

Martyn Wyndham

Anthony Trent, Master Criminal



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CHAPTER I

THE FIRST STEP

AUSTIN the butler gave his evidence in a straightforward fashion. He was a man slightly below middle height, inclined to portliness, but bore himself with the dignity of one who had been likened to an archbishop.

Although he had been examined by a number of minor officials, hectoring by them, threatened or cajoled as they interpreted their duty, his testimony remained the same. And when he hoped this tedious business was all over, he was brought before Inspector McWalsh and compelled to begin all over again. It was McWalsh's theory that a man may be startled into telling the truth that will convict him. He had a habit of leaning forward, chin thrust out, great fists clenched, and hurling accusations at suspects.

He disliked Austin at sight. The feeling was not wholly of national origin. McWalsh liked witnesses, no less than criminals, to exhibit some indications of the terrors his name had inspired to the guilty. Austin gazed about him as though the surroundings were not to his taste. His attitude was one of deferential boredom. He recognized the inspector as one representing justly constituted authority to be accepted with respect in everything but a social sense.

Inspector McWalsh permitted himself to make jocose remarks as to Austin's personal appearance. McWalsh passed for a wit among his inferiors.

"At half past twelve on Tuesday I came into the library," the butler repeated patiently, "and asked Mr. Warren if he wanted anything before I went to bed."

"What did he say?" demanded the inspector.

"That he did not want anything and that I could go to bed."

"And you did?"

"Naturally," the butler returned.

"What duties have you the last thing before retiring?"

"I see that the doors and windows are fastened."

The inspector sneered. The small black eyes set in his heavy red face regarded the smaller man malevolently.

"And you did it so damn well that within an hour or so, ten thousand dollars' worth of valuables was walked off with by a crook! How do you account for that?"

"I don't try to," the butler answered suavely, "that's for you gentlemen of the police. I have my duties and I attend to them as my testimonials show. I don't presume to give you advice but I should say it was because the crook was cleverer than your men."

"Don't get funny," snapped McWalsh. He had on the table before him Austin's modest life history which consisted mainly in terms of service to wealthy families in England and the United States. These proved him to be efficient and trustworthy. "I want answers to my questions and not comments from you."

Austin's manner nettled him. It was that slightly superior air, the servants' mark of contempt. And never before had the inspector been referred to as "a gentleman of the police;" he suspected a slight.

"Let's get this thing straight," he went on. "You went to bed when your services were no longer required. Your employer said to you, 'You can go to bed, Austin, I don't want anything,' so you locked

up and retired. You didn't know anything about the burglary until half past six o'clock on Wednesday morning – this morning – You aroused your employer who sent for the police. That's correct?"

"Absolutely," Austin returned. He was, plainly, not much interested.

"And you still stick to it that Mr. Warren made that remark?"

Austin looked at the inspector quickly. His bored manner was gone.

"Yes," he said deliberately. "To the best of my knowledge those were his words. I may have made a mistake in the phrasing but that is what he meant."

"What's the good of your coming here and lying to me?" The inspector spoke in an aggrieved tone.

"I was brought here against my will," Austin reminded him, "and I have not lied, although your manner has been most offensive. You see, sir, I'm accustomed to gentlefolk."

McWalsh motioned him to be silent.

"That'll do," he commanded, "I'm not interested in what you think. Now answer this carefully. What clothes was Mr. Warren wearing?"

"Evening dress," said the butler, "but a claret-colored velvet smoking jacket instead of a black coat."

"How was he looking?"

"Do you mean in what direction?"

"You know I don't. I mean was he looking as usual? Was there anything unusual in his look?"

"Nothing that I noticed," Austin told him, "but then his back was to me so I am not competent to judge."

"When you speak to any one don't you go up and look 'em in the face like a man same as I'm talking and looking at you?"

Austin permitted himself to smile.

"Do you suggest I should look at Mr. Warren as you are looking at me? Pardon me, sir, but I should lose my place if I did."

McWalsh flushed a darker red.

"Why didn't you look at him in your own way then?"

"It's very clear," Austin answered with dignity, "that you know very little of the ways of an establishment like ours. I stood at the door as I usually do, asked a question I have done hundreds of times and received the same answer I do as a rule. If I'd known I was to have to answer all these questions I might have recollected more about it."

"What was Mr. Warren doing?"

"Reading a paper and smoking."

"He was alone?"

"Yes."

"And all the other servants had gone to bed?"

"Yes."

"You heard no unusual sounds that night?"

"If I had I should have investigated them."

"No doubt," sneered the other, "you look like a man who would enjoy running into a crook with a gun."

"I should not enjoy it," Austin returned seriously.

Inspector McWalsh beckoned to one of his inferiors.

"Keep this man outside till I send for him and see he don't speak to his boss who's waiting. Send Mr. Warren right in."

Conington Warren, one of the most popular men in society, member of the desirable clubs, millionaire owner of thoroughbreds, came briskly in. He was now about fifty, handsome still, but his florid face was marked by the convivial years. Inspector McWalsh had long followed the Warren

colors famous on the big race courses. His manner showed his respect for the owner of his favorite stable.

"I asked you to come here," he began, "because you told my secretary over the phone that you had some new light on this burglary. So far it seems just an ordinary case without any unusual angles."

"It's not as ordinary as you think," said Conington Warren. He offered McWalsh one of his famous cigars. "Incidentally it does not show me up very favorably as I'm bound to admit."

McWalsh regarded his cigar reverently. Warren smoked nothing but these superb things. What a man! What a man!

"I can't believe that, Mr. Warren," he returned.

"Are you interested in the thoroughbreds, McWalsh?"

"Am I?" cried the other enthusiastically. "Why when I couldn't spend a few hours at old Sheepshead Bay I nearly resigned. Why, Mr. Warren, I made enough on Conington when he won the Brooklyn Handicap to pay the mortgage off on my home!"

"Then you'll understand," the sportsman said graciously. "It's like this. Last year I bought a number of yearlings at the Newmarket sales in England. There's one of them – a chestnut colt named Saint Beau – who did a most remarkable trial a day or two since. In confidence, inspector, it was better than Conington's best. Make a note of that but keep it under your hat."

"I surely will, sir," cried the ecstatic McWalsh.

"When I heard the time of the trial I gave a little dinner to a number of good pals at Voisin's."

The names he mentioned were all of them prominently known in the fashionable world of sport.

"We had more champagne than was good for us and when the dinner was over we all went to Reggie Camplyn's rooms where he invented the Saint Beau cocktail. I give you my word, inspector, the thing has a thoro'bred kick to it. It's one of those damned insidious cocktails wrapped up in cream to make you think it's innocent. After I'd had a few I said to Camplyn, 'You've made me what I am to-night; I insist on sleeping here.'"

"But you didn't!" cried McWalsh.

"Until four in the morning. The Saint Beau cocktail made me so ill at four that I got up and walked down to my house."

"What time did you get there?"

"Exactly at five. I felt the need of the cool air, so I took a long walk first."

"Then at half past twelve you were at –"

"Voisin's as a score of people can prove. I had a table in the balcony and saw all the people I ever knew it seemed to me."

"But this morning you told the officers who made an investigation of the robbery a totally different story. You corroborated your butler's evidence that you were at home at half past twelve and told him to go to bed because you didn't want anything else. How do you account for that?"

The inspector was troubled. His only consolation was that he would have another session soon with the supercilious Austin. He licked his lips at the thought. But he did not wish to involve the horseman in any difficulties if he could avoid it.

Conington Warren laughed easily.

"You know how it is, inspector. You can understand that sometimes a man suddenly waked out of heavy sleep can forget what happened the night before for the time being. That's what happened with me. I clean forgot the dinner, Camplyn's Saint Beau cocktail, everything. I only knew I had the devil of a head. I always rely on Austin."

"When did you remember?" McWalsh demanded.

"When Camplyn came in to see me and ask for the ingredients of the cocktail which he claims I invented. Then I recollected everything and telephoned to you."

"I knew that damned fellow was lying," McWalsh cried. "He thought he was clever. He'll find out just how smart he is! Tell me, Mr. Warren, what did he want to put up that fiction for?"

Warren put a hot hand to a head which still ached.

"I can't imagine," he answered. "I've never found him out in a lie yet. He's too damn conceited to descend to one. I don't think you should suspect Austin."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Warren, but I've got to. He lied to you and he lied to me and – ten thousand dollars' worth of stuff was stolen. He's in the outer room now. I'll have him brought in."

Austin entered with his precise and measured tread and bowed with respectful affection to his employer. He liked Conington Warren better than any American with whom he had taken service. The hearty, horse-loving type was one which appealed to Austin. He had several times been obliged to throw up lucrative jobs because employers persisted in treating him as an equal.

"This is a bad mix-up," his master began. "The inspector seems to think you have been deceiving him."

"He has and he knows it," cried McWalsh.

"He's inclined to be hasty, sir," said Austin tolerantly.

"See here," snapped the inspector, "you say you found Mr. Warren in his library at half past twelve. Did you hear him enter the house?"

"No," the butler returned, "he has his key."

"The thing we want to clear up," interrupted Mr. Warren in a kindly tone, "is simply this. What did I say to you when you spoke to me?"

Austin looked uncomfortable.

"It was a gesture, sir, rather than a word. You waved your arm and I knew what you meant."

"You are one prize liar!" roared the inspector. "You said something quite different when I asked you."

"I don't see that it matters much," Austin returned acidly. "On Monday night Mr. Warren may have said for me to go to bed. On Tuesday he may have waved his hand impatient like. On Wednesday he may have asked for cigars or the evening papers. I remember only that on this occasion I was not asked for anything." He turned to his employer, "I should like to remind you, sir, that we are giving a dinner party to-night and I ought to be seeing after it now. Can I go, sir?"

"You cannot," cried Inspector McWalsh, "you're under arrest!"

"I told you he was hasty, sir," said Austin without emotion. "What for may I ask?"

"Let me answer him please, inspector," begged Conington Warren. "You told the police that you saw me sitting in my library. Are you prepared to swear to that, Austin?"

"Certainly, sir," said the man. "You were in the big turkish rocker, smoking one of the cigars you are smoking now and reading the Sporting Times."

"I'd give a thousand dollars to know who that was!" Warren commented. "It wasn't I at all. I was dining at Voisin's at that hour."

For the first time Austin was acutely disturbed.

"I don't understand," he stammered. "It looked like you, sir, it did indeed."

"And if you'd only gone up like a man and looked in his face you'd have seen the burglar," McWalsh said scowling.

Austin looked at the speaker coldly.

"It is not my business to suspect my employer of being a crook. If it's crime to be deceived then I'm guilty. I admit I didn't look very closely. I was sleepy and wanting to get to bed, but I did notice that whoever it was wore a claret colored velvet smoking jacket."

"I've a list here," said McWalsh, "given my men by the footman of the people who called at Mr. Warren's house yesterday. Look it over and see if you can supplement it."

"There was one other visitor," Austin said slowly, "an intimate friend of Mr. Warren's, but I don't know his name. I didn't admit him."

"That's curious," said his employer. "I thought you knew every one who was intimate enough to come to my home. What was he like?"

“I didn’t see him full face,” the other admitted, “but he was tall, about your height, but dark in coloring with a rather large nose. It struck me he was a trifle in liquor if I may say so.”

“I don’t remember any one like that,” Warren asserted.

“The gentleman,” said Austin anxious to establish his point, “who bet you ten thousand dollars that his filly could beat your Saint Beau at five furlongs.”

“This is all damned nonsense,” returned Conington Warren a little crossly, “I’m in possession of my full senses now at all events. I made no such wager.”

“I told you he was a crook, Mr. Warren,” cried McWalsh gleefully. “See what he’s trying to put over on you now!”

“Surely, sir,” said the butler anxiously, “you remember asking a gentleman to come into your dressing room?”

“You’re crazy,” his master declared, “I asked nobody. Why should I?”

“He was standing just inside the room as I passed by. He was very merry. He was calling you ‘Connie’ like only your very intimate friends do.”

“And what was I saying?” Warren returned, impressed with the earnestness of one in whom he believed.

“I didn’t listen, sir,” the butler answered. “I was just passing along the hall.”

“Did you hear Mr. Warren’s voice?” McWalsh demanded suddenly.

Austin reflected.

“I wouldn’t swear to it,” he decided.

“What time was it?” Warren asked.

“A little after ten,” said Austin.

“I left the house at eight, so you are not likely to have heard me. I was at Voisin’s from half past eight until nearly one. When did you first see this supposed friend?”

“I was going up the main stairway as he was about to come down toward me. Almost directly I saw him – and I didn’t at the time think he saw me – he turned back as if you had called him from your room. He said, ‘What is it, Connie?’ then he walked down the corridor and stood half way in your room talking to you as I supposed. He looked like a gentleman who might belong to your clubs, sir, and spoke like one. What was I to think?”

“I’m not blaming you,” said Conington Warren. “I’m as puzzled as you are. Didn’t Yogotama see him when he went to my room to get my smoking jacket which you say he wore? What was Yogotama doing to allow that sort of thing?”

“You forget, sir,” explained Austin, “that Yogotama wasn’t there.”

“Why wasn’t he?”

“Directly he got your note he went off to the camp.”

“This gets worse and worse,” Warren asserted. “I sent him no note.”

“He got one in your writing apparently written on the stationery of the Knickerbocker Club. I saw it. You told him to go instantly to your camp and prepare it for immediate occupancy. He was to take Evans and one of the touring cars. He got the note about half past eight.”

“Just after you’d left the house,” McWalsh commented.

“It didn’t take Yogotama a half hour to prepare,” added Austin.

“What do you make of it, inspector?” Warren demanded.

“A clever crook, that’s all,” said the other, “but he can’t pull anything like that in this town and get away with it.”

Austin made a polite gesture implying doubt. It incensed the official.

“You don’t think so, eh?”

“Not from what I’ve seen of your methods. I’ve no doubt you can deal with the common ruck of criminals, but this man is different. It may be easy enough for a man to deceive you people by

pretending to be a gentleman but we can see through them. Frankly,” said Austin growing bolder, “I don’t think you gentlemen of the police have the native wit for the higher kind of work.”

Warren looked from one to the other of them. This was a new and rebellious Austin, a man chafing under a personal grievance, a belligerent butler.

“You mustn’t speak like that to Inspector McWalsh,” he commanded. “He is doing his duty.”

“That may be sir,” Austin remarked, “but how would you like to be called ‘Little Lancelot from Lunnon’?”

“You look it,” McWalsh said roughly. “Anyway I’ve no time to argue with house servants. What you’ve got to do is to look through our collection of pictures and see if you can identify any of ’em with the man you say you saw.”

Austin surveyed the faces with open aversion.

“He’s not here,” said Austin decisively. “He was not this criminal type at all. I tell you I mistook him for a member of Mr. Warren’s clubs, the kind of gentleman who dines at the house. These,” and he pointed derisively to the pillories of crime. “You wouldn’t be likely to see any of these at our house. They are just common.”

McWalsh sneered.

“I see. Look more like policemen I suppose?”

Austin smiled blandly.

“The very thing that was in my mind.”

CHAPTER II

ANTHONY TRENT TALKS ON CRIME

ANTHONY TRENT was working his typewriter at top speed when there came a sudden, peremptory knocking at his door.

“Lord!” he grumbled, rising, “it must be old Lund to say I’m keeping him awake.”

He threw open his door to find a small, choleric and elderly man clad in a faded dressing gown. It was a man with a just grievance and a desire to express it.

“This is no time to hammer on your typewriter,” said Mr. Lund fiercely. “This is a boarding house and not a private residence. Do you realize that you generally begin work at midnight?”

“Come in,” said Anthony Trent genially. With friendly force he dragged the smaller man along and placed him in a morris chair. “Come in and give me your opinion of the kind of cigar smoked by the president of the publishing house for whose magazines I work noisily at midnight.”

Mr. Lund found himself a few seconds later sitting by an open window, an excellent cigar between his teeth, and the lights of New York spread before him. And he found his petulance vanishing. He wondered why it was that although he had before this come raging to Anthony Trent’s door, he always suffered himself to be talked out of his ill humors. It was something magnetic and engaging that surrounded this young writer of short stories.

“I can’t smoke a cigar when I’m working,” said Trent, lighting a pipe.

“Surely,” said Mr. Lund, not willing so soon to be robbed of his grievance, “you choose the wrong hours to work. Mrs. Clarke says you hardly ever touch your typewriter till late.”

“That’s because you don’t appreciate the kind of story I write,” Anthony Trent told him. “If I wrote the conventional story of love or matrimony I could work so many hours a day and begin at nine like any business man. But I don’t. I begin to write just when the world I write of begins to live. My men and women are waking into life now, just when the other folks are climbing into their suburban beds.”

“I understood you wrote detective stories,” Mr. Lund remarked. His grievances were vanishing. His opinion of the president of Trent’s magazine was a high one.

“Crook stories,” Anthony Trent confided. “Not the professional doings of thoughtless thugs. They don’t interest me a tinker’s curse. I like subtlety in crime. I could take you now into the great restaurants on Broadway or Fifth Avenue and point out to you some of the kings of crime – men who are clever enough to protect themselves from the police. Men who play the game as a good chess player does against a poorer one, with the certainty of being a move ahead.”

Mr. Lund conjured up a vision of such a restaurant peopled by such a festive crowd. He felt in that moment that an early manhood spent in Somerville had perhaps robbed him of a chance to live.

“They all get caught sooner or later,” asserted the little man in the morris chair.

“Because they get careless or because they trust another. If you want to be a successful crook, Mr. Lund, you’ll have to map out your plan of life as carefully as an athlete trains for a specific event. Now if you went in for crime you’d have to examine your weaknesses.”

“Thank you,” said Mr. Lund a little huffily, “I am not going in for a life of crime. I am perfectly content with my own line.” This, with unconscious sarcasm for Mr. Lund, pursued what he always told the borders was “the advertising.”

“There are degrees in crime I admit,” said Anthony Trent, “but I am perfectly serious in what I say. The ordinary crook has a low mental capacity. He generally gets caught in the end as all such clumsy asses should. The really big man in crime often gets caught because he is not aware of his weaknesses. Drink often brings out an incautious boasting side of a man. If you are going in for crime, Mr. Lund, cut out drink I beg of you.”

"I do not need your advice," Mr. Lund returned with some dignity. "I have tasted rum once only in my life."

Trent looked at him interested.

"It would probably make you want to fight," he said.

"I don't care to think of it," said Mr. Lund.

"And the curious part of it is," mused Trent, "that in the sort of crowd these high class crooks mix with it is most unusual not to drink, and the man who doesn't is almost always under suspicion. The great thing is to be able to take your share and stop before the danger mark is reached. Did you ever hear of Captain Despard?"

"I think not," Lund answered.

"A boyhood idol of mine," Anthony Trent admitted. "One of the few gentleman crooks. Most of the so-called gentlemen criminals have been anything but gentlemen born. Despard was. I was in Devonshire on my last trip to the other side and I made a pilgrimage to the place where he was born. Funny to think that a man brought up in one of the 'stately homes of England, how beautiful they stand,' should come to what he was."

"Woman, I suppose," said Lund, as one man of the world to another.

"Not in the beginning," Anthony Trent answered. "He was a cavalry officer in India – Kipling type you know – and had a craze for precious stones. Began to collect them honestly enough and found his pay and private fortune insufficient. He got kicked out of his regiment anyway and went to Cape Town. One night a very large diamond was stolen from a bedroom of the Mount Nelson hotel and he was suspected. They couldn't prove anything, but he came over here to New York and sold it, under another name, and with a different history, to one of the Pierpoints. The trouble with Captain Despard was that he used to drink heavily when he had pulled a big thing off. While he was planning a *coup* he was temperate and he never touched a drop while he was working."

"Started to boast, I suppose?" Lund suggested.

"No," said Anthony Trent. "Not that sort at all. He lived at a pretty fair sort of club here in the forties and was well enough liked until the drink was in him. It was then that he began to think of his former mode of life and the kind he was now living. He used to think the other members were trying to slight him or avoid him. He laboriously picked quarrels with some of them. He beat up one of them in a fist fight in the club billiard room. This fellow brooded over his licking for a long time and then with another man, also inflamed with cocktails, went up to Despard's room to beat him up. Despard was out, so they broke his furniture. They found that the legs of chairs and tables had been hollowed so as to conceal what Despard stole. It was in one of the chairs that they found the Crediton pearls which had been missing for a year. They waited for him and he was sent to Sing Sing but escaped. He shot a man later in Denver and was executed. He might have been living comfortably but for getting suspicious when he had been drinking."

"You must have studied this thing deeply," Lund commented.

"I have," Anthony Trent admitted; "I know the histories of most of the great criminals and their crimes. The police do too, but I know more than they. I make a study of the man as well as his crime. I find vanity at the root of many failures."

"*Cherchez la femme*," Mr. Lund insisted.

"Not that sort of vanity," Anthony Trent corrected. "I mean the sheer love to boast about one's abilities when other men are boasting of theirs. There was a man called Paul Vierick, by profession a second story man. He was short, stout and a great consumer of beer and in his idle hours fond of bowling. He was staying in Stony Creek, Connecticut, one summer, when a tennis ball was hit up high and lodged in a gutter pipe on the roof. Vierick told the young man who had hit it there how to get it. It was so dangerous looking a climb that the lad refused. Some of the guests suggested in fun that Vierick should try. They made him mad. He thought they were laughing at his two hundred pound look. They were not to know that a more expert porch climber didn't exist than this man who

had been a professional trapeze man in a circus. They say he ran up the side of that house like a monkey. Directly he had done it and people began talking he knew he'd been unwise. He had been posing as a retired dentist and here he was running up walls like the count in Dracula. He moved away and presently denied the story so vehemently that an intelligent young lawyer investigated him and he is now up the river."

"That's an interesting study," Mr. Lund commented. He was thoroughly taken up with the subject. "Do you know any more instances like that?"

"I know hundreds," Anthony Trent returned smiling. "I could keep on all night. Your town of Somerville produced Blodgett the Strangler. You must have heard of him?"

"I was at school with him," Lund said almost excitedly. It was a secret he had buried in his breast for years. Now it seemed to admit him to something of a kinship with Anthony Trent. "He was always chasing after women."

"That wasn't the thing which got him. It was the desire to set right a Harvard professor of anatomy on the subject of strangulation. Blodgett had his own theories. You may remember he strangled his stepfather when he was only fifteen."

"He nearly strangled me once," Mr. Lund exclaimed. "He would have done if I hadn't had sufficient presence of mind to bite him in the thumb."

"Good for you," said the other heartily. "You'll find the history of crime is full of the little mistakes that take the cleverest of them to the chair. And yet," he mused, "it's a great life. One man pitting his courage and knowledge against all the forces organized by society to stamp him out. You've got to be above the average in almost every quality to succeed if you work alone."

Mr. Lund felt a trifle uncomfortable. The bright laughing face that had been Anthony Trent to him had given place to a sterner cast of countenance. The new Trent reminded him of a hawk. There was suddenly brought to the rather timid and elderly man the impression of ruthless strength and tireless energy. He had been a score of times in Anthony Trent's room and had always found him amusing and light hearted. Never until to-night had they touched upon crime. The New York over which Mr. Lund gazed from the seat by the window no longer seemed a friendly city. Crime and violence lurked in its every corner, he reflected.

Mr. Lund was annoyed with himself for feeling nervous. To brace up his courage he reverted to his former grievance. The sustaining cigar had long ceased to give comfort.

"I must protest at being waked up night after night by your typewriting machine. Everybody seems to be in bed and asleep but you. I must have my eight hours, Mr. Trent."

Anthony Trent came to his side.

"Everybody asleep?" he giped. "Why, man, the shadows are alive if you'll only look into them. And as to the night, it is never quiet. A myriad strange sounds are blended into this stillness you call night." His voice sank to a whisper and he took the discomfited Lund's arm. "Can you see a woman standing there in the shadow of that tree?"

"It might be a woman," Lund admitted guardedly.

"It is," he was told; "she followed not ten yards behind you as you came from the El. She's been waiting for a man and he ought to be by in a few minutes now. She's known in every rogues' gallery in the world. Scotland Yard knows her as Gipsy Lee, and if ever a woman deserved the chair she does."

"Not murder?" Lund hazarded timidly. He shivered. "It's a little cold by the window."

"Don't move," Anthony commanded. "You may see a tragedy unroll itself before your eyes in a little while. She's waiting for a banker named Pereira who looted Costa Rica. He's a big, heavy man."

"He's coming now," Lund whispered. "I don't like this at all, Mr. Trent."

"He won't either," muttered the other.

Unable to move Mr. Lund watched a tall man come toward the shadows which hid Gipsy Lee.

"We ought to warn him," Mr. Lund protested.

“Not on your life,” he was told. “This time it is punishment, not murder. She saved his life and he deserted her. Pereira’s pretending to be drunk. I wonder why. He dare not touch a drop because he has Bright’s disease in the last stages.”

A minute later Mr. Lund, indignant and commanding as his inches permitted, was shaking an angry finger at his host.

“You’ve no right to frighten me,” he exclaimed, “with your Gipsy Lee and Pereira when it was only poor Mrs. Clarke waiting for that drunken scamp of a husband who spends all he earns at the corner saloon.”

Heavy steps passed along the passage. It was Clarke making his bedward way to his wife’s verbal accompaniment.

“You ought to be pleased to get a thrill like that for nothing,” said Anthony Trent laughing. “I’d pay good money for it.”

“I don’t like it,” Mr. Lund insisted. “I thought you meant it.”

“I did,” the other asserted, “for the moment. New York is full of such stories and if they don’t happen in this street they happen in another. They always happen after midnight and I’ve got to put them down on the old machine. Somewhere a Gipsy Lee is waiting for a defaulting South American banker or a Captain Despard is planning to get a priceless stone, or a humbler Vierick plotting to climb into an inviting window, or some one like your boyhood chum Blodgett planning to get his hands around some one’s throat.”

Anthony Trent leaned from the window and breathed in the soft night air.

“It’s a great old city,” he said, half affectionately, “and I make my living by letting my hook down into the night and drawing up a mystery. You mustn’t mind if I sometimes rattle the old Royal when better folks are asleep.”

“If you’ll take the advice of an older man,” said Mr. Lund with an air of firmness, “you’ll let crook stories alone and choose something a little healthier. Your mind is full of them.”

Still a little outraged Mr. Lund bowed himself from the room. Anthony Trent fed his ancient briar and took the seat by the window.

“I wonder if he’s right,” mused Anthony Trent.

CHAPTER III

THE DAY OF TEMPTATION

THE dawn had long passed and the milkmen had awakened their unwilling clients two hours ago before Anthony Trent finished his story. He was not a quick worker. His was a mind that labored heavily unless the details of his work were accurate. This time he was satisfied. It was a good story and the editor for whom he was doing a series would be pleased. He might even increase his rates.

Crosbeigh, the editor of the magazine which sought Anthony Trent's crook stories, was an amiable being who had won a reputation for profundity by reason of eloquent silences. He would have done well in any line of work where originality was not desired. He knew, from what his circulation manager told him, that Trent's stories made circulation and he liked the writer apart from his work. Perhaps because he was not a disappointed author he was free from certain editorial prejudices.

"Sit down," he cried cordially, when Anthony Trent was shown in. "Take a cigarette and I'll read this right away." Crosbeigh was a nervous man who battled daily with subway crowds and was apt to be irritable.

"It's great," he said when he had finished it, "Great! Doyle, Hornung, well – there you are!" It was one of his moments of silent eloquence. The listener might have inferred anything.

"But they are paid real money," replied Anthony Trent gloomily.

"You get two cents a word," Crosbeigh reminded him, "you haven't a wife and children to support."

"I'd be a gay little adventurer to try it on what I make at writing," Trent told him. "It takes me almost a month to write one of those yarns and I get a hundred and fifty each."

"You are a slow worker," his editor declared.

"I have to be," he retorted. "If I were writing love slush and pretty heroine stuff it would be different. Do you know, Crosbeigh, there isn't a thing in these stories of mine that is impossible? I take the most particular care that my details are correct. When I began I didn't know anything about burglar alarms. What did I do? I got a job in the shop that makes the best known one. I'm worth more than two cents a word!"

"That's our maximum," Crosbeigh asserted. "These are not good days for the magazine business. Shot to pieces. If I said what I knew. If you knew what I got and how much I had to do with it!"

Anthony Trent looked at him critically. He saw a very carefully dressed Crosbeigh to-day, a man whose trousers were pressed, whose shoes were shined, who exuded prosperity. Never had he seen him so apparently affluent.

"Come into money?" he enquired. "Whence the prosperity? Whose wardrobe have you robbed?"

"These are my own clothes," returned Crosbeigh with dignity, "at least leave me my clothes."

"Sure," said Trent amiably, "if I took 'em you'd be arrested. But tell me why this sartorial display. Are you going to be photographed for the 'great editors' series?"

"I'm lunching with an old friend," Crosbeigh answered, "a man of affairs, a man of millions, a man about whom I could say many things."

"Say them," his contributor demanded, "let me in on a man for whom you have arrayed yourself in all your glory. Who is your friend? Is she pretty? I don't believe it's a man at all."

"It's a man I know and respect," he said, a trifle nettled at the comments his apparel had drawn. "It's the man who takes me every year to the Yale-Harvard boat race."

"Your annual jag party? He's no fit company for a respectable editor."

"It is college spirit," Crosbeigh explained.

“You can call it by any name but it’s too strong for you. What is the name of your honored friend?”

“Conington Warren,” Crosbeigh said proudly.

“That’s the millionaire sportsman with the stable of steeple-chasers, isn’t it?” Trent demanded.

“He wins all the big races,” Crosbeigh elaborated.

“He’s enormously rich, splendidly generous, has everything. Only one thing – drink.” Crosbeigh fell into silence.

“You’ve led him astray you mean?” The spectacle of the sober editor consorting with reckless bloods of the Conington Warren type amused Trent.

“Same year at college,” Crosbeigh explained, “and he has always been friendly. God knows why,” the editor said gloomily. The difference in their lot seemed suddenly to appal him.

“There must be something unsuspectedly bad in your make-up,” Trent declared, “which attracts him to you. It can’t be he wants to sell you a story.”

“There are all sorts of rumors about him,” Crosbeigh went on meditatively, “started by his wife’s people, I believe. He was wild. Sometimes he has hinted at it. I know him well enough to call him ‘Connie’ and go up to his dressing-room sometimes. That’s a mark of intimacy. My Lord, Trent, but it makes me envious to see with what luxury the rich can live. He has a Japanese valet and masseur, Togoyama, and an imported butler who looks like a bishop. They know him at his worst and worship him. He’s magnetic, that’s what Connie is, magnetic. Have you ever thought what having a million a year means?”

“Ye Gods,” groaned Trent, “don’t you read my lamentations in every story you buy from me at bargain rates?”

“And a shooting box in Scotland which he uses two weeks a year in the grouse season. A great Tudor residence in Devonshire overlooking Exmoor, a town house in Park Lane which is London’s Fifth Avenue! And you know what he’s got here in his own country. Can you imagine it?”

“Not on forty dollars a week,” said Anthony Trent gloomily.

“You’d make more if you were the hero of your own stories,” Crosbeigh told him.

Anthony Trent turned on him quickly, “What do you mean?”

“Why this crook you are making famous gets away with enough plunder to live as well as Conington Warren.”

“Ah, but that’s in a story,” returned the author.

“Then you mean they aren’t as exact and possible as you’ve been telling me?”

“They are what I said they were,” their author declared. “They could be worked out, with ordinary luck, by any man with an active body, good education and address. The typical thick-witted criminal wouldn’t have a chance.”

It was a curious thing, thought Anthony Trent, that Crosbeigh should mention the very thing that had been running in his mind for weeks. To live in such an elaborate manner as Conington Warren was not his ambition. The squandering of large sums of money on stage favorites of the moment was not to his taste; but he wanted certainly more than he was earning. Trent had a passion for fishing, golf and music. Not the fishing that may be indulged in on Sunday and week-day on fishing steamers, making excursions to the banks where one may lose an ear on another angler’s far flung hook, but the fly fishing where the gallant trout has a chance to escape, the highest type of fishing that may appeal to man.

And his ambitions to lower his golf handicap until it should be scratch could not well be accomplished by his weekly visit to Van Cortlandt Park. He wished to be able to join Garden City or Baltusrol and play a round a day in fast company. And this could not be accomplished on what he was making.

And as to music, he longed to compose an opera. It was a laudable ambition and would commence, he told himself, with a grand piano. He had only a hard-mouthed hired upright so far.

Sometimes he had seen himself in the rôle of his hero amply able to indulge himself in his moderate ambitions. It was of this he had been thinking when Mr. Lund came to his room. And now the very editor for whom he had created his characters was making the suggestion.

"I was only joking," Crosbeigh assured him.

"It is not a good thing to joke about," Anthony Trent answered, "and an honest man at forty a week is better than an outlaw with four hundred."

He made this remark to set his thoughts in less dangerous channels, but it sounded dreadfully hollow and false. He half expected that Crosbeigh would laugh aloud at such a hackneyed sentiment, but Crosbeigh looked grave and earnest. "Very true," he answered. "A man couldn't think of it."

"And why not?" Anthony Trent demanded; "would the fictional character I created do as much harm to humanity as some cotton mill owner who enslaved little children and gave millions to charity?"

A telephone call relieved Crosbeigh of the need to answer. Trent swept into his brief case the carbon copy of his story which he had brought by mistake.

"Where are you going?" the editor demanded.

"Van Cortlandt," the contributor answered; "I'm going to try and get my drive back. I've been slicing for a month."

"Conington Warren has a private eighteen-hole course on his Long Island place," Crosbeigh said with pride. "I've been invited to play."

"You're bent on driving me to a life of crime," Trent exclaimed frowning. "An eighteen-hole private course while I struggle to get a permit for a public one!"

But Anthony Trent did not play golf that afternoon at Van Cortlandt Park. As a matter of fact he never again invaded that popular field of play.

Outside Crosbeigh's office he was hailed by an old Dartmouth chum, one Horace Weems.

"Just in time for lunch," said Weems wringing his hand. Weems had always admired Anthony Trent and had it been possible would have remodeled himself physically and mentally in the form of another Trent. Weems was short, blond and perspired profusely.

"Hello, Tubby," said Trent without much cordiality, "you look as though the world had been treating you right."

"It has," said Weems happily. "Steel went to a hundred and twelve last week and it carried me up with it."

Weems had been, as Trent remembered, a bond salesman. Weems could sell anything. He had an ingratiating manner and a disability to perceive snubs or insults when intent on making sales. He had paid his way through college by selling books. Trent had been a frequent victim.

"What do you want to sell me this time?" he demanded.

"Nothing," Weems retorted, "I'm going to buy you the best little lunch that Manhattan has to offer. Anywhere you say and anything you like to eat and drink." Weems stopped a cruising taxi. "Hop in, old scout, and tell the pirate where to go."

Trent directed the man to one of the three famous and more or less exclusive restaurants New York possesses.

"I hope you have the price," he commented, "otherwise I shall have to cash a check I've just received for a story."

"Keep your old check," jeered Weems, "I'm full of money. Why, boy, I own an estate and have a twelve-cylinder car of my own."

Over the luncheon Horace Weems babbled cheerfully. He had made over three hundred thousand dollars and was on his way to millionairehood.

"You ought to see my place up in Maine," he said presently.

"Maine?" queried his guest. It was in Maine that Anthony Trent, were he fortunate enough, would one day erect a camp. "Where?"

“On Kennebago lake,” Weems told him and stopped when an expression of pain crossed the other’s face. “What’s the matter? That sauce wrong?”

“Just sheer envy,” Trent admitted, “you’ve got what I want. I know every camp on the Lake. Which is it?”

“The Stanley place,” said Weems. “The finest camp on the whole Lake. I bought it furnished and it’s some furniture believe me. There’s a grand piano – that would please you – and pictures that are worth thousands, one of ’em by some one named Constable. Ever hear of him?”

“Yes,” Trent grunted, “I have. Fancy you with a Constable and a grand piano when you don’t know one school of painting from another and think the phonograph the only instrument worth listening to!”

“I earned it,” Weems said, a little huffily. “Why don’t you make money instead of getting mad because I do?”

“Because I haven’t your ability, I suppose,” Trent admitted. “It’s a gift and the gods forgot me.”

“Some of the boys used to look down on me,” said Weems, “but all I ask is ‘where is little Horace to-day?’ This money making game is the only thing that counts, believe me. Up in Hanover I wasn’t one, two, three, compared with you. Your father was well off and mine hadn’t a nickel. You graduated *magna cum laude* and I had to work like a horse to slide by. You were popular because you made the football team and could sing and play.” Weems paused reflectively, “I never did hear any one who could mimic like you. You should have taken it up and gone into vaudeville. How much do you make a week?”

“Forty – with luck.”

“I give that to my chauffeur and I’m not rich yet. But I shall be. I’m out to be as rich as that fellow over there.”

He pointed to a rather high colored extremely well dressed man about town to whom the waiters were paying extreme deference.

“That’s Conington Warren,” Weems said with admiration in his voice, “he’s worth a million per annum.”

Anthony Trent turned to look at him. There was no doubt that Conington Warren was a personage. Just now he was engaged in an argument with the head waiter concerning *Château Y’Quem*. Trent noticed his gesture of dismissal when he had finished. It was an imperious wave of his hand. It was his final remark as it were.

“Some spender,” Weems commented. “Who’s the funny old dodger with him? Some other millionaire I suppose.”

“I’ll tell him that next time I see him,” laughed Trent beholding Crosbeigh, Crosbeigh who looked wise where vintages were discussed and knew not one from another. A well-dressed man paused at Warren’s side and Weems, always anxious to acquire information, begged his guest to be silent.

“Did you get that?” he asked when the man had moved away.

“I don’t make it a habit to listen to private conversations,” Trent returned stiffly.

“Well I do,” said Weems unabashed. “If I hadn’t I shouldn’t have got in on this Steel stuff. I’m a great little listener. That fellow who spoke is Reginald Camplyn, the man who drives a coach and four and wins blue ribbons at the horse show. Warren asked him to a dinner here to-morrow night at half past eight in honor of some horse who’s done a fast trial.” Weems made an entry in his engagement book.

“Are you going, too?” Trent demanded.

“I’m putting down the plug’s name,” said Weems, “Sambo,” he said. “That’s no name for a thoroughbred. Say couldn’t you introduce me?”

“I don’t know him,” Trent asserted.

“You know the man with him. That’s enough for me. If you do it right the other fellow’s bound to introduce you. Then you beckon me over and we’ll all sit down together.”

“That isn’t my way of doing things,” replied Trent with a frown.

Weems made a gesture of despair and resignation.

“That’s why you’ll always be poor. That’s why you’ll never have a grand piano and a Constable and a swell place up in Maine.”

Anthony Trent looked at him and smiled.

“There may be other ways,” he said slowly.

“You try ’em,” Weems retorted crossly. “Here you are almost thirty years old, highly educated, prep school and college and you make a week what I give my chauffeur.”

“I think I will,” Trent answered.

Weems attacked his salad angrily. If only Trent had been what he termed aggressive, an introduction could easily have been effected. Then Weems would have seen to it that he and Warren left the restaurant together. Some one would be bound to see them. Then, for Weems had an expansive fancy, it would be rumored that he, Horace Weems, who cleaned up on Steel, was friendly with the great Conington Warren. It might lead to anything!

“Well,” he commented, “I’d rather be little Horace Weems, who can’t tell a phonograph from a grand piano than Mr. Anthony Trent, who makes with luck two thousand a year.”

“I’m in bad company to-day,” replied Trent. “First Crosbeigh and now you tempting me. You know very well I haven’t that magic money making ability you have. My father hadn’t it or he would have left money when he died and not debts.”

“Magic!” Weems snorted. “Common sense, that’s what it is.”

“It’s magic,” the other insisted, “as a boy you exchanged a jack knife for a fishing pole and the fishing pole for a camera and the camera for a phonograph and the phonograph for a canoe and the canoe for a sailing boat and so on till you’ve got your place in Maine and a chauffeur who makes more than I do! Magic’s the only name for it.”

“You must come up and see me in Maine,” Weems said, later.

“Make your mind easy,” Trent assured him, “I will.”

CHAPTER IV

BEGINNING THE GAME

WHEN he left Weems, it was too late to start a round of golf so Trent took his homeward way intent on starting another story. Crosbeigh was always urging him to turn out more of them.

His boarding house room seemed shabbier than ever. The rug, which had never been a good one, showed its age. The steel engravings on the wall were offensive. "And Weems," he thought, "owns a Constable!"

His upright piano sounded thinner to his touch. "And Weems," he sighed, "has been able to buy a grand."

Up from the kitchen the triumphant smell of a "boiled New England dinner" sought out every corner of the house. High above all the varied odors, cabbage was king. The prospect of the dinner table was appalling, with Mr. Lund, distant and ready to quarrel over any infringement of his rights or curtailment of his portion. Mrs. Clarke ready to resent any jest as to her lord's habits. The landlady eager to give battle to such as sniffed at what her kitchen had to offer. Wearisome banter between brainless boarders tending mainly to criticism of moving picture productions and speculations as to the salaries of the stars. Not a soul there who had ever heard of William Blake or Ravel! Overdressed girls who were permanently annoyed with Anthony Trent because he would never take them to ice-cream parlors. Each new boarder as she came set her cap for him and he remained courteous but disinterested.

One of the epics of Mrs. Sauer's boarding house was that night when Miss Margaret Rafferty, incensed at the coldness with which her advances were received and the jeers of her girl friends, brought as a dinner guest a former sweetheart, now enthusiastically patrolling city sidewalks as a guardian of the peace. It was not difficult to inflame McGuire. He disliked Anthony Trent on sight and exercised an untrammelled wit during the dinner at his expense. It was afterwards in the little garden where the men went to smoke an after dinner cigar that the unforgivable phrase was passed.

McGuire was just able to walk home. He had met an antagonist who was a lightning hitter, whose footwork was quick and who boxed admirably and kept his head.

After this a greater meed of courtesy was accorded the writer of stories. But the bibulous Clarke alone amused him, Clarke who had been city editor of a great daily when Trent was a police reporter on it, and was now a Park Row derelict supported by the generosity of his old friends and acquaintances. Only Mrs. Clarke knew that Anthony Trent on numerous occasions gave her a little money each week until that day in the Greek kalends when her husband would find another position.

Anthony Trent settled himself at his typewriter and began looking over the carbon copy of the story he had just sold to Crosbeigh. He wished to assure himself of certain details in it. Among the pages was an envelope with the name of a celebrated Fifth Avenue club embossed upon it. Written on it in pencil was Crosbeigh's name. Unquestionably he had swept it from the editorial desk when he had taken up the carbon copy of his story.

Opening it he found a note written in a rather cramped and angular hand. The stationery was of the Fifth Avenue club. The signature was unmistakable, "Conington Warren." Trent read:

"My dear Crosbeigh:

"I am sending this note by Togoyama because I want to be sure that you will lunch with me at Voisin's to-morrow at one o'clock. I wish affairs permitted me to see more of my old Yale comrades but I am enormously busy. By the way, a little friend of mine thinks she can write. I don't suppose she can, but I promised to show her efforts to you. I'm no judge but it seems to me her work is very much the kind

you publish in your magazine. We will talk it over to-morrow. Of course she cares nothing about what you would pay her. She wants to see her name in print.

"Yours ever,

"CONINGTON WARREN."

Trent picked up an eraser and passed it over the name on the envelope. It had been written with a soft pencil and was easily swept away.

Over the body of the letter he spent a long time. He copied it exactly. A stranger would have sworn that the copy had been written by the same hand which indited the original. And when this copy had been made to Trent's satisfaction, he carefully erased everything in the original but the signature. Then remembering Weems' description of the Conington Warren camp in the Adirondacks, he wrote a little note to one Togoyama.

It was five when he had finished. There was no indecision about him. Twenty minutes later he was at the Public Library consulting a large volume in which were a hundred of the best known residences in New York. So conscientious was the writer that there were plans of every floor and in many instances descriptions of their interior decoration. Anthony Trent chuckled to think of the difficulties with which the unlettered crook has to contend. "Chicago Ed. Binner," for example, had married half a hundred servant maids to obtain information as to the disposition of rooms that he could have obtained by the mere consultation of such a book as this.

It was while Mrs. Sauer's wards were finishing their boiled dinner that some of them had a glimpse of Anthony Trent in evening dress descending the stairs.

"Dinner not good enough for his nibs," commented one boarder seeking to curry the Sauer favor.

"I'd rather have my boarders pay and not eat than eat and not pay," said Mrs. Sauer grimly. It was three weeks since she had received a dollar from the speaker.

"Drink," exclaimed Mr. Clarke, suddenly roused from meditation of a day now dead when a highball could be purchased for fifteen cents. "This food shortage now. That could be settled easily. Take the tax off liquor and people wouldn't want to eat so much. It's the high cost of drinking that's the trouble. What's the use of calling ourselves a free people? I tell you it was keeping vodka from the Russians that caused the whole trouble. Don't argue with me. I know."

Mr. Clarke went from the dinner table to his bed and awoke around midnight possessed with the seven demons of unsatiated thirst. He determined to go down and call upon Anthony Trent. He would plead for enough money to go to the druggist and get his wife's prescription filled. Trent, good lad that he was, always fell for it. And, he argued, it was a friendly act to do, this midnight call on a hard working young writer who had once been at his command.

For the first time Anthony Trent's door was locked. And the voice that snapped out an interrogation was different from the leisurely and amiable invitation to enter which was usual. The door was suddenly flung open, so sudden that poor Clarke was startled. And facing him, his fists clenched and a certain tenseness of attitude that was a strange one to the visitor, was Anthony Trent still in evening dress. Clarke construed it into an expression of resentment at his intrusion. He could not understand the sudden affability that took possession of his former reporter.

"Come in, Mr. Clarke," said Trent cordially. "I am sorry your wife's heart is troubling her but I agree with you that you should rush with all haste to the nearby druggist and have that prescription filled. And as the man who owes you money did not pay you to-day as he promised, but will without fail to-morrow at midday, take this five dollar bill with my blessing."

"How did you know?" gasped Clarke.

"I am a mind reader," Trent retorted. "It saves time." He led Mr. Clarke gently to the door. "Now I'm tired and want to go to sleep so don't call in on your way back with the change. Just trot up to bed as quietly as you can."

When the door was locked and a chair-back wedged against the handle, Trent lowered the shades. Then he cleared his table of the litter of paper. A half dozen pages of the first draft of his new story held his attention for a few seconds. Then he deliberately tore the pages into little fragments, threw them into the waste paper basket. And to this cenotaph he added the contents of the table drawer, made up of notes for future stories, the results of weeks of labor.

“Dust to dust,” he murmured, “ashes to ashes!”

It was the end of the career of Anthony Trent, writer.

And on the table which had formerly held only writing paper a quaint miscellany was placed. Eight scarf pins, each holding in golden claws stones of price. Apparently Conington Warren had about him only what was good. And there was a heavy platinum ring with a ruby of not less than four carats, a lady’s ring. It would not be difficult for a man so clever with his hands and apt mechanically to remove these jewels from their setting. Nor was there any difficulty in melting the precious metals.

It seemed to Trent that he had gloated over these glistening stones for hours before he put them away.

Then he took out a roll of bills and counted them. Conington Warren, it seemed, must have had considerable faith in the excellent Togoyama now hurrying to the Adirondack camp, for he had left three thousand dollars in the upper left hand drawer of a Sheraton desk.

Morning was coming down the skies when Trent, now in dressing gown, lighted his pipe and sat down by the window.

“Well,” he muttered softly, “I’ve done it and there’s no going back. Yesterday I was what people call an honest man. Now – ?”

He shrugged his shoulders and puffed quickly. Out of the window grey clouds of smoke rose as fragrant incense.

He had never meant to take up a career of crime. Looking back he could see how little things coming together had provoked in him an insatiable desire for an easier life. In all his personal dealings heretofore, he had been scrupulously honest, and there had never been any reflection on his honor as a sportsman. He had played games for their own sake. He had won without bragging and lost with excuses. Up in Hanover there were still left those who chanted his praise. What would people think of him if he were placed in the dock as a criminal?

His own people were dead. There were distant cousins in Cleveland, whom he hardly remembered. There was no family honor to trail in the dust, no mother or sweetheart to blame him for a broken heart.

He stirred uneasily as he thought of the possibility of capture. Even now those might be on his trail who would arrest him. It would be ironical if, before he tasted the fruits of leisure, he were taken to prison – perhaps by Officer McGuire! It had all been so absurdly easy. Within a few minutes of receiving the forged note the Japanese was on his way to the mountains.

The bishop-like butler who adored his master according to Crosbeigh, had seemed utterly without suspicion when he passed Trent engaged in animated converse with his supposed employer. The bad moment was when the man had come into the library where the intruder was hiding himself and stood there waiting for an answer to his question. Trent had seen to it that the light was low. It was a moment of inspiration when he called to mind Conington Warren’s imperious gesture as he waved away Voisin’s head waiter, and another which had made him put on the velvet smoking jacket. And it had all come out without a hitch. But he was playing a game now when he could never be certain he was not outguessed. It might be the suave butler was outside in the shadows guiding police to the capture.

He looked out of the window and down the silent street. There was indeed a man outside and looking up at him. But it was only poor Clarke whose own prescription had been too well filled. He had captured, so he fancied, an errant lamppost wantonly disporting itself.

Anthony Trent looked at him with a relief in which disgust had its part. He swore, by all the high gods, never to sink to that level. A curious turn of mind, perhaps, for a burglar to take. But so far the sporting simile presented itself to him. It was a game, a big game in which he took bigger risks than any one else. He was going to pit his wit, strength and knowledge against society as it was organized.

“I don’t see why I can’t play it decently,” he said to himself as he climbed into bed.

CHAPTER V

ANTHONY PULLS UP STAKES

WHEN those two great Australians, Norman Brooks and Anthony Wilding, had played their brilliant tennis in America, Trent had been a close follower of their play. He had interviewed them for his paper. In those days he himself was a respectable performer at the game. Brooks had given him one of his own rackets which was no longer in first class condition. It was especially made for the Australian by a firm in Melbourne. So pleased was Trent with it that he, later, sent to Australia for two more. It happened that the manager of the sporting goods store in Melbourne was a young American who believed in the efficacy of “follow up” letters. It was a large and prosperous firm and it followed up Anthony Trent with thoroughness. He received square envelopes addressed by hand by every third Australian mail.

Mrs. Sauer’s boarders, being of that kind which interests itself in others’ affairs and discusses them, were intrigued at these frequent missives from the Antipodes.

Finally Trent invented an Uncle Samuel who had, so he affirmed, left his native land when an adventurous child of nine and made a great fortune among the Calgoorlie gold fields. Possessing a nimble wit he related to his fellow boarders amazing accounts of his uncle’s activities. The boarders often discussed this uncle, his strange dislike of women, the beard which fell to his knees, the team of racing kangaroos which drew his buggy, and so forth.

At the breakfast table on the morning when Anthony Trent faced his world no longer an honest man, it was observed that he was disinclined to talk. As a matter of fact he wanted a reasonable excuse for leaving the Sauer establishment. The woman had been kind and considerate to him and he had few grievances.

The mail brought him an enticing letter from Melbourne offering him all that the tennis player needs, at special prices.

“I trust your uncle is well,” Mrs. Clarke observed.

It was in that moment Trent got his inspiration.

“I’m afraid he is very ill,” he said sadly, “at his age – he must be almost ninety – ”

“Only eighty-four,” Mrs. Clarke reminded him. She remembered the year of his emigration.

“Eighty-four is a great age to attain,” he declared, “and he has lived not wisely but well. I feel I should go out and see if there’s anything I can do.”

“You are going to leave us?” gasped Mrs. Sauer. His going would deprive her of a most satisfactory lodger.

“I’m afraid my duty is plain,” he returned gravely.

Thus he left Mrs. Sauer’s establishment. Years later he wondered whether if he had enjoyed better cooking he would have fallen from grace, and if he could not with justice blame a New England boiled dinner for his lapse.

For a few days he stayed at a quiet hotel. He wanted a small apartment on Central Park. There were reasons for this. First, he must live alone in a house where no officious elevator boys observed his going and his coming. Central Park West offered many such houses. And if it should happen that he ever had to flee from the pursuit of those who guarded the mansions that faced him on the park’s eastern side, there was no safer way home than across the silent grass. He was one of those New Yorkers who know their Central Park. There had been a season when a friend gave him the use of a saddle horse and there was no bridle path that he did not know.

He was fortunate in finding rooms at the top of a fine old brownstone house in the eighties. There were four large rooms all overlooking the Park. That he was compelled to climb five flights of stairs was no objection in his eyes. A little door to the left of his own entrance gave admission

to a ladder leading to the roof. None of the other tenants, so the agent informed him, ever used it. Anthony Trent was relieved to hear it.

"I sleep badly," he said, "possibly because I read a great deal and am anxious to try open air sleeping. If I might have the right to use the roof for that I should be very willing to pay extra."

"Glad to have you there," said the agent heartily, "you'll be a sort of night watchman for the property." He laughed at his jest. "Insomnia is plain hell, ain't it? I used to suffer that way. I walk a great deal now and that cures me. Do you take drugs?"

"I'm afraid of them," Anthony Trent declared. "I walk a good deal at night when the streets are quiet."

The agent reported to his office that Trent was a studious man who slept badly and wanted to sleep on the roof; also that he took long tramps at night. A good tenant, in fine. Thus he spread abroad the report which Trent desired.

The selection of a housekeeper was of extreme importance. She must be an elderly, quiet body without callers or city relatives. Her references must be examined thoroughly. He interviewed a score of women before he found what he wanted. She was a Mrs. Phoebe Kinney from Agawam, a village overlooking Buzzard's Bay. A widow, childless and friendless, she had occupied similar positions in Massachusetts but this would be the first one in New York. He observed in his talk with her that she conceived the metropolis to be the world center of wickedness. She assured her future employer that she kept herself to herself because she could never be certain that the man or woman who addressed a friendly remark to her might not be a criminal.

"Keep that attitude and we two shall agree splendidly," he said. "I have few friends and no callers. I am of a studious disposition and cannot bear interruptions. If you had friends in New York I should not hire you. I sometimes keep irregular hours but I shall expect to find you there all the time. You can have two weeks in the summer if you want them."

Next day Mrs. Kinney was inducted to her new home. It was a happy choice for she cooked well and had the New England passion for cleanliness. Trent noticed with pleasure that she was even suspicious of the tradespeople who sent their wares up the dumb waiter. And she discouraged their gossip who sold meat and bread to her. The many papers he took were searched for their crimes by Mrs. Kinney. Discovery of such records affirmed her in her belief of the city's depravity.

In his examination of her former positions Trent discovered that she had been housekeeper to the Clent Bulstrodes. He knew they were a fine, old Boston family of Back Bay, with a mansion on Beacon street. When he questioned her about it she told him it was as housekeeper of their summer home on Buzzards' Bay. Young Graham Bulstrode had been a tennis player of note years before. Many a time Anthony Trent had seen him at Longwood. He had dropped out because he drank too much to keep fit. The two were of an age. Mrs. Kinney related the history of the Bulstrode family at length and concluded by remarking that when she first saw her employer at the agency she was reminded of Mr. Graham. "But he looks terrible now," she added, "they say he drinks brandy before breakfast!"

The next day the society columns of the *Herald* informed him that the Clent Bulstrodes had bought a New York residence in East 73d street, just off the Avenue. This information was of peculiar interest to Trent. Now he was definitely engaged in a precarious profession he was determined to make a success of it. He had smoked innumerable pipes in tabulating those accidents which brought most criminals to sentence. He believed in the majority of cases they had not the address to get away with plausible excuses. It was an ancient and frayed excuse, that of pretending to be sent to read the water or electric meter. And besides, it was not Trent's intention to take to disguises of this sort.

He was now engaged in working out the solution of his second adventure. He was to make an attempt upon the house of William Drummond, banker, who lived in 93rd street and in the same number as did the Clent Bulstrodes, twenty blocks to the south. He had learned a great deal about Drummond from Clarke, his one-time city editor. Clarke remembered most of the interesting things

about the big men of his day. He told Trent that Drummond invariably carried a great deal of money on his person. He expatiated on the Drummond history. This William Drummond had begun life on an Iowa farm. He had gradually saved a little money and then lent it at extravagant interest. Later he specialized on mortgages, foreclosing directly he knew his client unable to meet his notes. His type was a familiar one and had founded many fortunes. Clarke painted him as a singularly detestable creature.

"But why," demanded Anthony Trent, "does a man like that risk his money if he's so keen on conserving it? One would think he wouldn't take out more than his car fare for fearing either of being robbed or borrowed from."

"As for robbing," Clarke returned, "he's a great husky beast although he's nearly sixty. And as to being borrowed from, that's why he takes it out. He belongs to a lot of clubs – not the Knickerbocker type – but the sort of clubs where rich young fellows go to play poker. They know old Drummond can lend 'em the ready cash without any formalities any time they wish it. Ever sit in a poker game, son, and get a hunch that if you were able to buy just one more pile of chips you'd clean up?"

"I have," said the other smiling, "but my hunch has generally been wrong."

"Most hunches are," Clarke commented. "Theirs are, too, but that old scoundrel makes thousands out of just such hunches. He puts it up to the borrower that it's between club members and so forth, not a money lending transaction. Tells 'em he doesn't lend money as a rule, and so forth and so on. I know he was asked to resign from one club for it. He's a bloodsucker and if I had an automobile I'd watch for him to cross the street and then run him down."

"Has he ever stung you?" Trent asked.

"Me? Not on your life. He specializes in rich men's sons. He wouldn't lend you or me a nickel if we were starving. You remember young Hodgson Grant who committed suicide last year. They said it was the heat that got him. It was William Drummond."

"Why does he keep up a house on such a street as he does? I should think he'd live cheaper."

"A young second wife. Threw the old one away, so to speak, and got a high stepper that makes him speed up. She thinks she will get into society. Not a chance, son, not a chance. I know."

It was on some of William Drummond's money that Anthony Trent had set his heart. It salved what was still a conscience to know that he was taking back profits unlawfully made, bleeding a blood sucker.

Owing to the second Mrs. Drummond's desire to storm society she cultivated publicity. There were pictures of herself and her prize winning Red Chows in dog papers. In other magazines she was seen driving her two high stepping hackneys, Lord Ping and Lady Pong, at the Mineola Horse Show. Also, there was an article on her home in a magazine devoted to interior decoration. A careful study of it answered every question concerning its lay-out that the most careful cracksman needed to know. Trent spent a week in learning how Drummond occupied his time. The banker invariably left his most profitable club at midnight, never earlier. By half past twelve he was in his library smoking one of the cigars that had been given him that night. Then a drink of gin and water. Afterwards, bed. The house was protected by the Sherlock system of burglar alarm, a tiresome invention to those who were ignorant of it. Anthony Trent regarded it as an enemy and had mastered it successfully for there were tricks of lock opening not hard to one as mechanically able as he and many a criminal had talked to him openly when he had covered police headquarters years before.

Drummond drank very little. When asked he invariably took a cigar. He was possessed of great strength and still patronized the club gymnasium. For two hours one night Drummond sat near him at a certain famous athletic club. On that night there were certain changes to be observed in the appearance of Anthony Trent. He seemed to have put on twenty pounds in weight and ten years in age. The art of make-up which had been forced upon him in college theatricals had recently engaged his attention. It was an art of which he had thought little until for his paper he had once interviewed Beerbohm Tree and had seen the amazing changes skilful make-up may create.

Ordinarily he slipped in and out silently, not encouraging Mrs. Kinney to talk. On this particular night he asked her a question concerning a missing letter and she came out into the lighted hall.

“You gave me quite a shock,” she said. “You look as like Mr. Graham Bulstrode as one pea is like another, although I’ve never seen him in full evening dress.”

She was plainly impressed by her employer’s magnificence although she feared this unusual flush on his ordinarily pale face meant that he had been having more to drink than was good for him.

It was the tribute for which Trent had waited. If Mrs. Kinney had never seen the son of her former master in the garb of fashion, her present employer had, and that within the week. And he had observed him carefully. He had seen that Bulstrode was wearing during the nights of late Autumn an Inverness cape of light-weight black cloth, lined with white silk. To Trent it seemed rather stagey but that did not prevent him from ordering its duplicate from Bulstrode’s tailor. Bulstrode clung to the opera hat rather than to the silk hat which has almost superseded it. To-night Trent wore an opera hat.

Bulstrode came into the athletic club at half past eleven. He was slightly under the influence of liquor and his face no redder than that of Trent who waited across the street in the shadow of the Park wall. No sooner had Bulstrode been whirled off in a taxi than Anthony Trent went into the club. To the attendants it seemed that he had returned for something forgotten. With his Inverness still on and his hat folded he lost himself in the crowded rooms and found at last William Drummond. The banker nodded cordially. It was evident to the impostor that the banker wished to ingratiate himself with the new member. The Bulstrodes had enormous wealth and a name that was recognized. To his greeting Anthony Trent returned a solemn owl-like stare. “Shylock!” he hiccupped insolently.

Drummond flushed but said nothing. Indeed he looked about him to see if the insult had been overheard by any other member. Inwardly Trent chuckled. He had now no fear of being discovered. Bulstrode probably knew few men at the club. He had not been in town as a resident for a month yet. He sank into a chair and read an evening paper watching in reality the man Drummond.

CHAPTER VI

FOOLING SHYLOCK DRUMMOND

THE night that he entered Drummond's house was slightly foggy and visibility was low. He was dressed as he had been when he encountered Drummond at the club. He had seen the banker climb the five steps to his front door at half past twelve. At half past one the lights were switched off in the bedroom on the second floor. At two the door gently opened and admitted Anthony Trent. He left it unlocked and ready for flight. And he memorized the position of the furniture so that hasty flight would be possible.

It was not a big house. The articles of furniture, the pictures, rugs and hangings were splendid. The interior decorators had taken care of that. But he had seen them all in the magazine. Trent knew very well that to obtain such prizes as he sought could not be a matter of certainty. Somewhere in this house was a lot of currency. And it might be in a safe. Old fashioned safes presented few difficulties, but your modern strong box is a different matter. Criminal investigator as he was, he knew one man seldom attempted to dynamite a safe. It was a matter for several men. In itself the technique was not difficult but he had no accomplices and at best it is a matter better fitted for offices in the night silences than a private residence.

He had been told by criminals that it was astonishing how careless rich men were with their money. Anthony Trent proposed to test this. He had made only a noiseless progress on a half dozen stairs on his upward flight when a door suddenly opened, flooding the stairway with light. It was from a room above him. And there were steps coming along a corridor toward him. Feeling certain that the reception rooms leading off the entrance hall were empty, he swiftly opened a door and stepped backward into the room, watching intently to see that he had escaped the observation of some one descending the staircase.

From the frying pan's discomfort to the greater dangers of the fire was what he had done for himself. He found himself in a long room at one end of which he stood, swearing under breath at what he saw. At the other Mr. William Drummond was seated at a table. And Mr. Drummond held in his hand an ugly automatic of .38 calibre. Covering him with the weapon the banker came swiftly toward him. It was the unexpected moment for which Anthony Trent was prepared. Assuming the demeanor of the drunken man he peered into the elder man's face. He betrayed no fear of the pistol. His speech was thickened, but he was reasonably coherent.

"It is old Drummond, isn't it?" he demanded.

"What are you doing here?" the other snapped, and then gave a start when he saw to whom he spoke. "Mr. Bulstrode!"

"I've come," said the other swaying slightly, "to tell you I'm sorry. I don't know why I said it but the other fellers said it wasn't right. I've come to shake your hand." He caught sight of the weapon. "Put that damn thing down, Drummond."

Obediently the banker slipped it into the pocket of his dressing gown. He followed the swaying man as he walked toward the lighted part of the room. He was frankly amazed. Wild as he was, and drunken as was his evening custom, why had this heir to the Bulstrode millions entered his house like a thief in the night? And for what was he sorry?

In a chair by the side of the desk Anthony Trent flung himself. He wanted particularly to see what the banker had hidden with a swift motion as he had risen. The yellow end of some notes of high denomination caught his eye. Right on the table was what he sought. The only method of getting it would be to overpower Drummond. There were objections to this. The banker was armed and would certainly shoot. Or there might be a terrific physical encounter in which the younger man might kill

unintentionally. And an end in the electric chair was no part of Trent's scheme of things. Also, there was some one else awake in the house.

Drummond resumed his seat and the watcher saw him with elaborate unconcern slide an evening paper over the partially concealed notes.

"Just what is on your mind, Mr. Bulstrode?" he began.

"I called you 'Shylock,'" Trent returned. "No right to have said it. What I should have said was, 'Come and have a drink.' Been ashamed of myself ever since."

Drummond looked at him fixedly. It was a calculating glance and a cold one. And there was the contempt in it that a sober man has for one far gone in drink.

"And do you usually break into a man's house when you want to apologize?" There was almost a sneer in his voice.

"Break in?" retorted the other, apparently slow at comprehending him, "the damn door wasn't locked. Any one could get in. Burglars could break through and steal. Most foolish. I lock my door every night. All sensible people do. Surprised at you."

"We'll see about that," said Drummond. He took a grip on his visitor's arm and led him through the hall to the door. It was unlocked and the burglar alarm system disconnected. It was not the first time that Drummond's man had forgotten it. In the morning he would be dismissed. Apparently this irresponsible young ass had got the idea in his stupid head that he had acted offensively and had calmly walked in. It was the opportunity for the banker to cultivate him.

"As I came in," Trent told him, "some one was coming down the stairs. Better see who it was."

Drummond looked at him suspiciously. Trent knew that he was not yet satisfied that his visitor's story was worthy of belief. Then he spoke as one who humors a child.

"We'll go and find out."

Outside the door they came upon an elderly woman servant with a silver tray in her hands.

"Madame," she explained, "was not able to eat any luncheon or dinner and has waked up hungry."

Drummond raised the cover of a porcelain dish.

"Caviare sandwiches," he grunted, "bad things to sleep on."

He led the way back to the room. In his scheming mind was a vague scheme to use this bêtise of Graham Bulstrode as a means to win his wife social advancement. Mrs. Clent Bulstrode could do it. Money would not buy recognition from her. Perhaps fear of exposure might. He glanced with contempt at the huddled figure of the heir to Bulstrode millions. The young man was too much intoxicated to offer any resistance.

Tall, huge and menacing he stood over Anthony Trent. There was a look in his eye that caused a certain uneasiness in the impostor's mind. In another age and under different conditions Drummond would have been a pirate.

"If it had been any other house than mine," he began, "and you had not been a fellow clubman an unexpected call like this might look a little difficult of explanation."

Anthony Trent acted his part superbly. Drunkenness in others had always interested him. Drummond watching his vacuous face saw the inebriated man's groping for a meaning admirably portrayed.

"What do yer mean?"

"Simply this," said Drummond distinctly. "At a time when I am supposed to be in bed you creep into my house without knocking or ringing. You come straight into a room where very valuable property is. While I personally believe your story I doubt whether the police would. They are taught to be suspicious. There would be a lot of scandal. Your mother, for instance, would be upset. New York papers revel in that sort of thing. You have suppressed news in Boston papers but that doesn't go here." He nodded his head impressively. "I wouldn't like to wager that the police would be convinced. In fact it might take a lot of publicity before you satisfied the New York police."

The idea seemed to amuse the younger man.

“Let’s call ’em up and see,” he suggested and made a lurching step toward the phone.

“No, no,” the other exclaimed hastily, “I wouldn’t have that happen for the world.”

Over his visitor’s face Drummond could see a look of laboring comprehension gradually stealing. It was succeeded by a frown. An idea had been born which was soon to flower in high and righteous anger.

“You’re a damned old blackmailer!” cried Anthony Trent, struggling to his feet. “When a gentleman comes to apologize you call him a robber. I’m going home.”

Drummond stood over him threatening and powerful.

“I don’t know that I shall let you,” he said unpleasantly. “Why should I? You are so drunk that in the morning you won’t remember a word I’ve said to you. I’m going to make use of you, you young whelp. You’ve delivered yourself into my hands. If I were to shoot you for a burglar I should only get commended for it.”

“Like hell you would,” Trent chuckled, “that old girl with the caviare sandwiches would tell the jury we were conversing amiably. You’d swing for it, Drummond, old dear, and I’d come to see your melancholy end.”

“And there’s another thing,” Drummond reminded him, “you’ve got a bad record. Your father didn’t give up the Somerset Club because he liked the New York ones any better. They wanted to get you away from certain influences there. I’ve got your whole history.”

“Haven’t you anything to drink?” Anthony Trent demanded.

From a cupboard in his black walnut desk Drummond took a large silver flask. He did not want his guest to become too sober. Since it was the first drink that Anthony Trent had taken that night he gulped eagerly.

“Good old Henessey!” he murmured. “Henessey’s a gentleman,” he added pointedly.

“Look here,” said Drummond presently after deep thought. “You’ve got to go home. I’m told there’s a butler who fetches you from any low dive you may happen to be.”

“He hates it,” Trent chuckled. “He’s a prohibitionist. I made him one.”

Drummond came over to him and looked him clear in the eye.

“What’s your telephone number?” he snapped.

Trent was too careful a craftsman to be caught like that. He flung the Bulstrode number back in a flash. “Ring him up,” he commanded, “there’s a direct wire to his room after twelve.”

“What’s his name?” Drummond asked.

“Old Man Afraid of His Wife,” he was told. Mrs. Kinney had told him of the nickname young Bulstrode had given the butler.

Drummond flushed angrily. “His real name? I’m not joking.”

“Nor am I,” Trent observed, “I always call him that.” He put on an expression of obstinacy. “That’s all I’ll tell you. Give me the phone and let me talk.”

It was a bad moment for Anthony Trent. It was probable that William Drummond was going to call up the Bulstrode residence to make certain that his visitor was indeed Graham Bulstrode. And if the butler were to inform him that the heir already snored in his own bed there must come the sudden physical struggle. And Drummond was armed. He had not failed to observe that the door to the entrance hall was locked. When Drummond had spoken to the servant outside he had taken this precaution. For a moment Trent entertained the idea of springing at the banker as he stood irresolutely with the telephone in his hand. But he abandoned it. That would be to bring things to a head. And to wait might bring safety.

But he was sufficiently sure of himself to be amused when he heard Drummond hesitatingly ask if he were speaking to Old Man Afraid of His Wife. The banker hastily disclaimed any intention of being offensive.

“Mr. Graham Bulstrode is with me,” he informed the listener, “and that is the only name he would give. I am particularly anxious that you inform his father I am bringing him home. Also,” his voice sank to a whisper, “I must speak to Mr. Bulstrode when I come. I shall be there within half an hour. He will be sorry all his days if he refuses to see me.” As he hung up the instrument he noted with pleasure that young Bulstrode was conversing amicably with his old friend Henessey, whose brandy is famous.

Drummond had mapped it all out. He would not stay to dress. Over his dressing gown he would pull an automobile duster as though he had been suddenly disturbed. He would accuse Graham of breaking in to steal. He would remind the chastened father of several Boston scandals. He could see the Back Bay blue blood beg for mercy. And the end of it would be that in the society columns of the New York dailies it would be announced that Mr. and Mrs. William Drummond had dined with Mr. and Mrs. Clent Bulstrode.

No taxi was in sight when they came down the steps to the silent street. Drummond was in an amazing good humor. His captor was now reduced through his friendship with Henessey to a silent phase of his failing. He clung tightly to the banker’s stalwart arm and only twice attempted to break into song. Since the distance was not great the two walked. Trent looked anxiously at every man they met when they neared the Bulstrode mansion. He feared to meet a man of his own build wearing a silk lined Inverness cape. It may be wondered why Anthony Trent, fleet of foot and in the shadow of the park across which his modest apartment lay, did not trip up the banker and make his easy escape. The answer lies in the fact that Trent was not an ordinary breaker of the law. And also that he had conceived a very real dislike to William Drummond, his person, his character and his aspirations. He was determined that Drummond should ride for a fall.

A tired looking man yawning from lack of sleep let them into the house. It was a residence twice the size of Drummond’s. The banker peered about the vast hall, gloomy in the darkness. In fancy he could see Mrs. Drummond sweeping through it on her way to dinner.

“Mr. Bulstrode is in the library,” he said acidly. That another should dare to use a nickname that fitted him so aptly filled him with indignation. He barely glanced at the man noisily climbing the stairs to his bedroom, the man who had coined the opprobrious phrase. Drummond was ushered into the presence of Clent Bulstrode.

The Bostonian was a tall man with a cold face and a great opinion of his social responsibilities. The only New Yorkers he cared to know were those after whose families downtown streets had been named.

“I am not in the habit, sir,” he began icily, “of being summoned from my bed at this time of night to talk to a stranger. I don’t like it, Mr. Dummles – ”

“Drummond,” his visitor corrected.

“The same thing,” cried Bulstrode. “I know no one bearing either name. I can only hope your errand is justified. I am informed it has to do with my son.”

“You know it has,” Drummond retorted. “He broke into my house to-night. And he came, curiously enough, at a time when there was a deal of loose cash in my room. Mr. Bulstrode, has he done that before? If he has I’m afraid he could get into trouble if I informed the police.”

It was a triumphant moment when he saw a look of fear pass over Bulstrode’s contemptuous countenance. It was a notable hit.

“You wouldn’t do that?” he cried.

“That depends,” Drummond answered.

Upon what it depended Clent Bulstrode never knew for there came the noise of an automobile stopping outside the door. There was a honking of the horn and the confused sound of many voices talking at once.

Drummond followed the Bostonian through the great hall to the open door. They could see Old Man Afraid of His Wife assisting a young inebriate in evening dress. And his Inverness cape was lined with white silk and over his eyes an opera hat was pulled.

The chauffeur alone was sober. He touched his hat when he saw Mr. Bulstrode.

"Where have you come from?" he demanded.

"I took the gentlemen to New Haven," he said.

"Has my son been with you all the evening?"

"Yes, sir," the chauffeur returned.

Drummond, his hopes dashed, followed Bulstrode to the library. "Now," said the clubman sneering, "I shall be glad to hear your explanation of your slander of my son. In the morning I can promise you my lawyers will attend to it in detail."

"I was deceived," the wretched Drummond sought to explain. "A man dressed like your son whom I know by sight came in and –"

He went through the whole business. By this time the butler was standing at the open door listening.

"I can only say," Mr. Bulstrode remarked, "that these excuses you offer so glibly will be investigated."

"Excuses!" cried the other goaded to anger. "Excuses! I'll have you know that a father with a son like yours is more in need of excuses than I am."

He turned his head to see the butler entering the room. There was an unpleasant expression on the man's face which left him vaguely uneasy.

"Show this person out," said Bulstrode in his most forbidding manner.

"Wait a minute," Drummond commanded, "you owe it to me to have this house searched. We all saw that impostor go upstairs. For all we know he's in hiding this very minute."

"You needn't worry," Old Man Afraid of His Wife observed. "He went out just before Mr. Graham came back in the motor. I was going to see what it was when the car came between us." The man turned to Clent Bulstrode. "It's my belief, sir, they're accomplices."

"What makes you say that?" demanded his master. He could see an unusual expression of triumph in the butler's eye.

"The black pearl stick pin that Mr. Graham values so much has been stolen from his room."

"What have I to do with that?" Drummond shouted.

"Simply this," the other returned, "that you introduced this criminal to my house and I shall expect you to make good what your friend took."

"Friend!" repeated the outraged Drummond. "My friend!"

"It is a matter for the police," Bulstrode yawned.

Drummond watched his tall, thin figure ascending the stairs. Plainly there was nothing left but to go. Never in his full life had things broken so badly for William Drummond. He could feel the butler's baleful stare as he slowly crossed the great hall. He felt he hated the man who had witnessed his defeat and laughed at his humiliation. And Drummond was not used to the contempt of underlings.

Yet the butler had the last word. As he closed the door he flung a contemptuous good-night after the banker.

"Good-night," he said, "Old Man Afraid of the Police."

A broken and dispirited man William Drummond, banker, came to his own house. The pockets in which he had placed his keys were empty. There was no hole by which they might have been lost and he had not removed the long duster. Only one man could have taken them. He called to mind how the staggering creature who claimed to be Graham Bulstrode had again and again clutched at him for support. And if he had taken them, to what use had they been put?

It seemed he must have waited half an hour before a sleepy servant let him in. Drummond pushed by him with an oath and went hastily to the black walnut desk. There, seemingly unmoved,

was the paper that he had pulled over the notes when the unknown came into the room. It was when he raised it to see what lay beneath that he understood to the full what a costly night it had been for him. Across one of his own envelopes was scrawled the single word – Shylock.

CHAPTER VII

THE DANGER OF SENTIMENT

AFTER leaving Drummond's house Anthony Trent started without intemperate haste for his comfortable apartment. In accordance with his instructions, Mrs. Kinney retired not later than ten. There might come a night when he needed to prove the alibi that she could unconsciously nullify if she waited up for him.

In these early days of his career he was not much in fear of detection and approached his door with little of the trepidation he was to experience later when his name was unknown still but his reputation exceedingly high with the police. Later he knew he must arrange his mode of life with greater care.

New York, for example, is not an easy city for a man fleeing from police pursuit. Its brilliant lighting, its sleeplessness, the rectangular blocks and absence of helpful back alleys, all these were aids to the law abiding.

He had not chosen his location heedlessly. From the roof on which he often slept he could see five feet distant from its boundary, the wall that circumscribed the top of another house such as his but having its entrance on a side street. It would not be hard to get a key to fit the front door; and since he would make use of it infrequently and then only late at night there was little risk of detection.

Thinking several moves ahead of his game was one of Trent's means to insure success. He must have some plausible excuse in case he were caught upon the roof. The excuse that suggested itself instantly was a cat. He bought a large and frolicsome cat, tiger-striped and a stealthy hunter by night, and introduced him to Mrs. Kinney. That excellent woman was not pleased. A cat, she asserted, needed a garden. "Exactly," agreed her employer, "a roof garden." So it was that Agrippa joined the household and sought to prey upon twittering sparrows. And since Agrippa looking seventy feet below was not in fear of falling, he leaped the intermediate distance between the roofs and was rewarded with a sparrow. Thereafter he used what roof offered the best hunting.

Two maiden ladies occupied the topmost flat, the Misses Sawyer, and were startled one evening at a knock upon their door. An affable young gentleman begged permission to retrieve his cat from their roof. The hunting Agrippa had sprung the dreadful space and feared, he asserted plausibly, to get back.

The Misses Sawyer loved cats, it seemed, but had none now, fearing to seem disloyal to the memory of a peerless beast about whom they could not talk without tear-flooded eyes. They told their neighbor cordially that whenever Agrippa strayed again he was to make free of the roof.

"Ring our bell," said one of them, "and we'll let you in."

"But how did you get in?" the other sister demanded, suddenly.

"The door was open," he said blandly.

"That's that dreadful Mr. Dietz again," they cried in unison. "He drinks, and when he goes out to the saloon, he puts the catch back so there won't be the bother of a key. I have complained but the janitor takes no notice. I suppose we don't offer him cigars and tips, so he takes the part of Dietz."

By this simple maneuver Anthony Trent established his right to use the roof without incurring suspicion.

The Drummond loot proved not to be despised by one anxious to put a hundred thousand dollars to his credit. The actual amount was three thousand, eight hundred dollars. Furthermore, there was some of the Drummond stationery, a bundle of letters and the two or three things he had taken hastily from young Bulstrode's room. He regretted there had been so small an opportunity to investigate the Bulstrode mansion but time had too great a value for him. The black pearl had flung itself at him, and some yale keys and assorted club stationery – these were all he could take. The stationery might

prove useful. He had discovered that fact in the Conington Warren affair. If it had not been that the butler crept out of the dark hall to watch him as he left the Bulstrode house, he would have tried the keys on the hall door. That could be done later. It is not every rich house which is guarded by burglar resisting devices.

It was the bundle of letters and I. O. U.'s that he examined with peculiar care. They were enclosed in a long, blue envelope on which was written "Private and Personal."

When Trent had read them all he whistled.

"These will be worth ten times his measly thirty-eight hundred," he said softly.

But there was no thought of blackmail in his mind. That was a crime at which he still wholesomely rebelled. It occurred to him sometimes that a life such as his tended to lead to progressive deterioration. That there might come a time when he would no longer feel bitterly toward blackmailers. It was part of his punishment, this dismal thought of what might be unless he reverted to the ways of honest men. Inasmuch as a man may play a crooked game decently, so Anthony Trent determined to play it.

Many of the letters in the blue envelope were from women whose names were easily within the ken of one who studied the society columns of the metropolitan dailies. Most of them seemed to have been the victims of misplaced bets at Belmont Park or rash bidding at Auction. There was one letter from the wife of a high official at Washington begging him on no account to let her husband know she had borrowed money from him. A prominent society golfing girl whose play Trent had a score of times admired for its pluck and skill had borrowed a thousand dollars from Drummond. There was her I. O. U. on the table. Scrawling a line on Drummond stationery in what seemed to be Drummond handwriting, Anthony Trent sent it back to her. There were acknowledgments of borrowings from the same kind of rich waster that Graham Bulstrode represented. A score of prominent persons would have slept the better for knowing that their I. O. U.'s had passed from Drummond's keeping. The man was more of a usurer than banker.

What interested Anthony Trent most of all was a collection of letters signed "N.G." and written on the stationery of a very exclusive club. It was a club to which Drummond did not belong.

The first letter was merely a request that Drummond meet the writer in the library of the athletic club where Anthony Trent had seen him.

The second was longer and spelled a deeper distress.

"It's impossible in a case like this," wrote "N.G.," "to get any man I know well to endorse my note. If I could afford to let all the world into my secret, I should not have come to you. You know very well that as I am the only son your money is safe enough. I must pay this girl fifty thousand dollars or let my father know all about it. He would be angry enough to send me to some god-forsaken ranch to cut wild oats."

The third letter was still more insistent. The writer was obviously afraid that he would have to beg the money from his father.

"I have always understood," he wrote, "that you would lend any amount on reasonable security. I want only fifty thousand dollars but I've got to have it at once. It's quite beyond my mother's power to get it for me this time. I've been to that source too often and the old man is on to it. E.G. insists that the money in cash must be paid to her on the morning of the 18th when she will call at the house with her lawyer. I am to receive my letters back and she will leave New York. Let me know instantly."

The next letter indicated that William Drummond had decided to lend "N.G." the amount but that his offer came too late.

"I wish you had made up your mind sooner," said "N.G." "It would have saved me the devil of a lot of worry and you could have made money out of it. As it is my father learned of it somehow. He talked about the family honor as usual. But the result is that when she and her lawyer call at ten on Thursday morning the money will be there. No check for her; she's far too clever, but fifty thousand in crisp new notes. As for me, I'm to reform. That means I have to go down town every morning at

nine and work in my father's brokerage business. Can you imagine me doing that? I blame you for it, Drummond. You are too cautious by a damn sight to please me."

Anthony Trent was thus put into possession of the following facts. That a rich man's son, initials only known, had got into some sort of a scrape with a girl, initials were E.G., who demanded fifty thousand dollars in cash which was to be paid at the residence of the young man's father. The date set was Thursday the eighteenth. It was now the early morning of Tuesday the sixteenth.

Trent had lists of the members of all the best clubs. He went through the one on whose paper N.G. had written. There were several members with those initials. Careful elimination left him with only one likely name, that of Norton Guestwick. Norton Guestwick was the only son and heir of a very rich broker. The elder Guestwick posed as a musical critic, had a box in the Golden Horseshoe and patronized such opera singers as permitted it. Many a time Anthony Trent had gazed on the Guestwick family seated in their compelling box from the modest seat that was his. Guestwick had even written a book, "Operas I Have Seen," which might be found in most public libraries. It was an elaborately illustrated tome which reflected his shortcomings as a critic no less than his vanity as an author. A collector of musical books, Trent remembered buying it with high hopes and being disgusted at its smug ineffectiveness.

He had seldom seen Norton in the family box but the girls were seldom absent. They, too, upheld the Arts. Long ago he had conceived a dislike for Guestwick. He hated men who beat what they thought was time to music whose composers had other ideas of it.

Turning up a recent file of *Gotham Gossip* he came upon a reference to the Guestwick heir. "We understand," said this waspish, but usually veracious weekly, "that Norton Guestwick's attention to pretty Estelle Grandcourt (née Sadie Cort) has much perturbed his aristocratic parents who wish him to marry a snug fortune and a girl suited to be their daughter-in-law. It is not violating a confidence to say that the lady in question occupies a mansion on Commonwealth avenue and is one of the most popular girls in Boston's smart set."

While many commentators will puzzle themselves over the identity of the dark lady of the immortal sonnets, few could have failed to perceive that E.G. was almost certain to be Estelle Grandcourt. Sundry tests of a confirmatory nature proved it without doubt. He had thus two days in which to make his preparations to annex the fifty thousand dollars. There were difficulties. In these early days of his adventuring Anthony Trent made no use of disguises. He had so far been but himself. Vaguely he admitted that he must sooner or later come to veiling his identity. For the present exploit it was necessary that he should find out the name of the Guestwick butler.

He might have to get particulars from Clarke. But even Clarke's help could not now be called in and it was upon this seemingly unimportant thing that his plan hinged. In a disguise such as many celebrated cracksmen had used, he might have gained a kitchen door and learned by what name Guestwick's man called himself. Or he might have found it out from a tradesman's lad. But to ask, as Anthony Trent, what might link him with a robbery was too risky.

Unfortunately for Charles Newman Guestwick his book, which had cost Trent two dollars and was thrown aside as worthless, supplied the key to what was needed.

It was the wordy, garrulous book that only a multi-millionaire author might write and have published. The first chapter, "My Childhood," was succeeded by a lofty disquisition on music. Later there came revelations of the Guestwick family life with portraits of their various homes. The music room had a chapter to itself. Reading on, Anthony Trent came to the chapter headed, rather cryptically, "After the Opera."

"It is my custom," wrote the excellent Guestwick, "to hold in my box an informal reception after the performance is ended. My wide knowledge of music, of singers and their several abilities lends me, I venture to say, a unique position among amateurs."

"We rarely sup at hotel or restaurant after the performance. In my library where there is also a grand piano – we have three such instruments in our New York home and two more at Lenox –

Mrs. Guestwick and my daughters talk over what we have heard, criticizing here, lauding there, until a simple repast is served by the butler who always waits up for us. The rest of the servants have long since retired. My library consists of perhaps the most valuable collection of musical literature in the world.

“I have mentioned in another chapter the refining influence of music on persons of little education. John Briggs, my butler, is a case in point. He came to me from Lord Fitzhosken’s place in Northamptonshire, England. The Fitzhoskens are immemorially associated with fox-hunting and the steeple-chase and all Briggs heard there in the way of music were the cheerful rollicking songs of the hunt breakfast. I sent him to see *Götterdämmerung*. He told me simply that it was a revelation to him. He doubted in his uneducated way whether Wagner himself comprehended what he had written.”

There were thirty other chapters in Mr. Guestwick’s book. In all he revealed himself as a pompous ass assured only of tolerance among a people where money consciousness had succeeded that of caste. But Anthony Trent felt kindly toward him and the money he had spent was likely to earn him big dividends if things went well.

Caruso sang on the night preceding the morning on which Estelle Grandcourt was to appear and claim her heart balm. This meant a large attendance; for tenors may come and go, press agents may announce other golden voiced singers, but Caruso holds his pride of place honestly won and generously maintained. It had been Trent’s experience that the Guestwicks rarely missed a big night.

It was at half past nine Anthony Trent groaned that a professional engagement compelled him to leave the Metropolitan. He had spent money on a seat not this time for an evening of enjoyment, but to make certain that the Guestwicks were in their box.

There was Charles Newman Guestwick beating false time with a pudgy hand. His lady, weighted with Guestwick jewels, tried to create the impression that, after all, Caruso owed much of his success to her amiable patronage. The two daughters upheld the Guestwick tradition by being exceedingly affable to those greater than they and using lorgnettes to those who strove to know the Guestwicks.

Mr. John Briggs, drinking a mug of ale and wondering who was winning a light weight contest at the National Sporting Club, was resting in his sitting-room. He liked these long opera evenings, which gave him the opportunity to rest, as much as he despised his employer for his inordinate attendance at these meaningless entertainments. He shuddered as he remembered “*The Twilight of the Gods*.”

At ten o’clock when Mr. Briggs was nodding in his chair the telephone bell rang. Over the wire came his employer’s voice. It was not without purpose that Anthony Trent’s unusual skill in mimicry had been employed. As a youth he had acquired a reputation in his home town for imitations of Henry Irving, Bryan, Otis Skinner and their like.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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