Tracy Louis

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
A GATHERING AT A CLUB

That story of love and crime which figures in the records of the New York Detective Bureau as "The Yacht Mystery" has little to do with yachts and is no longer a mystery. It is concerned far more intimately with the troubles and trials of pretty Winifred Bartlett than with the vagaries of the restless sea; the alert, well-groomed figure of Winifred's true lover, Rex Carshaw, fills its pages to the almost total exclusion of the portly millionaire who owned the *Sans Souci*. Yet, such is the singular dominance exercised by the trivial things of life over the truly important ones, some hundreds of thousands of people in the great city on the three rivers will recall many episodes of the nine days' wonder known to them as "The Yacht Mystery" though they may never have heard of either Winifred or Rex.

It began simply, as all major events do begin, and, of course, at the outset, neither of these two young people seemed to have the remotest connection with it.

On the evening of October 5, 1913 – that is the date when

the first entry appears in the diary of Mr. James Steingall, chief of the Bureau – the stream of traffic in Fifth Avenue was interrupted to an unusual degree at a corner near Forty-second Street. The homeward-bound throng going up-town and the equally dense crowd coming down-town to restaurants and theater-land merely chafed at a delay which they did not understand, but the traffic policeman knew exactly what was going on, and kept his head and his temper.

A few doors down the north side of the cross street a famous club was ablaze with lights. Especially did three great windows on the first floor send forth hospitable beams, for the spacious room within was the scene of an amusing revel. Mr. William Pierpont Van Hofen, ex-commodore of the New York Yacht Club, owner of the *Sans Souci*, and multi-millionaire, had just astonished his friends by one of the eccentric jests for which he was famous.

The *Sans Souci*, notable the world over for its size, speed, and fittings, was going out of commission for the winter. Van Hofen had marked the occasion by widespread invitations to a dinner at his club, "to be followed by a surprise party," and the nature of the "surprise" was becoming known. Each lady had drawn by lot the name of her dinner partner, and each couple was then presented with a sealed envelope containing tickets for one or other of the many theaters in New York. Thus, not only were husbands, wives, eligible bachelors, and smart débutantes inextricably mixed up, but none knew whither the oddly assorted pairs were bound, since the envelopes were not to be opened until

the meal reached the coffee and cigarette stage.

There existed, too, a secret within a secret. Seven men were bidden privately to come on board the *Sans Souci*, moored in the Hudson off the Eighty-sixth Street landing-stage, and there enjoy a quiet session of auction bridge.

"We'll duck before the trouble gets fairly started," explained Van Hofen to his cronies. "You'll see how the bunch is sorted out at dinner, but the tangle then will be just one cent in the dollar to the pandemonium when they find out where they're going."

Of course, everybody was acquainted with everybody else, or the joke might have been in bad taste. Moreover, as the gathering was confined exclusively to the elect of New York society, the host had notified the Detective Bureau, and requested the presence of one of their best men outside the club shortly before eight o'clock. None realized better than he that where the carcass is there the vultures gather, and he wanted no untoward incident to happen during the confusion which must attend the departure of so many richly bejeweled ladies accompanied by unexpected cavaliers.

Thus it befell that Detective-Inspector Clancy was detailed for the job. Steingall and he were the "inseparables" of the Bureau, yet no two members of a marvelously efficient service were more unlike, physically and mentally. Steingall was big, blond, muscular, a genial giant whose qualities rendered him almost popular among the very criminals he hunted, whereas those same desperadoes feared the diminutive Clancy, the little,

slight, dark-haired sleuth of French-Irish descent. He, they were aware instinctively, read their very souls before Steingall's huge paw clutched their quaking bodies.

Idle chance alone decided that Clancy should undertake the half-hour's vigil at the up-town club that evening. All unknowing, he became thereby the controlling influence in many lives.

At eight o'clock an elderly man emerged from the building and edged his way through the cheery, laughing people already grouped about the doorway and awaiting automobiles. Mr. William Meiklejohn might have been branded with the word "Senator," so typical was he of the upper house at Washington. The very cut of his clothes, the style of his shoes, the glossiness of his hat, even the wide expanse of pearl-studded white linen marked him as a person of consequence.

A uniformed policeman, striving to keep the pavement clear of loiterers, recognized and saluted him. The salute was returned, though its recipient's face seemed to be gloomy, preoccupied, almost disturbed. Therefore he did not notice a gaunt, angular-jawed woman – one whose carriage and attire suggested better days long since passed – who had been peering eagerly at the revellers pouring out of the club, and now stepped forward impetuously as if to intercept him.

She failed. The policeman barred her progress quietly but effectually, and the woman, if bent on achieving her purpose, must have either called after the absorbed Meiklejohn or entered into a heated altercation with the policeman when accident came

to her aid.

Mrs. Ronald Tower, strikingly handsome, richly gowned and cloaked, with an elaborate coiffure that outvied nature's best efforts, was crossing the pavement to enter a waiting car when she stopped and drew her hand from her escort's arm.

"Senator Meiklejohn!" she cried.

The elderly man halted. He doffed his hat with a flourish.

"Ah, Helen," he said smilingly. "Whither bound?"

"To see Belasco's latest. Isn't that lucky? The very thing I wanted. Poor Ronald! I don't know what has become of him, or into what net he may have fallen."

The Senator beamed. He knew that Ronald Tower was one of the eight bridge-players, but was pledged to secrecy.

"I only hailed you to jog your memory about that luncheon to-morrow," went on Mrs. Tower.

"How could I forget?" he retorted gallantly. "Only two hours ago I postponed a business appointment on account of it."

"So good of you, Senator," and Mrs. Tower's smile lent a tinge of sarcasm to the words. "I'm awfully anxious that you should meet Mr. Jacob. I'm deeply interested, you know."

Meiklejohn glanced rather sharply at the lady's companion, who, however, was merely a vacuous man about town. It struck Clancy that the Senator resented this incautious using of names. The shabby-genteel woman, hovering behind the policeman, was following the scene with hawklike eyes, and Clancy kept her, too, under close observation.

The Senator coughed, and lowered his voice.

"I shall be most pleased to discuss matters with him," he said. "It will be a pleasure to render him a service if you ask it."

Mrs. Tower laughed lightly. "One o'clock," she said. "Don't be late! Come along, Mr. Forrest. Your car is blocking the way."

Mr. Meiklejohn flourished his hat again. He turned and found himself face to face with the hard-featured woman who had been waiting and watching for this very opportunity. She barred his further progress – even caught his arm.

Had the Senator been assaulted by the blue-coated guardian of law and order he could not have displayed more bewilderment.

"You, Rachel?" he gasped.

The policeman was about to intervene, but it was the Senator, not the shabbily dressed woman, who prevented him.

"It's all right, officer," he stammered vexedly. "I know this lady. She is an old friend."

The man saluted again and drew aside. Clancy moved a trifle nearer. No one would take notice of such an insignificant little man. Though he had his back to this strangely assorted pair, he heard nearly every syllable they uttered.

"He is here," snapped the woman without other preamble. "You must see him."

"It is quite impossible," was the answer, and, though the words were frigid and unyielding, Clancy felt certain that Senator Meiklejohn had to exercise an iron self-control to keep a tremor out of his utterance.

"You dare not refuse," persisted the woman.

The Senator glanced around in a scared way. Clancy thought for an instant that he meant to dart back into the security of the club. After an irresolute pause, however, he moved somewhat apart from the crowd of sightseers. The two stood together on the curb, and clear of the flood of light pouring through the open doors. Clancy edged after them. He gathered a good deal, not all, of what they said, as both voices were harsh and tinged with excitement.

"This very night," the woman was saying. "Bring at least five hundred dollars – If the police… Says he will confess everything… Do you get me? This thing can't wait."

The Senator did not even try now to conceal his agitation. He looked at the gaping mob, but it was wholly absorbed in the stream of fashionable people pouring out of the club, while the snorting of scores of automobiles created a din which meant comparative safety.

"Yes, yes," he muttered. "I understand. I'll do anything in reason. I'll give *you* the money, and you – "

"No. He means seeing you. You need not be afraid. He says you are going to Mr. Van Hofen's yacht at nine o'clock – "

"Good Lord!" broke in Meiklejohn, "how can he possibly know that?" Again he peered at the press of onlookers. A dapper little man who stood near was raised on tiptoe and craning his neck to catch a glimpse of a noted beauty who had just appeared.

"Oh, pull yourself together!" and there was a touch of scorn in

the woman's manner as she reassured this powerfully built man. "Isn't he clever and fertile in device? Haven't the newspapers announced your presence on the *Sans Souci*? And who will stop a steward's tongue from wagging? At any rate, he knows. He will be on the Hudson in a small boat, with one other man. At nine o'clock he will come close to the landing-stage at Eighty-sixth Street. There is a lawn north of the clubhouse, he says. Walk to the end of it and you will find him. You can have a brief talk. Bring the money in an envelope."

"On the lawn – at nine!" repeated the Senator in a dazed way.

"Yes. What better place could he choose? You see, he is willing to play fair and be discreet. But, quick! I must have your answer. Time is passing. Do you agree?"

"What is the alternative?"

"Capture, and a mad rage. Then others will share in his downfall."

"Very well. I'll be there. I'll not fail him, or you."

"He says it's his last request. He has some scheme – "

"Ah, his schemes! If only I could hope that this will be the end!"

"That is his promise."

The woman dropped the conversation abruptly. She darted through the line of cars and made off in the direction of Sixth Avenue. Senator Meiklejohn gazed after her dubiously, but her tall figure was soon lost in the traffic. Then, with bent head, and evidently a prey to harassing thoughts, he crossed Fifth Avenue.

Clancy sauntered after him, and saw him enter a block of residential flats in a side street. Then the detective strolled back to the club.

Most of Van Hofen's guests had gone. The policeman grinned and muttered in Clancy's ear:

"The Senator's a giddy guy. Two of 'em at wanst. Mrs. Tower's a good-looker, but I didn't think much of the other wan."

Clancy nodded. His black and beady eyes had just clashed with those of a notorious crook, who suddenly remembered an urgent appointment elsewhere.

Fifteen minutes later Senator Meiklejohn returned. He entered the club without being waylaid a second time. Clancy consulted his watch.

"Keep a sharp lookout here, Mac," he said, *sotto voce*. "While I was away just now Broadway Jim showed up. He's got cold feet, and there'll be nothing more doing to-night, I think. Anyhow, I'm going up-town."

In Fifth Avenue he boarded a Riverside Drive bus. The weather was mild, and he mounted to the roof.

"Now, who in the world will Senator Meiklejohn meet on the landing-stage?" he mused. "Seems to me the chief may be interested. Five hundred dollars, too! I wonder!"

CHAPTER II
A DARING CRIME

It was no part of Detective Clancy's business to pry into the private affairs of Senator Meiklejohn. Senators are awkward fish to handle, being somewhat similar to whales caught in nets designed to capture mackerel. But the Bureau is no respecter of persons. Men much higher up in politics and finance than William Meiklejohn would be disagreeably surprised if they could read certain details entered opposite their names in the *dossiers* kept by the police department. Still, it behooved Clancy to tread warily.

As it happened, he was just the man for this self-imposed duty. Two Celtic strains mingled in his blood, while American birth and training had not only quickened his intelligence but imparted a quality of wide-eyed shrewdness to a daring initiative. When he and the bluff Steingall worked together the malefactor on whose heels they pressed had a woeful time. As one blood-stained rascal put it in a bitter moment before the electric chair claimed him for the expiation of his last and worst crime:

"Them two guys give a reg'lar fellow no chanst. When they're trailin' you every road leads straight to Sing Sing. The big guy has a punch like Jess Willard, an' the lil 'un a nose like a Montana wolf."

It was Clancy's nose for the more subtle elements in crime which brought him to the small châlet on the private pier at the foot of Eighty-sixth Street that night. He could not guess what game he might flush, but he was keen as a bloodhound in the chase.

Meanwhile, Senator Meiklejohn encountered Ronald Tower the moment he re-entered the palatial club. By this time he seemed to have regained his customary air of geniality, being one of those rather uncommon men whose apparent characteristics are never so marked as when they are acting a part.

"H'lo, Ronnie," he cried affably, "I met Helen as she left for the theater. She has an inquiring mind, but I headed her off. By the way, will you be at this luncheon to-morrow?"

"Not I," laughed Tower. "I'm barred. She says I have no head for business, and some deep-laid plan for filling the family coffers is in hand."

The Senator obviously disliked these outspoken references to money-making. He squirmed, but smiled as though Tower had made an excellent joke.

"Try and get the ukase lifted," he urged. "I want you to be there."

"Nothing doing," and the other grinned. "Helen says I resemble you in everything but brain power, Senator. I'm a good-looker as a husband, but a poor mutt in Wall Street."

They laughed at the conceit. The two men were curiously alike in face and figure, though a close observer like Clancy

would have classed them as opposite as the poles in character and temperament. Meiklejohn's features were cast in the stronger mold. They showed lines which Ronald Tower's placid existence would never produce. The Senator was suave, too. He seldom pressed a point to the limit.

"Helen's good opinion is doubly flattering," he said. "She is a bright woman, and knows how to command her friends."

Tower glanced at a clock in the hall.

"Time we were off," he announced. "Come with me. I'm taking Johnny Bell, I think."

"Sorry. I have an important letter to write. But I'll join before the crowd cuts in."

The Senator hurried up-stairs. He must take the journey alone, and snatch an opportunity to attend that mysterious rendezvous while the *Sans Souci's* gig was ferrying some of the bridge-players to the yacht.

Owing to a slight misunderstanding Tower missed the other man, and traveled alone in his car. On that trivial circumstance hinged events which not only affected many lives but disturbed New York society more than any other incident within a decade.

Few among the thousands of summer promenaders who enjoy the magnificent panorama of the North River from the wooded heights of the Drive know of the pier at Eighty-sixth Street. For one thing, the clubhouse itself is an unpretentious structure; for another, the narrow and winding stairway leading down the side of the cliff gives no indication of its specific purpose. Moreover,

a light foot-bridge across the tracks is hardly noticeable through the screen of trees and shrubs above, and the water-front lies yet fifty yards farther on.

At night the approach is not well lighted. In fact, no portion of the beautiful and precipitous riparian park is more secluded than the short stretch between the landing-stage and the busy thoroughfare on the crest.

That evening, as has been seen, Mr. Van Hofen was taking no risks for himself or his guests. A patrolman from the local precinct was stationed at the iron-barred gate on the landward end of the foot-bridge.

Clancy, on descending from the bus, stood for a few seconds and surveyed the scene. The night was dark and the sky overcast, but the myriad lights on the New Jersey shore were reflected in the swift current of the Hudson. The superb *Sans Souci* was easily distinguishable. All her ports were a-glow; lamps twinkled beneath the awnings on her after deck, and a boarding light indicated the lowered gangway.

The yacht was moored about three hundred feet from the landing-stage. Her graceful outlines were clearly discernible against the black, moving plain of the river. Just in that spot shone her radiance, lending a sense of opulence and security. For the rest, that part of New York's great waterway was dim and impalpable.

Try as he might, the detective could see no small craft afloat. The yacht's gig, waiting at the clubhouse, was hidden from view.

He sped rapidly down the steps, and found the patrolman.

"That you, Nolan?" he said.

The man peered at him.

"Oh, Mr. Clancy, is it?" he replied.

"You know Senator Meiklejohn by sight?"

"Sure I do."

"When he comes along hail him. Say 'Good evening, Senator.' I'll hear you."

Clancy promptly moved off along the path which runs parallel with the railway. Nolan, though puzzled, put no questions, being well aware he would be told nothing more.

Three gentlemen came down the cliff, and crossed the bridge. One was Van Hofen himself. Now, the fates had willed that Ronald Tower should come next, and alone. He was hurrying. He had seen figures entering the club, and wanted to join them in the gig.

The policeman made the same mistake as many others.

"Good evenin', Senator," he said.

Tower nodded and laughed. He had no time to correct the harmless blunder. Even so, he was too late for the boat, which was already well away from the stage when he reached it. He lighted a cigarette, and strolled along the narrow terrace between river and lawn.

Clancy, on receiving his cue, followed Tower. An attendant challenged him at the iron gate, but Nolan certified that this diminutive stranger was "all right."

It was on the tip of the detective's tongue to ask if Mr. Meiklejohn had gone into the clubhouse when he saw, as he imagined, the Senator's tall form silhouetted against the vague carpet of the river; so he passed on, and this minor incident contributed its quota to a tragic occurrence. He heard some one behind him on the bridge, but paid no heed, his wits being bent on noting anything that took place in the semi-obscurity of the river's edge.

Meanwhile, the patrolman, encountering a double of Senator Meiklejohn, was dumbfounded momentarily. He sought enlightenment from the attendant.

"An', for the love of Mike, who was the first wan?" he demanded, when assured that the latest arrival was really the Senator.

"Mr. Ronald Tower," said the man. "They're like as two peas in a pod, ain't they?"

Nolan muttered something. He, too, crossed the bridge, meaning to find Clancy and explain his error. Thus, the four men were not widely separated, but Tower led by half a minute – long enough, in fact, to be at the north end of the terrace before Meiklejohn passed the gate.

There, greatly to his surprise, he looked down into a small motor-boat, with two occupants, keeping close to the sloping wall. The craft and its crew could have no reasonable business there. They suggested something sinister and furtive. The engine was stopped, and one of the men, huddled up in the bows, was

holding the boat against the pull of the tide by using a boathook as a punting pole.

Tower, though good-natured and unsuspicious, was naturally puzzled by this apparition. He bent forward to examine it more definitely, and rested his hands on a low railing. Then he was seen by those below.

"That you?" growled the second man, standing up suddenly.

"It is," said Tower, speaking with strict accuracy, and marveling now who on earth could have arranged a meeting at such a place and in such bizarre conditions.

"Well, here I am," came the gruff announcement. "The cops are after me. Some one must have tipped them off. If it was you I'll get to know and even things up, P. D. Q. Chew on that during the night's festivities, I advise you. Brought that wad?"

Tower was the last man breathing to handle this queer situation discreetly. He ought to have temporized, but he loathed anything in the nature of vulgar or criminal intrigue. Being quick-tempered withal, if deliberately insulted, he resented this fellow's crude speech.

"No," he cried hotly. "What you really want is a policeman, and there's one close at hand – Hi! Officer!" he shouted: "Come here at once. There are two rascals in a boat – "

Something swirled through the darkness, and his next word was choked in a cry of mortal fear, for a lasso had fallen on his shoulders and was drawn taut. Before he could as much as lift his hands he was dragged bodily over the railing and headlong

into the river.

Clancy, forced by circumstances to remain at a distance, could only overhear Tower's share in the brief conversation. The tones in the voice perplexed him, but the preconcerted element in the affair seemed to offer proof positive that Senator Meiklejohn had kept his appointment. He was just in time to see Tower's legs disappearing, and a loud splash told what had happened. He was not armed. He never carried a revolver unless the quest of the hour threatened danger or called for a display of force. In a word, he was utterly powerless.

Senator Meiklejohn, alive to the vital fact that some one on the terrace had discovered the boat, hung back dismayed. He was joined by Nolan, who could not understand the sudden commotion.

"What's up?" Nolan asked. "Didn't some wan shout?"

Clancy, in all his experience of crime and criminals, had never before encountered such an amazing combination of unforeseen conditions. The boat's motor was already chugging breathlessly, and the small craft was curving out into the gloom. He saw a man hauling in a rope from the stern, and well did he know why the cord seemed to be attached to a heavy weight. Not far away he made out the yacht's gig returning to the stage.

"*Sans Souci* ahoy!" he almost screamed. "Head off that launch! There's murder done!"

It was a hopeless effort, of course, though the sailors obeyed instantly, and bent to their oars. Soon they, too, vanished in the

murk, but, finding they were completely outpaced, came back seeking for instructions which could not be given. The detective thought he was bewitched when he ran into Senator Meiklejohn, pallid and trembling, standing on the terrace with Nolan.

"You?" he shrieked in a shrill falsetto. "Then, in heaven's name, who is the man who has just been pulled into the river?"

"Tower!" gasped the Senator. "Mr. Ronald Tower. They mistook him for me."

"Faith, an' I did that same," muttered the patrolman, whose slow-moving wits could assimilate only one thing at a time.

Clancy, afire with rage and a sense of inexplicable failure, realized that Meiklejohn's admission and its now compulsory explanation could wait a calmer moment. The club attendant, attracted by the hubbub, raced to the lawn, and the detective tackled him.

"Isn't there a motor launch on the yacht?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, but it'll be all sheeted up on deck."

"Have you a megaphone?"

"Yes."

The man ran and grabbed the instrument from its hook, so Clancy bellowed the alarming news to Mr. Van Hofen and the others already on board the *Sans Souci* that Ronald Tower had been dragged into the river and probably murdered. But what could they do? The speedy rescue of Tower, dead or alive, was simply impossible.

The gig arrived. Clancy stormed by telephone at a police

station-house and at the up-river station of the harbor police, but such vain efforts were the mere necessities of officialdom. None knew better than he that an extraordinary crime had been carried through under his very eyes, yet its daring perpetrators had escaped, and he could supply no description of their appearance to the men who would watch the neighboring ferries and wharves.

Van Hofen and his friends, startled and grieved, came ashore in the gig, and Clancy was striving to give them some account of the tragedy without revealing its inner significance when his roving glance missed Meiklejohn from the distraught group of men.

"Where is the Senator?" he cried, turning on the gaping Nolan.

"Gee, he's knocked out," said the policeman. "He axed me to tell you he'd gone down-town. Ye see, some wan has to find Mrs. Tower."

Clancy's black eyes glittered with fury, yet he spoke no word. A blank silence fell on the rest. They had not thought of the bereaved wife, but Meiklejohn had remembered. That was kind of him. The Senator always did the right thing. And how he must be suffering! The Towers were his closest friends!

CHAPTER III.
WINIFRED BARTLETT HEARS SOMETHING

Early next morning a girl attired in a neat but inexpensive costume entered Central Park by the One Hundred and Second Street gate, and walked swiftly by a winding path to the exit on the west side at One Hundredth Street.

She moved with the easy swing of one to whom walking was a pleasure. Without hurry or apparent effort her even, rapid strides brought her along at a pace of fully four miles an hour. And an hour was exactly the time Winifred Bartlett needed if she would carry out her daily program, which, when conditions permitted, involved a four-mile detour by way of Riverside Drive and Seventy-second Street to the Ninth Avenue "L." This morning she had actually ten minutes in hand, and promised herself an added treat in making little pauses at her favorite view-points on the Hudson.

To gain this hour's freedom Winifred had to practise some harmless duplicity, as shall be seen. She was obliged to rise long before the rest of her fellow-workers in the bookbinding factory of Messrs. Brown, Son & Brown, an establishment located in the least inviting part of Greenwich Village.

But she went early to bed, and the beams of the morning

sun drew her forth as a linnet from its nest. Unless the weather was absolutely prohibitive she took the walk every day, for she revelled in the ever-changing tints of the trees, the music of the songbirds, and the gambols of the squirrels in the park, while the broad highway of the river, leading to and from she hardly knew what enchanted lands, brought vague dreams of some delightful future where daily toil would not claim her and she might be as those other girls of the outer world to whom existence seemed such a joyous thing.

Winifred was not discontented with her lot – the ichor of youth and good health flowed too strongly in her veins. But at times she was bewildered by a sense of aloofness from the rest of humanity.

Above all did she suffer from the girls she met in the warehouse. Some were coarse, nearly every one was frivolous. Their talk, their thinly-veiled allusions to a night life in which she bore no part, puzzled and disturbed her. True, the wild revels of which they boasted did not sound either marvelous or attractive when analyzed. A couple of hours at the movies, a frolic in a dance hall, a quarrel about some youthful gallant, violent fluctuations from arm-laced friendship to sparkling-eyed hatred and back again to tears and kisses – these joys and cankers formed the limited gamut of their emotions.

For all that, Winifred could not help asking herself with ever increasing insistence why she alone, among a crude, noisy sisterhood of a hundred young women of her own age, should be

with them yet not of them. She realized that her education fitted her for a higher place in the army of New York workers than a bookbinder's bench. She could soon have acquired proficiency as a stenographer. Pleasant, well-paid situations abounded in the stores and wholesale houses. There was even some alluring profession called "the stage," where a girl might actually earn a living by singing and dancing, and Winifred could certainly sing and was certain she could dance if taught.

What queer trick of fate, then, had brought her to Brown, Son & Brown's in the spring of that year, and kept her there? She could not tell. She could not even guess why she dwelt so far up-town, while every other girl in the establishment had a home either in or near Greenwich Village.

Heigho! Life was a riddle. Surely some day she would solve it.

Her mind ran on this problem more strongly than usual that morning. Still pondering it, she diverged for a moment at the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, and stood on the stone terrace which commands such a magnificent stretch of the silvery Hudson, with the green heights of the New Jersey shore directly opposite, and the Palisades rearing their lofty crests away to the north.

Suddenly she became aware that a small group of men had gathered there, and were displaying a lively interest in two motor boats on the river. Something out of the common had stirred them; voices were loud and gestures animated.

"Look!" said one, "they've gotten that boat!"

"You can't be sure," doubted another, though his manner showed that he wanted only to be convinced.

"D'ye think a police launch 'ud be foolin' around with a tow at this time o' day if it wasn't something special?" persisted the first speaker. "Can't yer see it's empty? There's a cop pointin' now to the clubhouse."

"Good for you," pronounced the doubtful one. The pointing cop had clinched the argument.

"An' they're headin' that way," came the cry.

Off raced the men. Winifred found that people on top of motor-omnibuses scurrying down-town were also watching the two craft. Opposite the end of Eighty-sixth Street such a crowd assembled as though by magic that she could not see over the railings. She could not imagine why people should be so worked up by the mere finding of an empty boat. She heard allusions to names, but they evoked no echo in her mind. At last, approaching a girl among the sightseers, she put a timid question:

"Can you tell me what is the matter?" she said.

"They've found the boat," came the ready answer.

"Yes, but what boat? Why any boat?"

"Haven't you read about the murder last night. Mr. Van Hofen, who owns that yacht there, the *San Sowsy*, had a party of friends on board, an' one of 'em was dragged into the river an' drowned. Nice goin's on. *San Sowsy*– it's a good name for the whole bunch, I guess."

Winifred did not understand why the girl laughed.

"What a terrible thing!" she said. "Perhaps it was only an accident; and sad enough at that if some poor man lost his life."

"Oh, no. It's a murder right enough. The papers are full of it. I was walkin' here at nine o'clock with a fellow. It might ha' been done under me very nose. What d'ye know about that?"

"It's very sad," repeated Winifred. "Such dreadful things seem to be almost impossible under this blue sky and in bright sunshine. Even the river does not look cruel."

She went on, having no time for further dawdling. Her informant glanced after her curiously, for Winifred's cheap clothing and worn shoes were oddly at variance with her voice and manner.

At Seventy-second Street Winifred bought a newspaper, which she read instead of the tiny volume of Browning's poems carried in her hand-bag. She always contrived to have a book or periodical for the train journeys, since men had a way of catching her eye when she glanced around thoughtlessly, and such incidents were annoying. She soon learned the main details of "The Yacht Mystery." The account of Ronald Tower's dramatic end was substantially accurate. It contained, of course, no allusion to Senator Meiklejohn's singular connection with the affair, but Clancy had taken care that a disturbing paragraph should appear with the rest of a lurid write-up.

"Sinister rumors are current in clubland," read Winifred. "These warrant the belief that others beside the thugs in the boat are implicated in the tragedy. Indeed, it is whispered that a man

high in the political world can, if he chooses, throw light on what is, at this writing, an inexplicable crime, a crime which would be incredible if it had not actually taken place."

The reporter did not know, and Clancy did not tell him, just what this innuendo meant. The detective was anxious that Senator Meiklejohn should realize the folly of refusing all information to the authorities, and this thinly-veiled threat of publicity was one way of bringing him to his senses.

Winifred had never before come into touch, so to speak, with any deed of criminal violence. She was so absorbed in the story of the junketing at a fashionable club, with its astounding sequel in a locality familiar to her eyes, that she hardly noticed a delay on the line.

She did not even know that she would be ten minutes late until she saw a clock at Fourteenth Street. Then she raced to the door of a big, many-storied building. A timekeeper shook his head at her, but, punctual as a rule, on wet mornings she was invariably the first to arrive, so the watch-dog compromised on the give-and-take principle. When she emerged from the elevator at the ninth floor her cheeks were still suffused with color, her eyes were alight, her lips parted under the spell of excitement and haste. In a word, she looked positively bewitching.

Two people evidently took this view of her as she advanced into the workroom after hanging up her hat and coat.

"You're late again, Bartlett," snapped Miss Agatha Sugg, a forewoman, whose initials suggested an obvious nickname

among the set of flippant girls she ruled with a severity that was also ungracious. “I’ll not speak to you any more on the matter. Next time you’ll be fired. See?”

Winifred’s high color fled before this dire threat. Even the few dollars a week she earned by binding books was essential to the up-keep of her home. At any rate this fact was dinned into her ears constantly, and formed a ready argument against any change of employment.

“I’m sorry, Miss Sugg,” she stammered. “I didn’t think I had lost any time. Indeed, I started out earlier than usual.”

“Rubbish!” snorted Miss Sugg. “What’re givin’ me? It’s a fine day.”

“Yes,” said Winifred timidly, “but unfortunately I stopped a while on Riverside Drive to watch the police bringing in the boat from which Mr. Tower was mur – pulled into the river last night.”

“Riverside Drive!” snapped the forewoman. “Your address is East One Hundred and Twelfth Street, ain’t it? What were you doing on Riverside Drive?”

“I walk that way every morning unless it is raining.”

Miss Sugg looked incredulous, but felt that she was traveling outside her own territory.

“Anyhow,” she said, “that’s your affair, not mine, an’ it’s no excuse for bein’ late.”

“Oh, come now,” intervened a man’s voice, “this young lady is not so far behind time as to cause such a row. She can pull out a bit and make up for it.”

Miss Sugg wheeled wrathfully to find Mr. Fowle, manager on that floor, gazing at Winifred with marked approval. Fowle, a shifty-eyed man of thirty, compactly built, and somewhat of a dandy, seldom gave heed to any of the girls employed by Brown, Son & Brown. His benevolent attitude toward Winifred was a new departure.

"Young lady!" gasped the forewoman. She was in such a temper that other words failed.

"Yes, she isn't an old one," smirked Fowle. "That's all right, Miss Bartlett, get on with your work. Miss Sugg's bark is worse than her bite."

Though he had poured oil on the troubled waters his air was not altogether reassuring. Winifred went to her bench in a flurry of trepidation. She dreaded the vixenish Miss Sugg less than the too complaisant manager. Somehow, she fancied that he would soon speak to her again; when, a few minutes later, he drew near, and she felt rather than saw that he was staring at her boldly, she flushed to the nape of her graceful neck.

Yet he put a quite orthodox question.

"Did I get your story right when you came in?" he said. "I think you told Miss Sugg that the harbor police had picked up the motor-boat in that yacht case."

"So I heard," said Winifred. She was in charge of a wire-stitching machine, and her deft fingers were busy. Moreover, she was resolved not to give Fowle any pretext for prolonging the conversation.

"Who told you?"

The manager's tone grew a trifle less cordial. He was not accustomed to being held at arm's length by any young woman in the establishment whom he condescended to notice.

"I really don't know," and Winifred began placing her array of work in sorted piles. "Indeed, I spoke carelessly. No one told me. I saw a commotion on Riverside Drive, and heard a man arguing with others that a boat then being towed by a police launch must be the missing one."

Fowle's whiff of annoyance had passed. He had jumped to the conclusion that such an extremely pretty girl would surely own a sweetheart who escorted her to and from work each day. He did not suspect that every junior clerk downstairs had in turn offered his services in this regard, but with such lack of success that each would-be suitor deemed Winifred conceited.

"I wish I had been there," he said. "Do you go home the same way?"

"No."

Winifred was aware that the other girls were watching her furtively and exchanging meaning looks.

"You take the Third Avenue L, I suppose?" persisted Fowle. Then Winifred faced him squarely. For some reason her temper got the better of her.

"It is a house rule, Mr. Fowle," she said, "that the girls are forbidden to talk during working hours."

"Nonsense," laughed Fowle. "I'm in charge here, an' what I

say goes."

He left her, however, and busied himself elsewhere. Apparently, he was even forgiving enough to call Miss Sugg out of the room and detain her all the rest of the morning.

Winifred was promptly rallied by some of her companions.

"I must say this for you, Winnie Bartlett, you don't think you're the whole shootin' match," said a stout, red-faced creature, who would have been more at home on a farm than in a New York warehouse, "but it gets my goat when you hand the mustard to Fowle in that way. If he made goo-goo eyes at me, I'd play, too."

"I wish little Carlotta was a blue-eyed, golden-haired queen," sighed another, a squat Neapolitan with the complexion of a Moor. "She's give Fowle a chance to dig into his pocketbook, believe me."

The youthful philosopher won a chorus of approval. All the girls liked Winifred. They even tacitly admitted that she belonged to a different order, and seldom teased her. Fowle's obvious admiration, however, imposed too severe a strain, and their tongues ran freely.

The luncheon-hour came, and Winifred hurried out with the others. They patronized a restaurant in Fourteenth Street. At a news-stand she purchased an evening paper, a rare event, since she had to account for every cent of expenditure. Though allowed books, she was absolutely forbidden newspapers!

But this forlorn girl, who knew so little of the great city

in whose life she was such an insignificant item, felt oddly concerned in "The Yacht Mystery." It was the first noteworthy event of which she had even a remote first-hand knowledge. That empty launch, its very abandonment suggesting eeriness and fatality, was a tangible thing. Was she not one of the few who had literally seen it? So she invested her penny, and after reading of the discovery of the boat – it was found moored to a wharf at the foot of Fort Lee – breathlessly read:

> As the outcome of information given by a well-known Senator, the police have obtained an important clue which leads straight to a house in One Hundred and Twelfth Street.

"Well," mused Winifred, wide-eyed with astonishment. "Fancy that! The very street where I live!"

She read on:

> The arrest of at least one person, a woman, suspected of complicity in the crime may occur at any moment. Detectives are convinced that the trail of the murderers will soon be clearer.
>
> Every effort is being made to recover Mr. Tower's body, which, it is conceivable, may have been weighted and sunk in the river near the spot where the boat was tied.

Winifred gave more attention to the newspaper report than to her frugal meal. Resolving, however, that Miss Sugg should have no further cause for complaint that day, she returned to the factory five minutes before time. An automobile was standing outside the entrance, but she paid no heed to it.

The checker tapped at his little window as she passed.

"The boss wants you," he said.

"Me!" she cried. Her heart sank. Between Miss Sugg and Mr. Fowle she had already probably lost her situation!

"Yep," said the man. "You're Winifred Bartlett, I guess. Anyhow, if there's another peach like you in the bunch I haven't seen her."

She bit her lip and tears trembled in her eyes. Perhaps the gruff Cerberus behind the window sympathized with her. He lowered his voice to a hoarse whisper: "There's a cop in there, an' a 'tec,' too."

Winifred was startled out of her forebodings.

"They cannot want me!" she said amazedly.

"You never can tell, girlie. Queer jinks happen sometimes. I wouldn't bat an eyelid if they rounded up the boss hisself."

She was sure now that some stupid mistake had been made. At any rate, she no longer dreaded dismissal, and the first intuition of impending calamity yielded to a nervous curiosity as she pushed open a door leading to the general office.

CHAPTER IV
FURTHER SURPRISES

A clerk, one of the would-be swains who had met with chilling discouragement after working-hours, was evidently on the lookout for her. An ignoble soul prompted a smirk of triumph now.

"Go straight in," he said, jerking a thumb. "A cop's waitin' for you."

Winifred did not vouchsafe him even an indignant glance. Holding her head high, she passed through the main office, and made for a door marked "Manager." She knocked, and was admitted by Mr. Fowle. Grouped around a table she saw one of the members of the firm, the manager, a policeman, and a dapper little man, slight of figure, who held himself very erect. He was dressed in blue serge, and had the ivory-white face and wrinkled skin of an actor. She was conscious at once of the penetration of his glance. His eyes were black and luminous. They seemed to pierce her with an X-ray quality of comprehension.

"This is the girl," announced Mr. Fowle deferentially.

The little man in the blue suit took the lead forthwith.

"You are Winifred Bartlett?" he said, and by some subtle inter-flow of magnetism Winifred knew instantly that she had nothing to fear from this diminutive stranger.

"Yes," she replied, looking at him squarely.

"You live in East One Hundred and Twelfth Street?"

"Yes."

"With a woman described as your aunt, and known as Miss Rachel Craik?"

"Yes."

Each affirmative marked a musical crescendo. Especially was Winifred surprised by the sceptical description of her only recognized relative.

"Well," went on Clancy, suppressing a smile at the girl's naïve astonishment, "don't be alarmed, but I want you to come with me to Mulberry Street."

Now, Winifred had just been reading about certain activities in Mulberry Street, and her eyebrows rounded in real amazement.

"Isn't that the Police Headquarters?" she asked.

Fowle chuckled, whereupon Clancy said pleasantly:

"Yes. One man here seems to know the address quite intimately. But that fact need not set your heart fluttering. The chief of the Detective Bureau wishes to put a few questions. That is all."

"Questions about what?"

Winifred's natural dignity came to her aid. She refused to have this grave matter treated as a joke.

"Take my advice, Miss Bartlett, and don't discuss things further until you have met Mr. Steingall," said Clancy.

"But I have never even heard of Mr. Steingall," she protested. "What right have you or he to take me away from my work to a police-station? What wrong have I done to any one?"

"None, I believe."

"Surely I have a right to some explanation."

"If you insist I am bound to answer."

"Then I do insist," and Winifred's heightened color and wrathful eyes only enhanced her beauty. Clancy spread his hands in a gesture inherited from a French mother.

"Very well," he said. "You are required to give evidence concerning the death of Mr. Ronald Tower. Now, I cannot say any more. I have a car outside. You will be detained less than an hour. The same car will bring you back, and I think I can guarantee that your employers will raise no difficulty."

The head of the firm growled agreement. As a matter of fact the staid respectability of Brown, Son & Brown had sustained a shock by the mere presence of the police. Murder has an ugly aspect. It was often bound up in the firm's products, but never before had it entered that temple of efficiency in other guise.

Clancy sensed the slow fermentation of the pharisaical mind.

"If I had known what sort of girl this was I would never have brought a policeman," he muttered into the great man's ear. "She has no more to do with this affair than you have."

"It is very annoying – very," was the peevish reply.

"What is? Assisting the police?"

"Oh, no. Didn't mean that, of course."

The detective thought he might do more harm than good by pressing for a definition of the firm's annoyance. He turned to Winifred.

"Are you ready, Miss Bartlett?" he said. "The only reason the Bureau has for troubling you is the accident of your address."

Almost before the girl realized the new and astounding conditions which had come into her life she was seated in a closed automobile and speeding swiftly down-town.

She was feminine enough, however, to ply Clancy with questions, and he had to fence with her, as it was all-important that such information as she might be able to give should be imparted when he and Steingall could observe her closely. The Bureau hugged no delusions. Its vast experience of the criminal world rendered misplaced sympathy with erring mortals almost impossible. Young or old, rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, the strange procession which passes in unending review before the police authorities is subjected to impartial yet searching analysis. Few of the guilty ones escape suspicion, no matter how slight the connecting clue or scanty the evidence. On the other hand, Steingall and his trusty aid seldom made a mistake when they decided, as Clancy had already done in Winifred's case, that real innocence had come under the shadow of crime.

Steingall shared Clancy's opinion the instant he set eyes on the new witness. He gazed at her with a humorous dismay that was wholly genuine.

"Sit there, Miss Bartlett," he said, rising to place a chair for

her. “Please don’t feel nervous. I am sure you understand that only those who have broken the law need fear it. Now, *you* haven’t killed anybody, have you?”

Winifred smiled. She liked this big man’s kindly manner. Really, the police were not such terrifying ogres when you came to close quarters with them.

“No, indeed,” she said, little guessing that Clancy had indulged in a Japanese grimace behind her back, thereby informing his chief that “The Yacht Mystery” was still maintaining its claim to figure as one of the most sensational crimes the Bureau had investigated during many a year.

Steingall, wishing to put the girl wholly at ease, affected to consult some notes on his desk, but Winifred was too wrought up to keep silent.

“The gentleman who brought me here told me that I would be required to give evidence concerning the murder of Mr. Ronald Tower,” she said. “Believe me, sir, that unfortunate gentleman’s name was unknown to me before I read it in this morning’s paper. I have no knowledge of the manner of his death other than is contained in the account printed here in this newspaper.”

She proffered the newspaper purchased before lunch, which she still held in her left hand. The impulsive action broadened Steingall’s smile. He was still utterly at a loss to account for this well-mannered girl’s queer environment.

“Why,” he cried, “I quite understand that. Mr. Clancy didn’t tell you we regarded you as a desperate crook, did he?”

Winifred yielded to the chief's obvious desire to lift their talk out of the rut of formality. She could not help being interested in these two men, so dissimilar in their characteristics, yet each so utterly unlike the somewhat awesome personage she would have sketched if asked to define her idea of a "detective." Clancy, who had taken a chair at the side of the table, sat on it as though he were an automaton built of steel springs and ready to bounce instantly in any given direction. Steingall's huge bulk lolled back indolently. He had been smoking when the others entered, and a half-consumed cigar lay on an ash-tray. Winifred thought it would be rather amusing if she, in turn, made things comfortable.

"Please don't put away your cigar on my account," she said. "I like the smell of good tobacco."

"Ha!" cackled Clancy.

"Thank you," said Steingall, tucking the Havana into a corner of his mouth. The two men exchanged glances, and Winifred smiled. Steingall's look of tolerant contempt at his assistant was distinctly amusing.

"That little shrimp can't smoke, Miss Bartlett," he explained, "so he is an anti-tobacco maniac."

"You wouldn't care to take poison, would you?" and Clancy shot the words at Winifred so sharply that she was almost startled.

"No. Of course not," she agreed.

"Yet that is what that mountain of brawn does during fourteen hours out of the twenty-four. Nicotine is one of the deadliest poisons known to science. Even when absorbed into the tissues

in minute doses it corrodes the brain and atrophies the intellect. Did you see how he grinned when you described that vile weed as 'good tobacco'? Now, you don't know good, meaning real, tobacco from bad, do you?"

"I know whether or not I like the scent of it," persisted Winifred. She began to think that officialdom in Mulberry Street affected the methods of the court circles frequented by Alice and the Mad Hatter.

"Don't mind him," put in Steingall genially. "He's a living example of the close alliance between insanity and genius. On the tobacco question he's simply cracked, and that is all there is to it. Now we're wasting your time by this chatter. I'll come to serious business by asking a question which you will not find embarrassing for a good many years yet to come. How old are you?"

"Nineteen last birthday."

"When were you born?"

"On June 6, 1894."

"And where?"

Winifred reddened slightly.

"I don't know," she said.

"What?"

Steingall seemed to be immensely surprised, and Winifred proceeded forthwith to throw light on this singular admission, which was exactly what he meant her to do.

"That is a very odd statement, but it is quite true," she said

earnestly. “My aunt would never tell me where I was born. I believe it was somewhere in the New England States, but I have only the vaguest grounds for the opinion. What I mean is that aunty occasionally reveals a close familiarity with Boston and Vermont.”

“What is her full name?”

“Rachel Craik.”

“She has never been married?”

Winifred’s sense of humor was keen. She laughed at the idea of “Aunt Rachel” having a husband.

“I don’t think aunty will ever marry anybody now,” she said. “She holds the opposite sex in detestation. No man is ever admitted to our house.”

“It is a small, old-fashioned residence, but very large for the requirements of two women?” continued Steingall. He took no notes, and might have been discussing the weather, now that the first whiff of wonderment as to Winifred’s lack of information about her birth-place had passed.

“Yes. We have several rooms unoccupied.”

“And unfurnished?”

“Say partly furnished.”

“Ever had any boarders?”

“No.”

“No servants, of course?”

“No.”

“And how long have you been employed in Messrs. Brown,

Son & Brown's bookbinding department?"

"About six months."

"What do you earn?"

"Eight dollars a week."

"Is that the average amount paid to the other girls?"

"Slightly above the average. I am supposed to be quick and accurate."

"Well now, Miss Bartlett, you seem to be a very intelligent and well-educated young woman. How comes it that you are employed in such work?"

"It was the best I could find," she volunteered.

"No doubt. But you must be well aware that few, if any, among the girls in the bookbinding business can be your equal in education, and, may I add, in refinement. Now, if you were a bookkeeper, a cashier or a typist, I could understand it; but it does seem odd to me that you should be engaged in this kind of job."

"It was my aunt's wish," said Winifred simply.

"Ah!"

Steingall dwelt on the monosyllable.

"What reason did she give for such a singular choice?" he went on.

"I confess it has puzzled me," was the unaffected answer. "Although aunty is severe in her manner she is well educated, and she taught me nearly all I know, except music and singing, for which I took lessons from Signor Pecci ever since I was a tiny mite until about two years ago. Then, I believe, aunty lost a

good deal of money, and it became necessary that I should earn something. Signor Pecci offered to get me a position in a theater, but she would not hear of it, nor would she allow me to enter a shop or a restaurant. Really, it was aunty who got me work with Messrs. Brown, Son & Brown."

"In other words," said Steingall, "you were deliberately reared to fill a higher social station, and then, for no assignable reason, save a whim, compelled to sink to a much lower level?"

"I do not know. I never disputed aunty's right to do what she thought best."

"Well, well, it is odd. Do you ever entertain any visitors?"

"None whatever. We have no acquaintances, and live very quietly."

"Do you mean to say that your aunt never sees any one but yourself and casual callers, such as tradespeople?"

"So far as I know, that is absolutely the case."

"Very curious," commented Steingall. "Does your aunt go out much?"

"She leaves the house occasionally after I have gone to bed at ten o'clock, but that is seldom, and I have no idea where she goes. Every week-day, you know, I am away from home between seven in the morning and half past six at night, excepting Saturday afternoons. If possible, I take a long walk before going to work."

"Do you go straight home?"

Winifred remembered Mr. Fowle's query, and smiled again.

"Yes," she said.

"Now last night, for instance, was your aunt at home when you reached the house?"

"No; she was out. She did not come in until half past nine."

"Did she go out again last night?"

"I do not know. I was tired. I went to bed rather early."

Steingall bent over his notes for the first time since Winifred appeared. His lips were pursed, and he seemed to be weighing certain facts gravely.

"I think," he said at last, "that I need not detain you any longer, Miss Bartlett. By the way, I'll give you a note to your employers to say that you are in no way connected with the crime we have under investigation. It may, perhaps, save you needless annoyance."

"Thank you, sir," said the girl. "But won't you tell me why you have asked me so many questions about my aunt and her ways?"

Steingall looked at her thoughtfully before he answered: "In the first place, Miss Bartlett, tell me this. I assume Miss Craik is your mother's sister. When did your mother die?"

Winifred blushed with almost childish discomfiture. "It may seem very stupid to say such a thing," she admitted, "but I have never known either a father or a mother. My aunt has always refused to discuss our family affairs in any way whatever. I fear her view is that I am somewhat lucky to be alive at all."

"Few people would be found to agree with her," said the chief gallantly. "Now I want you to be brave and patient. A very extraordinary crime has been committed, and the police

occasionally find clues in the most unexpected quarters. I regret to tell you that Miss Craik is believed to be in some way connected with the mysterious disappearance, if not the death, of Mr. Ronald Tower, and she is being held for further inquiries."

Winifred's face blanched. "Do you mean that she will be kept in prison?" she said, with a break in her voice.

"She must be detained for a while, but you need not be so alarmed. Her connection with this outrage may be as harmless as your own, though I can inform you that, without your knowledge, your house last night certainly sheltered two men under grave suspicion, and for whom we are now searching."

"Two men! In our house!" cried the amazed girl.

"Yes. I tell you this to show you the necessity there is for calmness and reticence on your part. Don't speak to any one concerning your visit here. Above all else, don't be afraid. Have you any one with whom you can go to live until Miss Craik is" – he corrected himself – "until matters are cleared up a bit?"

"No," wailed Winifred, her pent-up feelings breaking through all restraint. "I am quite alone in the world now."

"Come, come, cheer up!" said Steingall, rising and patting her on the shoulder. "This disagreeable business may only last a day or two. You will not want for anything. If you are in any trouble all you need do is to let me know. Moreover, to save you from being afraid of remaining alone in the house at night, I'll give special instructions to the police in your precinct to watch the place closely. Now, be a brave girl and make the best of it."

The house in One Hundred and Twelfth Street would, of course, be an object of special interest to the police for other reasons apart from those suggested by the chief. Nevertheless, his kindness had the desired effect, and Winifred strove to repress her tears.

"Here is your note," he said, "and I advise you to forget this temporary trouble in your work. Mr. Clancy will accompany you in the car if you wish."

"Please – I would rather be alone," she faltered. She was far from Mulberry Street before she remembered that she had said nothing about seeing the boat that morning!

CHAPTER V
PERSECUTORS

During the brief run up-town Winifred managed to dry her tears, yet the mystery and terror of the circumstances into which she was so suddenly plunged seemed to become more distressful the longer she puzzled over them. She could not find any outlet from a labyrinth of doubt and uncertainty. She strove again to read the printed accounts of the crime, in order to wrest from them some explanation of the extraordinary charge brought against her aunt, but the words danced before her eyes. At last, with an effort, she threw the paper away and bravely resolved to follow Steingall's parting advice.

When she reached the warehouse she was naturally the object of much covert observation. Neither Miss Sugg nor Mr. Fowle spoke to her, but Winifred thought she saw a malicious smile on the forewoman's face. The hours passed wearily until six o'clock. She was about to quit the building with her companions – many of whom meant bombarding her with questions at the first opportunity – when she was again requested to report at the office.

A clerk handed her one of the firm's pay envelopes.

"What's comin' to you up to date," he blurted out, "and a week's salary instead of notice."

She was dismissed!

Some girls might have collapsed under this final blow, but not so Winifred Bartlett. Knowing it was useless to say anything to the clerk, she spiritedly demanded an interview with the manager. This was refused. She insisted, and sent Steingall's letter to the inner sanctum, having concluded that the dismissal was in some way due to her visit to the detective bureau.

The clerk came back with the note and a message: "The firm desire me to tell you," he said, "that they quite accept your explanation, but they have no further need of your services."

Explanation! How could a humble employee explain away the unsavory fact that the smug respectability of Brown, Son & Brown had been outraged by the name of the firm appearing in the evening papers as connected, even in the remotest way, with the sensational crime now engaging the attention of all New York?

Winifred walked into the street. Something in her face warned even the most inquisitive of her fellow-workers to leave her alone. Besides, the poor always evince a lively sympathy with others in misfortune. These working-class girls were consumed with curiosity, yet they respected Winifred's feelings, and did not seek to intrude on her very apparent misery by inquiry or sympathetic condolence. A few among them watched, and even followed her a little way as she turned the corner into Fourteenth Street.

"She goes home by the Third Avenue L," said Carlotta. "Sometimes I've walked with her that far. H'lo! Why's Fowle

goin' east in a taxi! He lives on West Seventeenth. Betcher a dime he's after Winnie."

"Whadda ya mean – after her?" cried another girl.

"Why, didn't you hear how he spoke up for her this mornin' when Ole Mother Sugg handed her the lemon about bein' late?"

"But he got her fired."

"G'wan!"

"He did, I tell you. I heard him phonin' a newspaper. He made 'em wise about Winnie's bein' pinched, and then took the paper to the boss. I was below with a packin' check when he went in, so I saw that with my own eyes, an' that's just as far as I'd trust Fowle."

The cynic's shrewd surmise was strictly accurate. Fowle had, indeed, secured Winifred's dismissal. Her beauty and disdain had stirred his lewd impulses to their depths. His plan now was to intercept her before she reached her home, and pose as the friend in need who is the most welcome of all friends. Knowing nothing whatsoever of her domestic surroundings he deemed it advisable to make inquiries on the spot. His crafty and vulpine nature warned him against running his head into a noose, since Winifred might own a strong-armed father or brother, but no one could possibly resent a well-meant effort at assistance.

The mere sight of her graceful figure as she hurried along with pale face and downcast eyes inflamed him anew when his taxi sped by. She could not avoid him now. He would go up-town by an earlier train, and await her at the corner of One Hundred and

Twelfth Street.

But the wariest fox is apt to find his paw in a trap, and Fowle, though foxy, was by no means so astute as he imagined himself. Once again that day Fate was preparing a surprise for Winifred, and not the least dramatic feature thereof connoted the utter frustration and undoing of Fowle.

About the time that Winifred caught her train it befell that Rex Carshaw, gentleman of leisure, the most industrious idler who ever extracted dividends from a business he cared little about, drove a high-powered car across the Harlem River by the Willis Avenue Bridge, and entered that part of Manhattan which lies opposite Randall's Island.

This was a new world to the eyes of the young millionaire. Nor was it much to his liking. The mixed citizenry of New York must live somewhere, but Carshaw saw no reason why he and his dainty car should loiter in a district which seemed highly popular with all sorts of undesirable folks; so, after skirting Thomas Jefferson Park he turned west, meaning to reach the better roadway and more open stretches of Fifth Avenue.

A too hasty express wagon, however, heedless of the convenience of wealthy automobilists, bore down on Carshaw like a Juggernaut car, and straightway smashed the differential, besides inflicting other grievous injuries on a complex mechanism. A policeman, the proprietor of a neighboring garage, and a greatly interested crowd provided an impromptu jury for the dispute between Carshaw and the express man.

The latter put up a poor case. It consisted almost entirely of the bitter and oft-repeated plaint:

"What was a car like that doin' here, anyhow?"

The question sounded foolish. It was nothing of the kind. Only the Goddess of Wisdom could have answered it, and she, being invisible, was necessarily dumb.

At last, when the damaged car was housed for the night, Carshaw set out to walk a couple of blocks to the elevated railway, his main objective being dinner with his mother in their apartment on Madison Avenue. He found himself in a comparatively quiet street, wherein blocks of cheap modern flats alternated with the dingy middle-class houses of a by-gone generation. He halted to light a cigarette, and, at that moment, a girl of remarkable beauty passed, walking quickly, yet without apparent effort. She was pallid and agitated, and her eyes were swimming with ill-repressed tears.

As a matter of fact, Winifred nearly broke down at sight of her empty abode. It was a cheerless place at best, and now the thought of being left there alone had induced a sense of feminine helplessness which overcame her utterly.

Carshaw was distinctly impressed. In the first place, he was young and good-looking, and human enough to try and steal a second glance at such a lovely face, though the steadily decreasing light was not altogether favorable. Secondly, he thought he had never seen any girl who carried herself with such rhythmic grace. Thirdly, here was a woman in distress, and,

to one of Carshaw's temperament and upbringing, that in itself formed a convincing reason why he should wish to help her.

He racked his brain for a fitting excuse to offer his services. He could find none. Above all else, Rex Carshaw was a gentleman.

Of course, he could not tell that the way was being made smooth for knight-errantry by a certain dragon named Fowle. He did not even quicken his pace, and was musing on the curious incongruity of the maid in distress with the rather squalid district in which she had her being when he saw a man bar her path.

This was Fowle, who, with lifted hat, was saying deferentially: "Miss Bartlett, may I have a word?"

Winifred stopped as though she had run into an unseen obstruction. She even recoiled a step or two.

"What do you want?" she said, and there was a quality of scorn, perhaps of fear, in her voice that sent Carshaw, now five yards away, into the open doorway of a block of flats. He was an impulsive young man. He liked the girl's face, and quite as fixedly disliked Fowle's. So he adopted the now world-famous policy of watchful waiting, being not devoid of a dim belief that the situation might evolve an overt act.

"I want to tell you how sorry I am for what happened to-day," said Fowle, trying to speak sympathetically, but not troubling to veil the bold admiration of his stare. "I tried hard to stop unpleasantness, and even risked a row with the boss. But it was no use. I couldn't do a thing."

"But why are you here?" demanded Winifred, and those

sorrow-laden eyes of hers might have won pity from any but one of Fowle's order.

"To help, of course," came the ready assurance. "I can get you a far better job than stitchin' octavos at Brown's. You're not meanin' to stay home with your folks, I suppose?"

"That is kind of you," said Winifred. "I may have to depend altogether on my own efforts, so I shall need work. I'll write to you for a reference, and perhaps for advice."

She had unwittingly told Fowle just what he was eager to know – that she was friendless and alone. He prided himself on understanding the ways of women, and lost no more time in coming to the point.

"Listen, now, Winnie," he said, drawing nearer, "I'd like to see you through this worry. Forget it. You can draw down twice or three times the money as a model in Goldberg's Store. I know Goldberg, an' can fix things. An', say, why mope at home evenings? I often get orders for two for the theaters an' vaudeville shows. What about comin' along down-town to-night? A bit of dinner an' a cabaret'd cheer you up after to-day's unpleasantness."

Winifred grew scarlet with vexation. The man had always been a repulsive person in her eyes, and, unversed though she was in the world's wiles, she knew instinctively that his present pretensions were merely a cloak for rascality. One should be fair to Winifred, too. Like every other girl, she had pictured the Prince Charming who would come into her life some day. But –

Fowle! Her gorge rose.

"How dare you follow me here and say such vile things?" she cried hysterically.

"What's up now?" said Fowle in mock surprise. "What have I said that you should fly off the trolley in that way?"

"I take it that this young lady is telling you to quit," broke in another voice. "Go, now! Go while the going is good."

Quietly but firmly elbowing Fowle aside, Rex Carshaw raised his hat and spoke to Winifred.

"If this fellow is annoying you he can soon be dealt with," he said. "Do you live near? If so, he can stop right here. I'll occupy his mind till you are out of sight."

The discomfited masher was snarling like a vicious cur. The first swift glance that measured the intruder's proportions did not warrant any display of active resentment on his part. Out of the tail of his eye, however, he noticed a policeman approaching on the opposite side of the street. The sight lent a confidence which might have been lacking otherwise.

"Why are you buttin' in?" he cried furiously. "This young lady is a friend of mine. I'm tryin' to pull her out of a difficulty, but she's got me all wrong. Anyhow, what business is it of yours?"

Fowle's anger was wasted, since Carshaw seemed not to hear. Indeed, why should a chivalrous young man pay heed to Fowle when he could gaze his fill into Winifred's limpid eyes and listen to her tuneful voice?

"I am very greatly obliged to you," she was saying, "but I hope

Mr. Fowle understands now that I do not desire his company and will not seek to force it on me."

"Sure he understands. Don't you, Fowle?" and Carshaw gave the disappointed wooer a look of such manifest purpose that something had to happen quickly. Something did happen. Fowle knew the game was up, and behaved after the manner of his kind.

"You're a cute little thing, Winifred Bartlett," he sneered, with a malicious glance from the girl to Carshaw, while a coarse guffaw imparted venom to his utterance. "Think you're taking an easier road to the white lights, I guess?"

"Guess again, Fowle," said Carshaw.

He spoke so quietly that Fowle was misled, because the pavement rose and struck him violently on the back of his head. At least, that was his first impression. The second and more lasting one was even more disagreeable. When he sat up, and fumbled to recover his hat, he was compelled to apply a handkerchief to his nose, which seemed to have been reduced to a pulp.

"Too bad you should be mixed up in this disturbance," Carshaw was assuring Winifred, "but a pup of the Fowle species can be taught manners in only one way. Now, suppose you hurry home!"

The advice was well meant, and Winifred acted on it at once. Fowle had scrambled to his feet and the policeman was running up. From east and west a crowd came on the scene like a well-trained stage chorus rushing in from the wings.

"Now, then, what's the trouble?" demanded the law, with gruff insistency.

"Nothing. A friend of mine met with a slight accident – that's all," said Carshaw.

"It's – it's – all right," agreed Fowle thickly. Some glimmer of reason warned him that an exposé in the newspapers would cost him his job with Brown, Son & Brown. The policeman eyed the damaged nose. He grinned.

"If you care to take a wallop like that as a friendly tap it's your affair, not mine," he said. "Anyhow, beat it, both of you!"

Carshaw was not interested in Fowle or the policeman. He had been vouchsafed one expressive look by Winifred as she hurried away, and he watched the slim figure darting up half a dozen steps to a small brown-stone house, and opening the door with a latch-key. Oddly enough, the policeman's attention was drawn by the girl's movements. His air changed instantly.

"H'lo," he said, evidently picking on Fowle as the doubtful one of these two. "This must be inquired into. What's your name?"

"No matter. I make no charge."

Fowle was turning away, but the policeman grabbed him.

"You come with me to the station-house," he said determinedly. "An' you, too," he added jerking his head at Carshaw.

"Have you gone crazy with the heat?" inquired Carshaw.

"I hold you for fighting in the public street, an' that's all there is to it," was the firm reply. "You can come quietly or be 'cuffed,

just as you like. Clear off, the rest of you."

An awe-stricken mob backed hastily. Fowle was too dazed even to protest, and Carshaw sensed some hidden but definite motive behind the policeman's strange alternation of moods. He looked again at the brown-stone house, but night was closing in so rapidly that he could not distinguish a face at any of the windows.

"Let us get there quickly – I'll be late for dinner," he said, and the three returned by the way Carshaw had come.

Thus it was that Rex Carshaw, eligible young society bachelor, was drawn into the ever-widening vortex of "The Yacht Mystery." He did not recognize it yet, but was destined soon to feel the force of its swirling currents.

Gazing from a window of the otherwise deserted house Winifred saw both her assailant and her protector marched off by the policeman. It was patent, even to her benumbed wits, that they had been arrested. The tailing-in of the mob behind the trio told her as much.

She was too stunned to do other than sink into a chair. For a while she feared she was going to faint. With lack-lustre eyes she peered into a gulf of loneliness and despair. Then outraged nature came to her aid, and she burst into a storm of tears.

CHAPTER VI
BROTHER RALPH

Clancy forced Senator Meiklejohn's hand early in the fray. He was at the Senator's flat within an hour of the time Ronald Tower was dragged into the Hudson, but a smooth-spoken English man-servant assured the detective that his master was out, and not expected home until two or three in the morning.

This arrangement obviously referred to the Van Hofen festivity, so Clancy contented himself with asking the valet to give the Senator a card on which he scribbled a telephone number and the words, "Please ring up when you get this."

Now, he knew, and Senator Meiklejohn knew, the theater at which Mrs. Tower was enjoying herself. He did not imagine for an instant that the Senator was discharging the mournful duty of announcing to his friend's wife the lamentable fate which had overtaken her husband. Merely as a perfunctory duty he went to the theater and sought the manager.

"You know Mrs. Ronald Tower?" he said.

"Sure I do," said the official. "She's inside now. Came here with Bobby Forrest."

"Anybody called for her recently?"

"I think not, but I'll soon find out."

No. Mrs. Tower's appreciation of Belasco's genius had not

been disturbed that evening.

"Anything wrong?" inquired the manager.

Clancy's answer was ready.

"If Senator Meiklejohn comes here within half an hour, see that the lady is told at once," he said. "If he doesn't show up in that time, send for Mr. Forrest, tell him that Mr. Tower has met with an accident, and leave him to look after the lady."

"Wow! Is it serious? Why wait?"

"The slight delay won't matter, and the Senator can handle the situation better than Forrest."

Clancy gave some telephonic instruction to the man on night duty at headquarters. He even dictated a paragraph for the press. Then he went straight to bed, for the hardiest detectives must sleep, and he had a full day's work before him when next the sun rose over New York.

He summed up Meiklejohn's action correctly. The Senator did not communicate with Mulberry Street during the night, so Clancy was an early visitor at his apartment.

"The Senator is ill and can see no one," said the valet.

"No matter how ill he may be, he must see me," retorted Clancy.

"But he musn't be disturbed. I have my orders."

"Take a fresh set. He's going to be disturbed right now, by you or me. Choose quick!"

The law prevailed. A few minutes later Senator Meiklejohn entered the library sitting-room, where the little detective

awaited him. He looked wretchedly ill, but his sufferings were mental, not physical. Examined critically now, in the cold light of day, he was a very different man from the spruce, dandified politician and financier who figured so prominently among Van Hofen's guests the previous evening. Yet Clancy saw at a glance that the Senator was armed at all points. Diplomacy would be useless. The situation demanded a bludgeon. He began the attack at once.

"Why didn't you ring up Mulberry Street last night, Senator?" he said.

"I was too upset. My nerves were all in."

"You told the patrolman at Eighty-sixth Street that you were hurrying away to break the news to Mrs. Tower, yet you did not go near her?"

Meiklejohn affected to consult Clancy's card to ascertain the detective's name.

"Perhaps I had better get in touch with the Bureau now," he said, and a flush of anger darkened his haggard face.

"No need. The Bureau is right here. Let us get down to brass tacks, Senator. A woman named Rachel met you outside the Four Hundred Club at eight o'clock as you were coming out. You had just spoken to Mrs. Tower, when this woman told you that you must meet two men who would await you at the Eighty-sixth landing-stage at nine. You were to bring five hundred dollars. At nine o'clock these same men killed Mr. Tower, and you yourself admitted to me that they mistook him for you. Now, will you be

good enough to fill in the blanks? Who is Rachel? Where does she live? Who were the two men? Why should you give them five hundred dollars, apparently as blackmail?"

Clancy was exceedingly disappointed by the result of this thunderbolt. Any ordinary man would have shrivelled under its crushing impact. If the police knew so much that might reasonably be regarded as secret, of what avail was further concealment? Yet Senator Meiklejohn bore up wonderfully. He showed surprise, as well he might, but was by no means pulverized.

"All this is rather marvelous," he said slowly, after a long pause. He had avoided Clancy's gaze after the first few words, and sank into an armchair with an air of weariness that was not assumed.

"Simple enough," commented the detective readily. Above all else he wanted Meiklejohn to talk. "I was on duty outside the club, and heard almost every word that passed between you and Rachel."

"Well, well."

The Senator arose and pressed an electric bell.

"If you don't mind," he explained suavely, "I'll order some coffee and rolls. Will you join me?"

This was the parry of a skilled duelist to divert an attack and gain breathing-time. Clancy rather admired such adroitness.

"Sorry, I can't on principle," he countered.

"How – on principle?"

"You see, Senator, I may have to arrest you, and I never eat with any man with whom I may clash professionally."

"You take risks, Mr. Clancy."

"I love 'em. I'd cut my job to-day if it wasn't for the occasional excitement."

The valet appeared.

"Coffee and rolls for two, Phillips," said Meiklejohn. He turned to Clancy. "Perhaps you would prefer toast and an egg?"

"I have breakfasted already, Senator," smiled the detective, "but I may dally with the coffee."

When the door was closed on Phillips, his master glanced at a clock on the mantelpiece. The hour was eight-fifteen. Some days elapsed before Clancy interpreted that incident correctly.

"You rose early," said the Senator.

"Yes, but worms are coy this morning."

"Meaning that you still await answers to your questions. I'll deal with you fully and frankly, but I'm curious to know on what conceivable ground you could arrest me for the murder of my friend Ronald Tower."

"As an accessory before the act."

"But, consider. You have brains, Mr. Clancy. I am glad the Bureau sent such a man. How can a bit of unthinking generosity on my part be construed as participation in a crime?"

"If you explain matters, Senator, the absurdity of the notion may become clear."

"Ah, that's better. Let me assure you that my coffee will

not affect your fine sensibilities. Miss Rachel Craik is a lady I have known nearly all my life. I have assisted her, within my means. She resides in East One Hundred and Twelfth Street, and the man about whom she was so concerned last night is her brother. He committed some technical offense years ago, and has always been a ne'er-do-well. To please his sister, and for no other reason, I undertook to provide him with five hundred dollars, and thus enable him to start life anew. I have never met the man. I would not recognize him if I saw him. I believe he is a desperate character; his maniacal behavior last night seems to leave no room for doubt in that respect. Don't you see, Mr. Clancy, that it was I, and not poor Tower, whom he meant attacking? But for idle chance, it is my corpse, not Tower's, that would now be floating in the Hudson. You heard what Tower said. I did not. I assume, however, that some allusion was made to the money – which, by the way, is still in my pocketbook – and Tower scoffed at the notion that he had come there to hand over five hundred dollars. There you have the whole story, in so far as I can tell it."

"For the present, Senator."

"How?"

"It should yield many more chapters. Is that all you're going to say? For instance, did you call on Rachel Craik after leaving Eighty-sixth Street?"

Meiklejohn's jaws closed like a steel trap. He almost lost his temper.

"No," he said, seemingly conquering the desire to blaze into

anger at this gadfly of a detective.

"Sure?"

"I said 'no.' That is not 'yes.' I was so overcome by Tower's miserable fate that I dismissed my car and walked home. I could not face any one, least of all Helen – Mrs. Tower."

"Or the Bureau?"

"Mr. Clancy, you annoy me."

Clancy stood up.

"I must duck your coffee, Senator," he said cheerfully. "Is Miss Craik on the phone?"

"No. She is poor, and lives alone – or, to be correct, with a niece, I believe."

"Well, think matters over. I'll see you again soon. Then you may be able to tell me some more."

"I have told you everything."

"Perhaps *I* may do the telling."

"Now, as to this poor woman, Miss Craik. You will not adopt harsh measures, I trust?"

"We are never harsh, Senator. If she speaks the truth, and all the truth, she need not fear."

In the hall Clancy met the valet, carrying a laden tray.

"Do you make good coffee, Phillips?" he inquired.

"I try to," smiled the other.

"Ah, that's modest – that's the way real genius speaks. Sorry I can't sample your brew to-day. So few Englishmen know the first thing about coffee."

"Nice, friendly little chap," was Phillips's opinion of the detective. Senator Meiklejohn's description of the same person was widely different. When Clancy went out, he, too, rose and stretched his stiff limbs.

"I got rid of that little rat more easily than I expected," he mused – that is to say, the Senator's thoughts may be estimated in some such phrase. But he was grievously mistaken in his belief. Clancy was no rat, but a most stubborn terrier when there were rats around.

While Meiklejohn was drinking his coffee the telephone rang. It was Mrs. Tower. She was heartbroken, or professed to be, since no more selfish woman existed in New York.

"Are you coming to see me?" she wailed.

"Yes, yes, later in the day. At present I dare not. I am too unhinged. Oh, Helen, what a tragedy! Have you any news?"

"News! My God! What news can I hope for except that Ronald's poor, maimed body has been found?"

"Helen, this is terrible. Bear up!"

"I'm doing my best. I can hardly believe that this thing has really happened. Help me in one small way, Senator. Telephone Mr. Jacob and explain why our luncheon is postponed."

"Yes, I'll do that."

Meiklejohn smiled grimly as he hung up the receiver. In the midst of her tribulations Helen Tower had not forgotten Jacob and the little business of the Costa Rica Cotton Concession! The luncheon was only "postponed."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.