conversations.

I also resented the looks of admiration which Mr. Orville cast at the beautiful girl. It seemed to me that with the exception of Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Porter, who were family friends, the jurors should have maintained a formal and impersonal attitude.

Mr. Hamilton spoke directly to Miss Lloyd on the subject.

"I am greatly surprised," he said, "that Mr. Crawford should take such a stand. He has often spoken to me of you as his heiress, and to my knowledge, your engagement to Mr. Hall is not of immediately recent date."

"No," said Miss Lloyd, "but it is only recently that my uncle expressed his disapprobation so strongly; and last night at dinner was the first time he positively stated his intention in regard to his will."

At this Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Porter conversed together in indignant whispers, and it was quite evident that they did not approve of Mr. Crawford's treatment of his niece.

Mr. Philip Crawford looked astounded, and also dismayed, which surprised me, as I had understood that had it not been for Miss Lloyd, he himself would have been his brother's heir.

Mr. Randolph showed only a lawyer-like, noncommittal expression, and Gregory Hall, too, looked absolutely impassive.

The coroner grew more alert, as if he had discovered something of definite import, and asked eagerly,

"Did he do so? Did he go to his lawyer's and make another will?"

Miss Lloyd's cold calm had returned, and seemed to rebuke the coroner's excited interest.

"I do not know," she replied. "He went out after dinner, as I have told you, but I retired to my bedroom before he came home."

"And you did not come down-stairs again last night?"

"I did not."

The words were spoken in a clear, even tone; but something made me doubt their truth. It was not the voice or inflection; there was no hesitation or stammer, but a sudden and momentary droop of Miss Lloyd's eyelids seemed to me to give the lie to her words.

I wondered if Gregory Hall had the same thought, for he slowly raised his own eyes and looked at her steadily for the first time since her testimony began.

She did not look at him. Instead, she was staring at the butler. Either she had reason to fear his knowledge, or I was fanciful. With an endeavor to shake off these shadows of suspicion, I chanced to look at Parmalee. To my disgust, he was quite evidently gloating over the disclosures being made by the witness. I felt my anger rise, and I determined then and there that if suspicion of guilt or complicity should by any chance unjustly light on that brave and lovely girl, I would make the effort of my life to clear her from it.

"You did not come down again," the coroner went on pointedly, "to ask your uncle if he had changed his will?"

"No, I did not," she replied, with such a ring of truth in her scornful voice, that my confidence returned, and I truly believed her.

"Then you were not in your uncle's office last evening at all?"

"I was not."

"Nor through the day?"

She reflected a moment. "No, nor through the day. It chanced I had no occasion to go in there yesterday at all."

At these assertions of Miss Lloyd's, the Frenchman, Louis, looked greatly disturbed. He tried very hard to conceal his agitation, but it was not at all difficult to read on his face an endeavor to look undisturbed at what he heard.

I hadn't a doubt, myself, that the man either knew something that would incriminate Miss Lloyd, or that they two had a mutual knowledge of some fact as yet concealed.

I was surprised that no one else seemed to notice this, but the attention of every one in the room was concentrated on the coroner and the witness, and so Louis's behavior passed unnoticed.

At this juncture, Mr. Lemuel Porter spoke with some dignity.

“It would seem,” he said, “that this concludes Miss Lloyd’s evidence in the matter. She has carried the narrative up to the point where Mr. Joseph Crawford went out of his house after dinner. As she herself retired to her room before his return, and did not again leave her room until this morning, she can have nothing further to tell us bearing on the tragedy. And as it is doubtless a most painful experience for her, I trust, Mr. Coroner, that you will excuse her from further questioning.”

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