Ottolengui Rodrigues

Final Proof: or, The Value of Evidence

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Ottolengui R.

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Содержание

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PREFATORY

The first meeting between Mr. Barnes, the detective, and Robert Leroy Mitchel, the gentleman who imagines himself to be able to outdo detectives in their own line of work, was fully set forth in the narrative entitled *An Artist in Crime*. Subsequently the two men occupied themselves with the solution of a startling murder mystery, the details of which were recorded in *The Crime of the Century*. The present volume contains the history of several cases which attracted their attention in the interval between those already given to the world, the first having occured shortly after the termination of the events in *An Artist in Crime*, and the others in the order here given, so that in a sense these stories are continuous and interdependent.

R. O.

I
THE PHŒNIX OF CRIME

I

Mr. Mitchel was still at breakfast one morning, when the card of Mr. Barnes was brought to him by his man Williams.

"Show Mr. Barnes in here," said he. "I imagine that he must be in a hurry to see me, else he would not call so early."

A few minutes later the detective entered, saying:

"It is very kind of you to let me come in without waiting. I hope that I am not intruding."

"Not at all. As to being kind, why I am kind to myself. I knew you must have something interesting on hand to bring you around so early, and I am proportionately curious; at the same time I hate to go without my coffee, and I do not like to drink it too fast, especially good coffee, and this is good, I assure you. Draw up and have a cup, for I observe that you came off in such a hurry this morning that you did not get any."

"Why, thank you, I will take some, but how do you know that I came off in a hurry and had no coffee at home? It seems to me that if you can tell that, you are becoming as clever as the famous Sherlock Holmes."

"Oh, no, indeed! You and I can hardly expect to be as shrewd as the detectives of romance. As to my guessing that you have had no coffee, that is not very troublesome. I notice three drops of milk on your coat, and one on your shoe, from which I deduce, first, that you have had no coffee, for a man who has his coffee in the morning is not apt to drink a glass of milk besides. Second, you must have left home in a hurry, or you would have had that coffee. Third, you took your glass of milk at the ferry-house of the Staten Island boat, probably finding that you had a minute to spare; this is evident because the milk spots on the tails of your frock-coat and on your shoe show that you were standing when you drank, and leaned over to avoid dripping the fluid on your clothes. Had you been seated, the coat tails would have been spread apart, and drippings would have fallen on your trousers. The fact that in spite of your precautions the accident did occur, and yet escaped your notice, is further proof, not only of your hurry, but also that your mind was abstracted, – absorbed no doubt with the difficult problem about which you have come to talk with me. How is my guess?"

"Correct in every detail. Sherlock Holmes could have done no better. But we will drop him and get down to my case, which, I assure you, is more astounding than any, either in fact or fiction, that has come to my knowledge."

"Go ahead! Your opening argument promises a good play. Proceed without further waste of words."

"First, then, let me ask you, have you read the morning's papers?"

"Just glanced through the death reports, but had gotten no further when you came in."

"There is one death report, then, that has escaped your attention, probably because the notice of it occupies three columns. It is another metropolitan mystery. Shall I read it to you? I glanced through it in bed this morning and found it so absorbing that, as you guessed, I hurried over here to discuss it with you, not stopping to get my breakfast."

"In that case you might better attack an egg or two, and let me read the article myself."

Mr. Mitchel took the paper from Mr. Barnes, who pointed out to him the article in question, which, under appropriate sensational headlines, read as follows:

"The account of a most astounding mystery is reported to-day for the first time, though the body of the deceased, now thought to have been murdered, was taken from the East River several days ago. The facts are as follows. On Tuesday last, at about six o'clock in the morning, several boys were enjoying an early swim in the river near Eighty-fifth Street, when one who had made a deep dive, on reaching the surface scrambled out of the water, evidently terrified. His companions crowded about him asking what he had seen, and to them he declared that there was a 'drownded man down there.' This caused the boys to lose all further desire to go into the water, and while they hastily scrambled into their clothes they discussed the situation, finally deciding that the proper course would be to notify the police, one boy, however, wiser than the others, declaring that he 'washed his hands of the affair' if they should do so, because he was not 'going to be held as no witness.' In true American fashion, nevertheless, the majority ruled, and in a body the boys marched to the station-house and reported their discovery. Detectives were sent to investigate, and after dragging the locality for half an hour the body of a man was drawn out of the water. The corpse was taken to the Morgue, and the customary red tape was slowly unwound. At first the police thought that it was a case of accidental drowning, no marks of violence having been found on the body, which had evidently been in the water but a few hours. Thus no special report of the case was made in the press. Circumstances have developed at the autopsy, however, which make it probable that New Yorkers are to be treated to another of the wonderful mysteries which occur all too frequently in the metropolis. The first point of significance is the fact, on which all the surgeons agree, that the man was dead when placed in the water. Secondly, the doctors claim that he died of disease, and not from any cause which would point to a crime. This conclusion seems highly improbable, for who would throw into the water the body of one who had died naturally, and with what object could such a singular course have been pursued? Indeed this claim of the doctors is so preposterous that a second examination of the body has been ordered, and will occur to-day, when several of our most prominent surgeons will be present. The third, and by far the most extraordinary circumstance, is the alleged identification of the corpse. It seems that one of the surgeons officiating at the first autopsy was attracted by a peculiar mark upon the face of the corpse. At first it was thought that this was merely a bruise caused by something striking the body while in the water, but a closer examination proved it to be a skin disease known as 'lichen.' It appears that there are several varieties of this disease, some of which are quite well known. That found on the face of the corpse, however, is a very rare form, only two other cases having been recorded in this country. This is a fact of the highest importance in relation to the events which have followed. Not unnaturally, the doctors became greatly interested. One of these, Dr. Elliot, the young surgeon who first examined it closely, having never seen any examples of lichen before, spoke of it that evening at a meeting of his medical society. Having looked up the literature relating to the disease in the interval, he was enabled to give the technical name of this very rare form of the disease. At this, another physician present arose, and declared that it seemed to him a most extraordinary coincidence that this case had been reported, for he himself had recently treated an exactly similar condition for a patient who had finally died, his death having occurred within a week. A lengthy and of course very technical discussion ensued, with the result that Dr. Mortimer, the physician who had treated the case of the patient who had so recently died, arranged with Dr. Elliot to go with him on the following day and examine the body at the Morgue.

> This he did, and, to the great amazement of his colleague, he then declared, that the body before him was none other than that of his own patient, supposed to have been buried. When the authorities learned of this, they summoned the family of the deceased, two brothers and the widow. All of these persons viewed the corpse separately, and each declared most emphatically that it was the body of the man whose funeral they had followed. Under ordinary circumstances, so complete an identification of a body would leave no room for doubt, but what is to be thought when we are informed by the family and friends of the deceased that the corpse had been cremated? That the mourners had seen the coffin containing the body placed in the furnace, and had waited patiently during the incineration? And that later the ashes of the dear departed had been delivered to them, to be finally deposited in an urn in the family vault, where it still is with contents undisturbed? It does not lessen the mystery to know that the body in the Morgue (or the ashes at the cemetery) represents all that is left of one of our most esteemed citizens, Mr. Rufus Quadrant, a gentleman who in life enjoyed that share of wealth which made it possible for him to connect his name with so many charities; a gentleman whose family in the past and in the present has ever been and still is above the breath of suspicion. Evidently there is a mystery that will try the skill of our very best detectives."

"That last line reads like a challenge to the gentlemen of your profession," said Mr. Mitchel to Mr. Barnes as he put down the paper.

"I needed no such spur to urge me to undertake to unravel this case, which certainly has most astonishing features."

"Suppose we enumerate the important data and discover what reliable deduction may be made therefrom."

"That is what I have done a dozen times, with no very satisfactory result. First, we learn that a man is found in the river upon whose face there is a curious distinguishing mark in the form of one of the rarest of skin diseases. Second, a man has recently died who was similarly afflicted. The attending physician declares upon examination that the body taken from the river is the body of his patient. Third, the family agree that this identification is correct. Fourth, this second dead man was cremated. Query, how can a man's body be cremated, and then be found whole in the river subsequently? No such thing has been related in fact or fiction since the beginning of the world."

"Not so fast, Mr. Barnes. What of the Phœnix?"

"Why, the living young Phœnix arose from the ashes of his dead ancestor. But here we have seemingly a dead body re-forming from its own ashes, the ashes meanwhile remaining intact and unaltered. A manifest impossibility."

"Ah; then we arrive at our first reliable deduction, Mr. Barnes."

"Which is?"

"Which is that, despite the doctors, we have two bodies to deal with. The ashes in the vault represent one, while the body at the Morgue is another."

"Of course. So much is apparent, but you say the body at the Morgue is another, and I ask you, which other?"

"That we must learn. As you appear to be seeking my views in this case I will give them to you, though of course I have nothing but this newspaper account, which may be inaccurate. Having concluded beyond all question that there are two bodies in this case, our first effort must be to determine which is which. That is to say, we must discover whether this man, Rufus Quadrant, was really cremated, which certainly ought to be the case, or whether, by some means, another body has been exchanged for his, by accident or by design, and if so, whose body that was."

"*If* it turns out that the body at the Morgue is really that of Mr. Quadrant, then, of course, as you say, some other man's body was cremated, and – "

"Why may it not have been a woman's?"

"You are right, and that only makes the point to which I was about to call your attention more forcible. If an unknown body has been incinerated, how can we ever identify it?"

"I do not know. But we have not arrived at that bridge yet. The first step is to reach a final conclusion in regard to the body at the Morgue. There are several things to be inquired into, there."

"I wish you would enumerate them."

"With pleasure. First, the autopsy is said to have shown that the man died a natural death, that is, that disease, and not one of his fellow-beings, killed him. What disease was this, and was it the same as that which caused the death of Mr. Quadrant? If the coroner's physicians declared what disease killed the man, and named the same as that which carried off Mr. Quadrant, remembering that the body before them was unknown, we would have a strong corroboration of the alleged identification."

"Very true. That will be easily learned."

"Next, as to this lichen. I should think it important to know more of that. Is it because the two cases are examples of the same rare variety of the disease, or was there something so distinct about the location and area or shape of the diseased surface, that the doctor could not possibly be mistaken? – for doctors do make mistakes, you know."

"Yes, just as detectives do," said Mr. Barnes, smiling, as he made notes of Mr. Mitchel's suggestions.

"If you learn that the cause of death was the same, and that the lichen was not merely similar but identical, I should think that there could be little reason for longer doubting the identification. But if not fully satisfied by your inquiries along these lines, then it might be well to see the family of Mr. Quadrant, and inquire whether they too depend upon this lichen as the only means of identification, or whether, entirely aside from that diseased spot, they would be able to swear that the body at the Morgue is their relative. You would have in connection with this inquiry an opportunity to ask many discreet questions which might be of assistance to you."

"All of this is in relation to establishing beyond a doubt the identity of the body at the Morgue, and of course the work to that end will practically be simple. In my own mind I have no doubt that the body of Mr. Quadrant is the one found in the water. Of course, as you suggest, it will be as well to know this rather than merely to think it. But once knowing it, what then of the body which is now ashes?"

"We must identify that also."

"Identify ashes!" exclaimed Mr. Barnes. "Not an easy task."

"If all tasks were easy, Mr. Barnes," said Mr. Mitchel, "we should have little need of talent such as yours. Suppose you follow my advice, provided you intend to accept it, as far as I have indicated, and then report to me the results."

"I will do so with pleasure. I do not think it will occupy much time. Perhaps by luncheon, I – "

"You could get back here and join me. Do so!"

"In the meanwhile shall you do any – any investigating?"

"I shall do considerable thinking. I will cogitate as to the possibility of a Phœnix arising from those ashes."

II

Leaving Mr. Mitchel, Mr. Barnes went directly to the office of Dr. Mortimer, and after waiting nearly an hour was finally ushered into the consulting-room.

"Dr. Mortimer," said Mr. Barnes, "I have called in relation to this remarkable case of Mr. Quadrant. I am a detective, and the extraordinary nature of the facts thus far published attracts me powerfully, so that, though not connected with the regular police, I am most anxious to unravel this

mystery if possible, though, of course, I should do nothing that would interfere with the regular officers of the law. I have called, hoping that you might be willing to answer a few questions."

"I think I have heard of you, Mr. Barnes, and if, as you say, you will do nothing to interfere with justice, I have no objection to telling you what I know, though I fear it is little enough."

"I thank you, Doctor, for your confidence, which, I assure you, you shall not regret. In the first place, then, I would like to ask you about this identification. The newspaper account states that you have depended upon some skin disease. Is that of such a nature that you can be absolutely certain in your opinion?"

"I think so," said the doctor. "But then, as you must have found in your long experience, all identifications of the dead should be accepted with a little doubt. Death alters the appearance of every part of the body, and especially the face. We think that we know a man by the contour of his face, whereas we often depend, during life, upon the habitual expressions which the face ever carries. For example, suppose that we know a young girl, full of life and happiness, with a sunny disposition undimmed by care or the world's worry. She is ever smiling, or ready to smile. Thus we know her. Let that girl suffer a sudden and perhaps painful death. In terror and agony as she dies, the features are distorted, and in death the resultant expression is somewhat stamped upon the features. Let that body lie in the water for a time, and when recovered it is doubtful whether all of her friends would identify her. Some would, but others would with equal positiveness declare that these were mistaken. Yet you observe the physical contours would still be present."

"I am pleased, Doctor, by what you say," said Mr. Barnes, "because with such appreciation of the changes caused by death and exposure in the water, I must lay greater reliance upon your identification. In this case, as I understand it, there is something peculiar about the body, a mark of disease called lichen, I believe?"

"Yes. But what I have said about the changes caused by death must have weight here also," said the doctor. "You see I am giving you all the points that may militate against my identification, that you may the better judge of its correctness. We must not forget that we are dealing with a disease of very great rarity; so rare, in fact, that this very case is the only one that I have ever seen. Consequently I cannot claim to be perfectly familiar with the appearance of surfaces attacked by this disease, after they have suffered the possible alterations of death."

"Then you mean that, after all, this spot upon which the identification rests does not now look as it did in life?"

"I might answer both yes and no to that. Changes have occurred, but they do not, in my opinion, prevent me from recognizing both the disease and the corpse. To fully explain this I must tell you something of the disease itself, if you will not be bored?"

"Not at all. Indeed, I prefer to know all that you can make intelligible to a layman."

"I will use simple language. Formerly a great number of skin diseases were grouped under the general term 'lichen,' which included all growths which might be considered fungoid. At the present time we are fairly well able to separate the animal from the vegetable parasitic diseases, and under the term 'lichen' we include very few forms. The most common is *lichen planus*, which unfortunately is not infrequently met, and is therefore very well understood by the specialists. *Lichen ruber*, however, is quite distinct. It was first described by the German, Hebra, and has been sufficiently common in Europe to enable the students to thoroughly well describe it. In this country, however, it seems to be one of the rarest of diseases. White of Boston reported a case, and Fox records another, accompanied by a colored photograph, which, of course, aids greatly in enabling any one to recognize a case should it occur. There is one more fact to which I must allude as having an important bearing upon my identification. *Lichen ruber*, like other lichens, is not confined to any one part of the body; on the contrary, it would be remarkable, should the disease be uncontrolled for any length of time, not to see it in many places. This brings me to my point. The seat of the disease, in the case of Mr. Quadrant, was the left cheek, where a most disfiguring spot appeared. It happened that I was in constant attendance

upon Mr. Quadrant for the trouble which finally caused his decease, and therefore I saw this lichen in its incipiency, and more fortunately I recognized its true nature. Now whether due to my treatment or not, it is a fact that the disease did not spread; that is to say, it did not appear elsewhere upon the body."

"I see! I see!" said Mr. Barnes, much pleased. "This is an important point. For if the body at the Morgue exhibits a spot in that exact locality and nowhere else, and if it is positively this same skin disease, it is past belief that it should be any other than the body of your patient."

"So I argue. That two such unique examples of so rare a disease should occur at the same time seems incredible, though remotely possible. Thus, as you have indicated, we have but to show that the mark on the body at the Morgue is truly caused by this disease, and not by some abrasion while in the water, in order to make our opinion fairly tenable. Both Dr. Elliot and myself have closely examined the spot, and we have agreed that it is not an abrasion. Had the face been thus marked in the water, we should find the cuticle rubbed off, which is not the case. Contrarily, in the disease under consideration, the cuticle, though involved in the disease, and even missing in minute spots, is practically present. No, I am convinced that the mark on the body at the Morgue existed in life as the result of this lichen, though the alteration of color since death gives us a much changed appearance."

"Then I may consider that you are confident that this mark on the body is of the same shape, in the same position, and caused by the same disease as that which you observed upon Mr. Quadrant?"

"Yes. I do not hesitate to assert that. To this you may add that I identify the body in a general way also."

"By which you mean?"

"That without this mark, basing my opinion merely upon my long acquaintance with the man, I would be ready to declare that Mr. Quadrant's body is the one which was taken from the water."

"What, then, is your opinion as to how this strange occurrence has come about? If Mr. Quadrant was cremated, how could – "

"It could not, of course. This is not the age of miracles. Mr. Quadrant was not cremated. Of that we may be certain."

"But the family claim that they saw his body consigned to the furnace."

"The family believe this, I have no doubt. But how could they be sure? Let us be accurate in considering what we call facts. What did the family see at the crematory? They saw a closed coffin placed into the furnace."

"A coffin, though, which contained the body of their relative."

Mr. Barnes did not of course himself believe this, but made the remark merely to lead the doctor on.

"Again you are inaccurate. Let us rather say a coffin which once contained the body of their relative."

"Ah; then you think that it was taken from the coffin and another substituted for it?"

"No. I do not go so far. I think, nay, I am sure, that Mr. Quadrant's body was taken from the coffin, but whether another was substituted for it, is a question. The coffin may have been empty when burned."

"Could we settle that point by an examination of the ashes?"

The doctor started as though surprised at the question. After a little thought he replied hesitatingly:

"Perhaps. It seems doubtful. Ashes from bone and animal matter would, I suppose, bring us chemical results different from those of burned wood. Whether our analytical chemists could solve such a problem remains to be seen. Ordinarily one would think that ashes would resist all efforts at identification." The doctor seemed lost in thoughtful consideration of this scientific problem.

"The trimmings of the coffin might contain animal matter if made of wool," suggested Mr. Barnes.

"True; that would certainly complicate the work of the chemist, and throw doubt upon his reported results."

"You admitted, Doctor, that the body was placed in the coffin. Do you know that positively?"

"Yes. I called on the widow on the night previous to the funeral, and the body was then in the coffin. I saw it in company with the widow and the two brothers. It was then that it was decided that the coffin should be closed and not opened again."

"Whose wish was this?"

"The widow's. You may well understand that this lichen greatly disfigured Mr. Quadrant, and that he was extremely sensitive about it. So much so that he had not allowed any one to see him for many weeks prior to his death. It was in deference to this that the widow expressed the wish that no one but the immediate family should see him in his coffin. For this reason also she stipulated that the coffin should be burned with the body."

"You say this was decided on the night before the funeral?"

"Yes. To be accurate, about five o'clock in the afternoon, though at this season and in the closed rooms the lamps were already lighted."

"Was this known to many persons? That is, that the coffin was not again to be opened?"

"It was known of course to the two brothers, and also to the undertaker and two of his assistants who were present."

"The undertaker himself closed the casket, I presume?"

"Yes. He was closing it as I escorted the widow back to her own room."

"Did the brothers leave the room with you?"

"I think so. Yes, I am sure of it."

"So that the body was left with the undertaker and his men, after they knew that it was not to be opened again?"

"Yes."

"Did these men leave before you did?"

"No. I left almost immediately after taking the widow to her own room and seeing her comfortably lying down, apparently recovered from the hysterical spell which I had been summoned to check. You know, of course, that the Quadrant residence is but a block from here."

"There is one more point, Doctor. Of what disease did Mr. Quadrant die?"

"My diagnosis was what in common parlance I may call cancer of the stomach. This, of course, I only knew from the symptoms. That is to say, there had been no operation, as the patient was strenuously opposed to such a procedure. He repeatedly said to me, 'I would rather die than be cut up.' A strange prejudice in these days of successful surgery, when the knife in skilful hands promises so much more than medication."

"Still these symptoms were sufficient in your own mind to satisfy you that your diagnosis was accurate?"

"I can only say in reply that I have frequently in the presence of similar symptoms performed an operation, and always with the same result. The cancer was always present."

"Now the coroner's autopsy on the body at the Morgue is said to have shown that death was due to disease. Do you know what they discovered?"

"Dr. Elliot told me that it was cancer of the stomach."

"Why, then, the identification seems absolute?"

"So it seems. Yes."

III

Mr. Barnes next called at the home of the Quadrants, and was informed that both of the gentlemen were out. With some hesitation he sent a brief note in to the widow, explaining his purpose

and asking for an interview. To his gratification his request was granted, and he was shown up to that lady's reception-room.

"I fear, madame," said he, "that my visit may seem an intrusion, but I take the deepest sort of interest in this sad affair of your husband, and I would much appreciate having your permission and authority to investigate it, with the hope of discovering the wrong-doers."

"I see by your note," said Mrs. Quadrant in a low, sad voice, "that you are a detective, but not connected with the police. That is why I have decided to see you. I have declined to see the regular detective sent here by the police, though my husband's brothers, I believe, have answered all his questions. But as for myself, I felt that I could not place this matter in the hands of men whom my husband always distrusted. Perhaps his prejudice was due to his politics, but he frequently declared that our police force was corrupt. Thus you understand why I am really glad that you have called, for I am anxious, nay, determined, to discover if possible who it was who has done me this grievous wrong. To think that my poor husband was there in the river, when I thought that his body had been duly disposed of. It is horrible, horrible!"

"It is indeed horrible, madame," said Mr. Barnes sympathizingly. "But we must find the guilty person or persons and bring them to justice."

"Yes! That is what I wish. That is what I am ready to pay any sum to accomplish. You must not consider you are working, as you courteously offer, merely to satisfy your professional interest in a mysterious case. I wish you to undertake this as my special agent."

"As you please, madame, but in that case I must make one condition. I would ask that you tell this to no one unless I find it necessary. At present I think I can do better if I am merely regarded as a busybody detective attracted by an odd case."

"Why, certainly, no one need know. Now tell me what you think of this matter."

"Well, it is rather early to formulate an opinion. An opinion is dangerous. One is so apt to endeavor to prove himself right, whereas he ought merely to seek out the truth. But if you have any opinion, it is necessary for me to know it. Therefore I must answer you by asking the very question which you have asked me. What do you think?"

"I think that some one took the body of my husband from the coffin, and that we burned an empty casket. But to guess what motive there could be for such an act would be beyond my mental abilities. I have thought about it till my head has ached, but I can find no reason for such an unreasonable act."

"Let me then suggest one to you, and then perhaps your opinion may be more useful. Suppose that some person, some one who had the opportunity, had committed a murder. By removing the body of your husband, and replacing it with that of his victim, the evidences of his own crime would be concealed. The discovery of your husband's body, even if identified, as it has been, could lead to little else than mystification, for the criminal well knew that the autopsy would show natural causes of death."

"But what a terrible solution this is which you suggest! Why, no one had access to the coffin except the undertaker and his two men!"

"You naturally omit your two brothers, but a detective cannot make such discrimination."

"Why, of course I do not count them, for certainly neither of them could be guilty of such a crime as you suggest. It is true that Amos – but that is of no consequence."

"Who is Amos?" asked Mr. Barnes, aroused by the fact that Mrs. Quadrant had left her remark unfinished.

"Amos is one of my brothers – my husband's brothers, I mean. Amos Quadrant was next in age, and Mark the youngest of the three. But, Mr. Barnes, how could one of the undertakers have made this exchange which you suggest? Certainly they could not have brought the dead body here, and my husband's body never left the house prior to the funeral."

"The corpse which was left in place of that of your husband must have been smuggled into this house by some one. Why not by one of these men? How, is a matter for explanation later. There is one other possibility about which you may be able to enlighten me. What opportunity, if any, was there that this substitution may have occurred at the crematory?"

"None at all. The coffin was taken from the hearse by our own pall-bearers, friends all of them, and carried directly to the room into which the furnace opened. Then, in accordance with my special request, the coffin, unopened, was placed in the furnace in full view of all present."

"Were you there yourself?"

"Oh! no, no! I could not have endured such a sight. The cremation was resorted to as a special request of my husband. But I am bitterly opposed to such a disposition of the dead, and therefore remained at home."

"Then how do you know what you have told me? – that there was no chance for substitution at the crematory?"

"Because my brothers and other friends have related all that occurred there in detail, and all tell the same story that I have told you."

"Dr. Mortimer tells me that you decided to have the coffin closed finally on the evening prior to the funeral. With the casket closed, I presume you did not consider it necessary to have the usual watchers?"

"Not exactly, though the two gentlemen, I believe, sat up through the night, and occasionally visited the room where the casket was."

"Ah! Then it would seem to have been impossible for any one to enter the house and accomplish the exchange, without being detected by one or both of these gentlemen?"

"Of course not," said Mrs. Quadrant, and then, realizing the necessary deduction, she hastened to add: "I do not know. After all, they may not have sat up through all the night."

"Did any one enter the house that night, so far as you know?"

"No one, except Dr. Mortimer, who stopped in about ten as he was returning from a late professional call. He asked how I was, and went on, I believe."

"But neither of the undertakers came back upon any excuse?"

"Not to my knowledge."

At this moment some one was heard walking in the hall below, and Mrs. Quadrant added:

"I think that may be one of my brothers now. Suppose you go down and speak to him. He would know whether any one came to the house during the night. You may tell him that you have seen me, if you wish, and that I have no objection to your endeavoring to discover the truth."

Mr. Barnes bade Mrs. Quadrant adieu and went down to the parlor floor. Not meeting any one, he touched a bell, and when the servant responded, asked for either of the gentlemen of the house who might have come in. He was informed that Mr. Mark Quadrant was in the library, and was invited to see him there.

Mr. Mark Quadrant was of medium height, body finely proportioned, erect figure, a well-poised head, keen, bright eyes, a decided blond, and wore a Vandyke beard, close trimmed. He looked at Mr. Barnes in such a manner that the detective knew that whatever he might learn from this man would be nothing that he would prefer to conceal, unless accidentally surprised from him. It was necessary therefore to approach the subject with considerable circumspection.

"I have called," said Mr. Barnes, "in relation to the mysterious circumstances surrounding the death of your brother."

"Are you connected with the police force?" asked Mr. Quadrant.

"No. I am a private detective."

"Then you will pardon my saying that you are an intruder – an unwelcome intruder."

"I think not," said Mr. Barnes, showing no irritation at his reception. "I have the permission of Mrs. Quadrant to investigate this affair."

"Oh! You have seen her, have you?"

"I have just had an interview with her."

"Then your intrusion is more than unwelcome; it is an impertinence."

"Why, pray?"

"You should have seen myself or my brother, before disturbing a woman in the midst of her grief."

"I asked for you or your brother, but you were both away. It was only then that I asked to see Mrs. Quadrant."

"You should not have done so. It was impertinent, I repeat. Why could you not have waited to see one of us?"

"Justice cannot wait. Delay is often dangerous."

"What have you to do with justice? This affair is none of your business."

"The State assumes that a crime is an outrage against all its citizens, and any man has the right to seek out and secure the punishment of the criminal."

"How do you know that any crime has been committed?"

"There can be no doubt about it. The removal of your brother's body from his coffin was a criminal act in itself, even if we do not take into account the object of the person who did this."

"And what, pray, was the object, since you are so wise?"

"Perhaps the substitution of the body of a victim of murder, in order that the person killed might be incinerated."

"That proposition is worthy of a detective. You first invent a crime, and then seek to gain employment in ferreting out what never occurred."

"That hardly holds with me, as I have offered my service without remuneration."

"Oh, I see. An enthusiast in your calling! A crank, in other words. Well, let me prick your little bubble. Suppose I can supply you with another motive, one not at all connected with murder?"

"I should be glad to hear you propound one."

"Suppose that I tell you that though my brother requested that his body should be cremated, both his widow and myself were opposed? Suppose that I further state that my brother Amos, being older than I, assumed the management of affairs, and insisted that the cremation should occur? And then suppose that I admit that to thwart that, I removed the body myself?"

"You ask me to suppose all this," said Mr. Barnes quietly. "In reply, I ask you, do you make such a statement?"

"Why, no. I do not intend to make any statement, because I do not consider that you have any right to mix yourself up in this affair. It is my wish that the matter should be allowed to rest. Nothing could be more repugnant to my feelings, or to my brother's, were he alive, poor fellow, than all this newspaper notoriety. I wish to see the body buried, and the mystery with it. I have no desire for any solution."

"But, despite your wishes, the affair will be, must be, investigated. Now, to discuss your imaginary proposition, I will say that it is so improbable that no one would believe it."

"Why not, pray?"

"First, because it was an unnatural procedure upon such an inadequate motive. A man might kill his brother, but he would hardly desecrate his brother's coffin merely to prevent a certain form of disposing of the dead."

"That is mere presumption. You cannot dogmatically state what may actuate a man."

"But in this case the means was inadequate to the end."

"How so?"

"If the combined wishes of yourself and the widow could not sway your brother Amos, who had taken charge of the funeral, how could you hope when the body should be removed from the river, that he would be more easily brought around to your wishes?"

"The effort to cremate the body having failed once, he would not resist my wishes in the second burial."

"That is doubtful. I should think he would be so incensed by your act, that he would be more than ever determined that you should have no say in the matter. But supposing that you believed otherwise, and that you wished to carry out this extraordinary scheme, you had no opportunity to do so."

"Why not?"

"I suppose, of course, that your brother sat up with the corpse through the night before the funeral."

"Exactly. You suppose a good deal more than you know. My brother did not sit up with the corpse. As the coffin had been closed, there was no need to follow that obsolete custom. My brother retired before ten o'clock. I myself remained up some hours longer."

Thus in the mental sparring Mr. Barnes had succeeded in learning one fact from this reluctant witness.

"But even so," persisted the detective, "you would have found difficulty in removing the body from this house to the river."

"Yet it was done, was it not?"

This was unanswerable. Mr. Barnes did not for a moment place any faith in what this brother had said. He argued that had he done anything like what he suggested, he would never have hinted at it as a possibility. Why he did so was a puzzle. Perhaps he merely wished to make the affair seem more intricate, in the hope of persuading him to drop the investigation, being, as he had stated, honestly anxious to have the matter removed from the public gaze, and caring nothing about any explanation of how his brother's body had been taken from the coffin. On the other hand, there was a possibility which could not be entirely overlooked. He might really have been guilty of acting as he had suggested, and perhaps now told of it as a cunning way of causing the detective to discredit such a solution of the mystery. Mr. Barnes thought it well to pursue the subject a little further.

"Suppose," said he, "that it could be shown that the ashes now in the urn at the cemetery are the ashes of a human being?"

"You will be smart if you can prove that," said Mr. Quadrant. "Ashes are ashes, I take it, and you will get little proof there. But since you discussed my proposition, I will argue with you about yours. You say, suppose the ashes are those of a human being. Very well, then, that would prove that my brother was cremated after all, and that I have been guying you, playing with you as a fisherman who fools a fish with feathers instead of real bait."

"But what of the identification of the body at the Morgue?"

"Was there ever a body at the Morgue that was not identified a dozen times? People are apt to be mistaken about their friends after death."

"But this identification was quite complete, being backed up by scientific reasons advanced by experts."

"Yes, but did you ever see a trial where expert witnesses were called, that equally expert witnesses did not testify to the exact contrary? Let me ask you a question. Have you seen this body at the Morgue?"

"Not yet."

"Go and see it. Examine the sole of the left foot. If you do not find a scar three or four inches long the body is not that of my brother. This scar was the result of a bad gash made by stepping on a shell when in bathing. He was a boy at the time, and I was with him."

"But, Mr. Quadrant," said Mr. Barnes, astonished by the new turn of the conversation, "I understood that you yourself admitted that the identification was correct."

"The body was identified by Dr. Mortimer first. My sister and my brother agreed with the doctor, and I agreed with them all, for reasons of my own."

"Would you mind stating those reasons?"

"You are not very shrewd if you cannot guess. I want this matter dropped. Had I denied the identity of the body it must have remained at the Morgue, entailing more newspaper sensationalism. By admitting the identity, I hoped that the body would be given to us for burial, and that the affair would then be allowed to die."

"Then if, as you now signify, this is not your brother's body, what shall I think of your suggestion that you yourself placed the body in the river?"

"What shall you think? Why, think what you like. That is your affair. The less you think about it, though, the better pleased I should be. And now really I cannot permit this conversation to be prolonged. You must go, and if you please I wish that you do not come here again."

"I am sorry that I cannot promise that. I shall come if I think it necessary. This is your sister's house, I believe, and she has expressed a wish that I pursue this case to the end."

"My sister is a fool. At any rate, I can assure you, you shall not get another chance at me, so make the most of what information I have given you. Good morning."

With these words Mr. Mark Quadrant walked out of the room, leaving Mr. Barnes alone.

IV

Mr. Barnes stood for a moment in a quandary, and then decided upon a course of action. He touched the bell which he knew would call the butler, and then sat down by the grate fire to wait. Almost immediately his eye fell upon a bit of white paper protruding from beneath a small rug, and he picked it up. Examining it closely, he guessed that it had once contained some medicine in powder form, but nothing in the shape of a label, or traces of the powder itself, was there to tell what the drug had been.

"I wonder," thought he, "whether this bit of paper would furnish me with a clue? I must have it examined by a chemist. He may discern by his methods what I cannot detect with the naked eye."

With this thought in his mind, he carefully folded the paper in its original creases and deposited it in his wallet. At that moment the butler entered.

"What is your name?" asked Mr. Barnes.

"Thomas, sir," said the man, a fine specimen of the intelligent New York negro. "Thomas Jefferson."

"Well, Thomas, I am a detective, and your mistress wishes me to look into the peculiar circumstances which, as you know, have occurred. Are you willing to help me?"

"I'll do anything for the mistress, sir."

"Very good. That is quite proper. Now, then, do you remember your master's death?"

"Yes, sir."

"And his funeral?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know when the undertaker and his men came and went, and how often, I presume? You let them in and saw them?"

"I let them in, yes, sir. But once or twice they went out without my knowing."

"At five o'clock on the afternoon before the funeral, I am told that Mrs. Quadrant visited the room where the body was, and ordered that the coffin should be closed for the last time. Did you know this?"

"No, sir."

"I understand that at that time the undertaker and two of his men were in the room, as were also the two Mr. Quadrants, Mrs. Quadrant, and the doctor. Now, be as accurate as you can, and tell me in what order and when these persons left the house."

"Dr. Mortimer went away, I remember, just after Mrs. Quadrant went to her room to lie down. Then the gentlemen went in to dinner, and I served them. The undertaker and one of his men left

together just as dinner was put on table. I remember that because the undertaker stood in the hall and spoke a word to Mr. Amos just as he was entering the dining-room. Mr. Amos then turned to me, and said for me to show them out. I went to the door with them, and then went back to the dining-room."

"Ah! Then one of the undertaker's men was left alone with the body?"

"I suppose so, unless he went away first. I did not see him go at all. But, come to think of it, he must have been there after the other two went away."

"Why?"

"Because, when I let out the undertaker and his man, their wagon was at the door, but they walked off and left it. After dinner it was gone, so the other man must have gone out and driven off in it."

"Very probably. Now, can you tell me this man's name? The last to leave the house, I mean?"

"I heard the undertaker call one 'Jack,' but I do not know which one."

"But you saw the two men – the assistants, I mean. Can you not describe the one that was here last?"

"Not very well. All I can say is that the one that went away with the undertaker was a youngish fellow without any mustache. The other was a short, thick-set man, with dark hair and a stubby mustache. That is all I noticed."

"That will be enough. I can probably find him at the undertaker's. Now, can you remember whether either of the gentlemen sat up with the corpse that night?"

"Both the gentlemen sat in here till ten o'clock. The body was across the hall in the little reception-room near the front door. About ten the door-bell rang, and I let in the doctor, who stopped to ask after Mrs. Quadrant. He and Mr. Amos went up to her room. The doctor came down in a few minutes, alone, and came into this room to talk with Mr. Mark."

"How long did he stay?"

"I don't know. Not long, I think, because he had on his overcoat. But Mr. Mark told me I could go to bed, and he would let the doctor out. So I just brought them a fresh pitcher of ice-water, and went to my own room."

"That is all, then, that you know of what occurred that night?"

"No, sir. There was another thing, that I have not mentioned to any one, though I don't think it amounts to anything."

"What was that?"

"Some time in the night I thought I heard a door slam, and the noise woke me up. I jumped out of bed and slipped on some clothes and came as far as the door here, but I did not come in."

"Why not?"

"Because I saw Mr. Amos in here, standing by the centre-table with a lamp in his hand. He was looking down at Mr. Mark, who was fast asleep alongside of the table, with his head resting on his arm on the table."

"Did you notice whether Mr. Amos was dressed or not?"

"Yes, sir. That's what surprised me. He had all his clothes on."

"Did he awaken his brother?"

"No. He just looked at him, and then tiptoed out and went upstairs. I slipped behind the hall door, so that he would not see me."

"Was the lamp in his hand one that he had brought down from his own room?"

"No, sir. It was one that I had been ordered to put in the room where the coffin was, as they did not want the electric light turned on in there all night. Mr. Amos went back into the front room, and left the lamp there before he went upstairs."

"Do you know when Mr. Mark went up to his room? Did he remain downstairs all night?"

"No, sir. He was in bed in his own room when I came around in the morning. About six o'clock, that was. But I don't know when he went to bed. He did not come down to breakfast, though, till nearly noon. The funeral was at two o'clock."

"That is all, I think," said Mr. Barnes. "But do not let any one know that I have talked with you."

"Just as you say, sir."

As it was now nearing noon, Mr. Barnes left the house and hastened up to Mr. Mitchel's residence to keep his engagement for luncheon. Arrived there, he was surprised to have Williams inform him that he had received a telephone message to the effect that Mr. Mitchel would not be at home for luncheon.

"But, Inspector," said Williams, "here's a note just left for you by a messenger."

Mr. Barnes took the envelope, which he found inclosed the following from Mr. Mitchel:

> "Friend Barnes: —
>
> "Am sorry I cannot be home to luncheon. Williams will give you a bite. I have news for you. I have seen the ashes, and there is now no doubt that a body, a human body, was burned at the crematory that day. I do not despair that we may yet discover whose body it was. More when I know more."

V

Mr. Barnes read this note over two or three times, and then folded it thoughtfully and put it in his pocket. He found it difficult to decide whether Mr. Mitchel had been really detained, or whether he had purposely broken his appointment. If the latter, then Mr. Barnes felt sure that already he had made some discovery which rendered this case doubly attractive to him, so much so that he had concluded to seek the solution himself.

"That man is a monomaniac," thought Mr. Barnes, somewhat nettled. "I come here and attract his attention to a case that I know will afford him an opportunity to follow a fad, and now he goes off and is working the case alone. It is not fair. But I suppose this is another challenge, and I must work rapidly to get at the truth ahead of him. Well, I will accept, and fight it out."

Thus musing, Mr. Barnes, who had declined Williams's offer to serve luncheon, left the house and proceeded to the shop of the undertaker. This man had a name the full significance of which had never come home to him until he began the business of caring for the dead. He spelled it Berial, and insisted that the pronunciation demanded a long sound to the "i," and a strong accent on the middle syllable. But he was constantly annoyed by the cheap wit of acquaintances, who with a significant titter would call him either Mr. "Burial," or Mr. "Bury all."

Mr. Barnes found Mr. Berial disengaged, undertakers, fortunately, not always being rushed with business, and encountered no difficulty in approaching his subject.

"I have called, Mr. Berial," said the detective, "to get a little information about your management of the funeral of Mr. Quadrant."

"Certainly," said Mr. Berial; "any information I can give, you are welcome to. Detective, I suppose?"

"Yes; in the interest of the family," replied Mr. Barnes. "There are some odd features of this case, Mr. Berial."

"Odd?" said the undertaker. "Odd don't half cover it. It's the most remarkable thing in the history of the world. Here I am, with an experience in funerals covering thirty years, and I go and have a man decently cremated, and, by hickory, if he ain't found floating in the river the next morning. Odd? Why, there ain't any word to describe a thing like that. It's devilish; that's the nearest I can come to it."

"Well, hardly that," said Mr. Barnes, with a smile. "Of course, since Mr. Quadrant's body has been found in the river, it never was cremated."

"Who says so?" asked the undertaker, sharply. "Not cremated? Want to bet on that? I suppose not. We can't make a bet about the dead. It wouldn't be professional. But Mr. Quadrant was cremated. There isn't any question about that point. Put that down as final."

"But it is impossible that he should have been cremated, and then reappear at the Morgue."

"Just what I say. The thing's devilish. There's a hitch, of course. But why should it be at my end, eh? Tell me that, will you? There's just as much chance for a mistake at the Morgue as at the funeral, isn't there?" This was said in a tone that challenged dispute.

"What mistake could have occurred at the Morgue?" asked Mr. Barnes.

"Mistaken identification," replied the undertaker so quickly that he had evidently anticipated the question. "Mistaken identification. That's your cue, Mr. Barnes. It's happened often enough before," he added, with a chuckle.

"I scarcely think there can be a mistake of that character," said Mr. Barnes, thinking, nevertheless, of the scar on the foot. "This identification is not merely one of recognition; it is supported by scientific reason, advanced by the doctors."

"Oh! doctors make mistakes too, I guess," said Mr. Berial, testily. "Look here, you're a detective. You're accustomed to weigh evidence. Now tell me, will you, how could this man be cremated, as I tell you he was, and then turn up in the river? Answer that, and I'll argue with you."

"The question, of course, turns on the fact of the cremation. How do you know that the body was in the coffin when it was consigned to the furnace?"

"How do I know? Why, ain't that my business? Who should know if I don't? Didn't I put the body in the coffin myself?"

"Very true. But why could not some one have taken the body out after you closed the coffin finally, and before the hour of the funeral?"

Mr. Berial laughed softly to himself, as though enjoying a joke too good to be shared too soon with another. Presently he said:

"That's a proper question, of course; a very proper question, and I'll answer it. But I must tell you a secret, so you may understand it. You see in this business we depend a good deal on the recommendation of the attending physician. Some doctors are real professional, and recommend a man on his merits. Others are different. They expect a commission. Surprises you, don't it? But it's done every day in this town. The doctor can't save his patient, and the patient dies. Then he tells the sorrowing friends that such and such an undertaker is the proper party to hide away the result of his failure; failure to cure, of course. In due time he gets his little check, ten per cent. of the funeral bill. This seems like wandering away from the point, but I am coming back to it. This commission arrangement naturally keeps me on the books of certain doctors, and vicy versy it keeps them on mine. So, working for certain doctors, it follows that I work for a certain set of people. Now I've a Catholic doctor on my books, and it happens that the cemetery where that church buries is in a lonesome place; just the spot for a grave-robber to work undisturbed, especially if the watchman out there should happen to be fond of his tipple, which I tell you, again in confidence, that he is. Now, then, it has happened more than once, though it has been kept quiet, that a grave filled up one afternoon would be empty the next morning. At least the body would be gone. Of course they wouldn't take the coffin, as they'd be likely to be caught getting rid of it. You see, a coffin ain't exactly regular household furniture. If they have time they fill the grave again, but often enough they're too anxious to get away, because, of course, the watchman might not be drunk. Well, these things being kept secret, but still pretty well known in the congregation, told in whispers, I might say, a sort of demand sprung up for a style of coffin that a grave-robber couldn't open, – a sort of coffin with a combination lock, as it were."

"You don't mean to say – " began Mr. Barnes, greatly interested at last in the old man's rather lengthy speech. He was interrupted by the undertaker, who again chuckled as he exclaimed:

"Don't I? Well, I do, though. Of course I don't mean there's really a combination lock. That would never do. We often have to open the coffin for a friend who wants to see the dead face again, or for folks that come to the funeral late. It's funny, when you come to think of it, how folks will be late to funerals. As they only have this last visit to make, you'd think they'd make it a point to be on time and not delay the funeral. But about the way I fasten a coffin. If any grave-robber tackles one of my coffins without knowing the trick, he'd be astonished, I tell you. I often think of it and laugh. You see, there's a dozen screws and they look just like ordinary screws. But if you work them all out with a screw-driver, your coffin lid is just as tight as ever. You see, it's this way. The real screw works with a reverse thread, and is hollow on the top. Now I have a screw-driver that is really a screw. When the screw-threaded end of this is screwed into the hollow end of the coffin-bolt, as soon as it is in tight it begins to unscrew the bolt. To put the bolt in, in the first place, I first screw it tight on to my screw-driver, and then drive it in, turning backwards, and as soon as it is tight my screw-driver begins to unscrew and so comes out. Then I drop in my dummy screw, and just turn it down to fill the hole. Now the dummy screw and the reverse thread of the real bolt is a puzzle for a grave-robber, and anyway he couldn't solve it without one of my own tools."

Mr. Barnes reflected deeply upon this as a most important statement. If Mr. Quadrant's coffin was thus fastened, no one could have opened it without the necessary knowledge and the special screw-driver. He recalled that the butler had told him that one of Mr. Berial's men had been at the house after the departure of the others. This man was therefore in the position to have opened the coffin, supposing that he had had one of the screw-drivers. Of this it would be well to learn.

"I suppose," said Mr. Barnes, "that the coffin in which you placed Mr. Quadrant was fastened in this fashion?"

"Yes; and I put the lid on and fastened it myself."

"What, then, did you do with the screw-driver? You might have left it at the house."

"I might have, but I didn't. No; I'm not getting up a combination and then leaving the key around loose. No, sir; there's only one of those screw-drivers, and I take care of it myself. I'll show it to you."

The old man went to a drawer, which he unlocked, and brought back the tool.

"You see what it is," he continued – "double-ended. This end is just the common every-day screw-driver. That is for the dummies that fill up the hollow ends after the bolts are sent home. The other end, you see, looks just like an ordinary screw with straight sides. There's a shoulder to keep it from jamming. Now that's the only one of those, and I keep it locked in that drawer with a Yale lock, and the key is always in my pocket. No; I guess that coffin wasn't opened after I shut it."

Mr. Barnes examined the tool closely, and formed his own conclusions, which he thought best to keep to himself.

"Yes," said he aloud; "it does seem as though the mistake must be in the identification."

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Mr. Berial, delighted at thinking that he had convinced the detective. "Oh, I guess I know my business."

"I was told at the house," said Mr. Barnes, "that when you left, after closing the coffin, one of your men stayed behind. Why was that?"

"Oh, I was hungry and anxious to get back for dinner. One of my men, Jack, I brought away with me, because I had to send him up to another place to get some final directions for another funeral. The other man stayed behind to straighten up the place and bring off our things in the wagon."

"Who was this man? What is his name?"

"Jerry, we called him. I don't know his last name."

"I would like to have a talk with him. Can I see him?"

"I am afraid not. He isn't working with me any more."

"How was that?"

"He left, that's all. Threw up his job."

"When was that?"

"This morning."

"This morning?"

"Yes; just as soon as I got here, about eight o'clock."

Mr. Barnes wondered whether there was any connection between this man's giving up his position, and the account of the discoveries in regard to Mr. Quadrant's body which the morning papers had published.

VI

"Mr. Berial," said Mr. Barnes after a few moments' thought, "I wish you would let me have a little talk with your man – Jack, I think you called him. And I would like to speak to him alone if you don't mind. I feel that I must find this other fellow, Jerry, and perhaps Jack may be able to give me some information as to his home, unless you can yourself tell me where he lives."

"No; I know nothing about him," said Mr. Berial. "Of course you can speak to Jack. I'll call him in here and I'll be off to attend to some business. That will leave you alone with him."

Jack, when he came in, proved to be a character. Mr. Barnes soon discovered that he had little faith in the good intentions of any one in the world except himself. He evidently was one of those men who go through life with a grievance, feeling that all people have in some way contributed to their misfortune.

"Your name is Jack," said Mr. Barnes; "Jack what?"

"Jackass, you might say," answered the fellow, with a coarse attempt at wit.

"And why, pray?"

"Well, a jackass works like a slave, don't he? And what does he get out of it? Lots of blows, plenty of cuss words, and a little fodder. It's the same with yours truly."

"Very well, my man, have your joke. But now tell me your name. I am a detective."

"The devil a much I care for that. I ain't got nothin' to hide. My name's Randal, if you must have it. Jack Randal."

"Very good. Now I want to ask you a few questions about the funeral of Mr. Quadrant."

"Ask away. Nobody's stoppin' you."

"You assisted in preparing the body for the coffin, I think?"

"Yes, and helped to put him in it."

"Have you any idea how he got out of it again?" asked Mr. Barnes suddenly.

"Nit. Leastways, not any worth mentionin', since I can't prove what I might think."

"But I should like to know what you think, anyway," persisted the detective.

"Well, I think he was took out," said Randal with a hoarse laugh.

"Then you do not believe that he was cremated?"

"Cremated? Not on your life. If he was made into ashes, would he turn up again a floater and drift onto the marble at the Morgue? I don't think."

"But how could the body have gotten out of the coffin?"

"He couldn't. I never saw a stiff do that, except once, at an Irish wake, and that fellow wasn't dead. No, the dead don't walk. Not these days. I tell you, he was took out of the box. That's as plain as your nose, not meanin' to be personal."

"Come, come, you have said all that before. What I want to know is, how you think he could have been taken out of the coffin."

"Lifted out, I reckon."

Mr. Barnes saw that nothing would be gained by getting angry, though the fellow's persistent flippancy annoyed him extremely. He thought best to appear satisfied with his answers, and to endeavor to get his information by slow degrees, since he could not get it more directly.

"Were you present when the coffin lid was fastened?"

"Yes; the boss did that."

"How was it fastened? With the usual style of screws?"

"Oh, no! We used the boss's patent screw, warranted to keep the corpse securely in his grave. Once stowed away in the boss's patent screw-top casket, no ghost gets back to trouble the long-suffering family."

"You know all about these patent coffin-screws?"

"Why, sure. Ain't I been working with old Berial these three years?"

"Does Mr. Berial always screw on the coffin lids himself?"

"Yes; he's stuck on it."

"He keeps the screw-driver in his own possession?"

"So he thinks."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Barnes, immediately attentive.

"Just what I say. Old Berial thinks he's got the only screw-driver."

"But you know that there is another?"

"Who says so? I don't know anything of the sort."

"Why, then, do you cast a doubt upon the matter by saying that Mr. Berial thinks he has the only one?"

"Because I do doubt it, that's all."

"Why do you doubt it?"

"Oh, I don't know. A fellow can't always account for what he thinks, can he?"

"You must have some reason for thinking there may be a duplicate of that screw-driver."

"Well, what if I have?"

"I would like to know it."

"No doubt! But it ain't right to cast suspicions when you can't prove a thing, is it?"

"Perhaps others may find the proof."

"Just so. People in your trade are pretty good at that, I reckon."

"Good at what?"

"Proving things that don't exist."

"But if your suspicion is groundless, there can be no harm in telling it to me."

"Oh, there's grounds enough for what I think. Look here, suppose a case. Suppose a party, a young female party, dies. Suppose her folks think they'd like to have her hands crossed on her breast. Suppose a man, me, for instance, helps the boss fix up that young party with her hands crossed, and suppose there's a handsome shiner, a fust-water diamond, on one finger. Suppose we screw down that coffin lid tight at night, and the boss carts off his pet screw-driver. Then suppose next day, when he opens that coffin for the visitors to have a last look at the young person, that the other man, meanin' me, happens to notice that the shiner is missin'. If no other person notices it, that's because they're too busy grievin'. But that's the boss's luck, I say. The diamond's gone, just the same, ain't it? Now, you wouldn't want to claim that the young person come out of that patent box and give that diamond away in the night, would you? If she come out at all, I should say it was in the form of a ghost, and I never heard of ghosts wearin' diamonds, or givin' away finger rings. Did you?"

"Do you mean to say that such a thing as this has occurred?"

"Oh, I ain't sayin' a word. I don't make no accusations. You can draw your own conclusions. But in a case like that you would think there was more than one of them screw-drivers, now, wouldn't you?"

"I certainly should, unless we imagined that Mr. Berial himself returned to the house and stole the ring. But that, of course, is impossible."

"Is it?"

"Why, would you think that Mr. Berial would steal?"

"Who knows? We're all honest, till we're caught."

"Tell me this. If Mr. Berial keeps that screw-driver always in his own possession, how could any one have a duplicate of it made?"

"Dead easy. If you can't see that, you're as soft as the old man."

"Perhaps I am. But tell me how it could be done."

"Why, just see. That tool is double-ended. But one end is just a common, ordinary screw-driver. You don't need to imitate that. The other end is just a screw that fits into the thread at the end of the bolts. Now old Berial keeps his precious screw-driver locked up, but the bolts lay around by the gross. Any man about the place could take one and have a screw cut to fit it, and there you are."

This was an important point, and Mr. Barnes was glad to have drawn it out. It now became only too plain that the patented device was no hindrance to any one knowing of it, and especially to one who had access to the bolts. This made it the more necessary to find the man Jerry.

"There was another man besides yourself who assisted at the Quadrant funeral, was there not?" asked Mr. Barnes.

"There was another man, but he didn't assist much. He was no good."

"What was this man's name?"

"That's why I say he's no good. He called himself Jerry Morton, but it didn't take me long to find out that his name was really Jerry Morgan. Now a man with two names is usually a crook, to my way of thinkin'."

"He gave up his job here this morning, did he not?"

"Did he?"

"Yes. Can you tell why he should have done so? Was he not well enough paid?"

"Too well, I take it. He got the same money I do, and I done twice as much work. So he's chucked it, has he? Well, I shouldn't wonder if there was good reason."

"What reason?"

"Oh, I don't know. That story about old Quadrant floatin' back was in the papers to-day, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Very well. There you are."

"You mean that this man Morgan might have had a hand in that?"

"Oh, he had a hand in it all right. So did I and the boss, for that matter. But the boss and me left him screwed tight in his box, and Jerry he was left behind to pick up, as it were. And he had the wagon too. Altogether, I should say he had the chance if anybody. But mind you, I ain't makin' no accusations."

"Then, if Jerry did this, he must have had a duplicate screw-driver?"

"You're improvin', you are. You begin to see things. But I never seen him with no screw-driver, remember that."

"Was he in Mr. Berial's employment at the time of the other affair?"

"What other affair?"

"The case of the young lady from whose finger the diamond ring was stolen."

"Oh, that. Why, he might have been, of course, but then, you know, we was only supposin' a case there. We didn't say that was a real affair." Randal laughed mockingly.

"Have you any idea as to where I could find this man Morgan?"

"I don't think you will find him."

"Why not?"

"Skipped, I guess. He wouldn't chuck this job just to take a holiday."

"Do you know where he lived?"

"Eleventh Avenue near Fifty-fourth Street. I don't know the number, but it was over the butcher shop."

"If this man Morgan did this thing, can you imagine why he did it?"

"For pay; you can bet on that. Morgan ain't the man as would take a risk like that for the fun of the thing."

"But how could he hope to be paid for such an act?"

"Oh, he wouldn't hope. You don't know Jerry. He'd be paid, part in advance anyway, and balance on demand."

"But who would pay him, and with what object?"

"Oh, I don't know. But let me tell you something. Them brothers weren't all so lovin' to one another as the outside world thinks. In the fust place, as I gathered by listenin' to the talk of the servants, the one they called Amos didn't waste no love on the dead one, though I guess the other one, Mark, liked him some. I think he liked the widow even better." Here he laughed. "Now the dead man wanted to be cremated – that is, he said so before he was dead. The widow didn't relish the idea, but she ain't strong-minded enough to push her views. Now we'll suppose a case again. I like that style, it don't commit you to anything. Well, suppose this fellow Mark thinks he'll get into the good graces of the widow by hindering the cremation. He stands out agin it. Amos he says the old fellow wanted to be burned, and let him burn. 'He'll burn in hell, anyway.' That nice, sweet remark he did make, I'll tell you that much. Then the brothers they quarrel. And a right good row they did have, so I hear. Now we'll suppose again. Why couldn't our friend, Mr. Mark, have got up this scheme to stop the cremation?"

Mr. Barnes was startled to hear this man suggest exactly what Mark himself had hinted at. Could it be only a coincidence or was it really the solution of the mystery? But if so, what of the body that was really cremated? But then again the only evidence in his possession on that point was the bare statement in the note received from Mr. Mitchel. Two constructions could be placed upon that note. First, it might have been honestly written by Mr. Mitchel, who really believed what he wrote, though, smart as he was, he might have been mistaken. Secondly, the note might merely have been written to send Mr. Barnes off on a wrong clue, thus leaving Mr. Mitchel a chance to follow up the right one. Resuming his conversation with Randal, Mr. Barnes said:

"Then you imagine that Mr. Mark Quadrant hired this man Morgan to take away the body and hide it until after the funeral?"

"Oh, I don't know. All I'll say is, I don't think Jerry would be too good for a little job like that. Say, you're not a bad sort, as detectives go. I don't mind givin' you a tip."

"I am much obliged, I am sure," said Mr. Barnes, smiling at the fellow's presumption.

"Don't mention it. I make no charge. But see. Have you looked at the corpse at the Morgue?"

"No. Why?"

"Well, I stopped in this morning and had a peep at him. I guess it's Quadrant all right."

"Have you any special way of knowing that?"

"Well, when the boss was injectin' the embalmin' fluid, he stuck the needle in the wrong place first, and had to put it in again. That made two holes. They're both there. You might wonder why we embalmed a body that was to be cremated. You see, we didn't know the family wasn't going to let him be seen, and we was makin' him look natural."

"And you are sure there are two punctures in the body at the Morgue?"

"Dead sure. That's a joke. But that ain't the tip I want to give you. This is another case of diamond rings."

"You mean that there were diamond rings left on the hand when the body was placed in the coffin?"

"One solitaire; a jim dandy. And likewise a ruby, set deep like a carbuncle, I think they call them other red stones. Then on the little finger of the other hand there was a solid gold ring, with a flat top to it, and a letter 'Q' in it, made of little diamonds. Them rings never reached the Morgue."

"But even so, that does not prove that they were taken by the man who removed the corpse from the coffin. They might have been taken by those who found the body in the river."

"Nit. Haven't you read the papers? Boys found it, but they called in the police to get it out of the water. Since then the police has been in charge. Now I ain't got none too good an opinion of the police myself, but they don't rob the dead. They squeeze the livin', all right, but not the dead. Put that down. You can believe, if you like, that Jerry carted that body off to the river and dumped it in, diamond rings and all. But as I said before, you don't know Jerry. No, sir, if I was you, I'd find them rings, and find out how they got there. And maybe I can help you there, too, – that is, if you'll make it worth my while."

Mr. Barnes understood the hint and responded promptly:

"Here is a five-dollar bill," said he. "And if you really tell me anything that aids me in finding the rings, I will give you ten more."

"That's the talk," said Randal, taking the money. "Well, it's this way. You'll find that crooks, like other fly birds, has regular haunts. Now I happen to know that Jerry spouted his watch, a silver affair, but a good timer, once, and I take it he'd carry the rings where he's known, 'specially as I'm pretty sure the pawnbroker ain't over inquisitive about where folks gets the things they borrow on. If I was you, I'd try the shop on Eleventh Avenue by Fiftieth Street. It don't look like a rich place, but that kind don't want to attract too much attention."

"I will go there. I have no doubt that if he took the rings we will find them at that place. One thing more. How was Mr. Quadrant dressed when you placed him in the coffin? The newspapers make no mention of the clothing found on him."

"Oh, we didn't dress him. You see, he was to be burned, so we just shrouded him. Nothin' but plain white cloth. No buttons or nothin' that wouldn't burn up. The body at the Morgue was found without no clothes of any kind. I'd recognize that shroud, though, if it turns up. So there's another point for you."

"One thing more. You are evidently sure that Mr. Quadrant's body was taken out of the coffin. Do you think, then, that the coffin was empty when they took it to the crematory?"

"Why, sure! What could there be in it?"

"Suppose I were to tell you that another detective has examined the ashes and declares that he can prove that a human body was burned with that coffin. What would you say?"

"I'd say he was a liar. I'd say he was riggin' you to get you off the scent. No, sir! Don't you follow no such blind trail as that."

VII

As Mr. Barnes left the undertaker's shop he observed Mr. Burrows coming towards him. It will be recalled that this young detective, now connected with the regular police force of the metropolis, had earlier in life been a *protégé* of Mr. Barnes. It was not difficult to guess from his being in this neighborhood that to him had been intrusted an investigation of the Quadrant mystery.

"Why, hello, Mr. Barnes," Mr. Burrows exclaimed, as he recognized his old friend. "What are you doing about here? Nosing into this Quadrant matter, I'll be bound."

"It is an attractive case," replied Mr. Barnes, in non-committal language. "Are you taking care of it for the office?"

"Yes; and the more I look into it the more complicated I find it. If you are doing any work on it, I wouldn't mind comparing notes."

"Very well, my boy," said Mr. Barnes, after a moment's thought, "I will confess that I have gone a little way into this. What have you done?"

"Well, in the first place, there was another examination by the doctors this morning. There isn't a shadow of doubt that the man at the Morgue was dead when thrown into the water. What's more, he died in his bed."

"Of what disease?"

"Cancer of the stomach. Put that down as fact number one. Fact number two is that the mark on his face is exactly the same, and from the same skin disease that old Quadrant had. Seems he also had a cancer, so I take it the identification is complete; especially as the family say it is their relative."

"Do they all agree to that?"

"Why, yes – that is, all except the youngest brother. He says he guesses it's his brother. Something about that man struck me as peculiar."

"Ah! Then you have seen him?"

"Yes. Don't care to talk to detectives. Wants the case hushed up; says there's nothing in it. Now I know there is something in it, and I am not sure he tells all he knows."

"Have you formed any definite conclusion as to the motive in this case?"

"The motive for what?"

"Why, for removing the body from the coffin."

"Well, I think the motive of the man who did it was money. What the motive of the man who hired him was, I can't prove yet."

"Oh! Then you think there are two in it?"

"Yes; I'm pretty sure of that. And I think I can put my finger on the man that made the actual transfer."

The two men were walking as they talked, Mr. Burrows having turned and joined the older detective. Mr. Barnes was surprised to find his friend advancing much the same theory as that held by Randal. He was more astonished, however, at the next reply elicited. He asked:

"Do you mind naming this man?"

"Not to you, if you keep it quiet till I'm ready to strike. I'm pretty sure that the party who carried the body away and put it in the river was the undertaker's assistant, a fellow who calls himself Randal."

Mr. Barnes started, but quickly regained his self-control. Then he said:

"Randal? Why, how could he have managed it?"

"Easily enough. It seems that the coffin was closed at five on the afternoon before the funeral, and the undertaker was told, in the presence of this fellow Randal, that it would not be opened again. Then the family went in to dine, and Berial and the other man, a fellow with an alias, but whose true name is Morgan, left the house, the other one, Randal, remaining behind to clear up. The undertaker's wagon was also there, and Randal drove it to the stables half an hour or so later."

Mr. Barnes noted here that there was a discrepancy between the facts as related by Mr. Burrows and as he himself had heard them. He had been told by Berial himself that it was "Jack" who had left the house with him, while Burrows evidently believed that it was Jack Randal who had been left behind. It was important, therefore, to learn whether there existed any other reason for suspecting Randal rather than Morgan.

"But though he may have had this opportunity," said Mr. Barnes, "you would hardly connect him with this matter without corroborative evidence."

"Oh, the case is not complete yet," said Mr. Burrows; "but I have had this fellow Randal watched for three days. We at the office knew about this identification before the newspapers got hold of it, be sure of that. Now one curious thing that he has done was to attempt to destroy some pawn-tickets."

"Pawn-tickets?"

"Yes. I was shadowing him myself last night, when I saw him tear up some paper and drop the pieces in the gutter at the side of the pavement. I let my man go on, for the sake of recovering those

bits of paper. It took some perseverance and no little time, but I found them, and when put together, as I have said, they proved to be pawn-tickets."

"Have you looked at the property represented yet?"

"No. Would you like to go with me? We'll go together. I was about to make my first open appearance at the undertaker's shop to face this fellow, when you met me. But there's time enough for that. We'll go and look at the rings if you say the word."

"Rings, are they?" said Mr. Barnes. "Why, I would like nothing better. They might have been taken from the corpse."

"Haven't a doubt of it," said Mr. Burrows. "Here are the pawn-tickets. There are two of them. Both for rings." He handed the two pawn-tickets to Mr. Barnes. The pieces had been pasted on another bit of paper and the two were consequently now on a single sheet. Mr. Barnes looked at them closely and then said:

"Why, Burrows, these are made out in the name of Jerry Morgan. Are you sure you have made no mistake in this affair?"

"Mistake? Not a bit of it. That fellow thinks he is smart, but I don't agree with him. He imagines that we might guess that one of those who had the handling of the body did this job, and when he pawned the rings he just used the other fellow's name. It's an old trick, and not very good, either."

Mr. Barnes was not entirely convinced, though the theory was possible, nay, plausible. In which case, the tip which Randal had given to Mr. Barnes was merely a part of his rather commonplace scheme of self-protection at the expense of a fellow-workman. He was glad now that he had met Burrows, for his possession of the pawn-tickets made it easy to visit the pawnbroker and see the rings; while his connection with the regular force would enable him to seize them should they prove to have been stolen from the body of Mr. Quadrant. It was noteworthy that the pawn-tickets had been issued by the man to whose place Randal had directed him. Arrived there, Mr. Burrows demanded to see the rings, to which the pawnbroker at first demurred, arguing that the tickets had been torn, that they had not been issued to the one presenting them, and that unless they were to be redeemed he must charge a fee of twenty-five cents for showing the goods. To all of this Mr. Burrows listened patiently and then showing his shield said meaningly:

"Now, friend Isaac, you get those rings out, and it will be better for you. The Chief has had an eye on this little shop of yours for some time."

"So help me Moses!" said the man, "he can keep both eyes on if he likes."

But his demeanor changed, and with considerable alacrity he brought out the rings. There were three, just as Randal had described to Mr. Barnes, including the one with the initial "Q" set in diamonds.

"Who left these with you?" asked Mr. Burrows.

"The name is on the ticket," answered the pawnbroker.

"You are inaccurate, my friend. A name is on the ticket, yes, but not the name. Now tell me the truth."

"It's all straight. I ain't hiding anything. Morgan brought the things here."

"Morgan, eh? You are sure his name is Morgan? Quite sure?"

"Why, that's the name I know him by. Sometimes he goes by the name of Morton, I've heard. But with me it's always been Morgan, Jerry Morgan, just as it reads on the ticket."

"Oh, then you know this man Morgan?"

"No; only that he borrows money on security once in a while."

"Well, now, if his name is Morgan, did you think this ring with a 'Q' on it was his? Does 'Q' stand for Morgan?"

"That's none of my affair. Heavens, I can't ask everybody where they get things. They'd be insulted."

"Insulted! That's a good one. Well, when I get my hands on this chap he'll be badly insulted, for I'll ask him a lot of questions. Now, Isaac, let me tell you what this 'Q' stands for. It stands for Quadrant, and that's the name of the man found in the river lately, and these three rings came off his fingers. After death, Isaac; after death! What do you think of that?"

"You don't say! I'm astonished!"

"Are you, now? Never thought your friend Morgan or Morton, who works out by the day, and brought valuable diamonds to pawn, would do such a thing, did you? Thought he bought these things out of his wages, eh?"

"I never knew he wasn't honest, so help me Moses! or I wouldn't have had a thing to do with him."

"Perhaps not. You're too honest yourself to take 'swag' from a 'crook,' even though you loan about one quarter of the value."

"I gave him all he asked for. He promised to take them out again."

"Well, he won't, Isaac. I'll take them out myself."

"You don't mean you're going to keep the rings? Where do I come in?"

"You're lucky you don't come into jail."

"May I ask this man a few questions, Burrows?" said Mr. Barnes.

"As many as you like, and see that you answer straight, Isaac. Don't forget what I hinted about the Chief having an eye on you."

"Why, of course, I'll answer anything."

"You say you have known this man Morgan for some time?" asked Mr. Barnes. "Can you give me an idea of how he looks?"

"Why, I ain't much on descriptions. Morgan is a short fellow, rather stocky, and he's got dark hair and a mustache that looks like a paintbrush."

Mr. Barnes recalled the description which the butler had given of the man who had remained at the house when the others went away, and this tallied very well with it. As Berial had declared that it was Morgan who had been left at the house, and as this description did not fit Randal at all, he being above medium height, with a beardless face which made him seem younger than he probably was, it began to look as though in some way Mr. Burrows had made a mistake, and that Randal was not criminally implicated, though perhaps he had stolen the pawn-tickets, and subsequently destroyed them when he found that a police investigation was inevitable.

There was no object in further questioning the pawnbroker, who pleaded that as the owners of the property were rich, and as he had "honestly" made the loan, they might be persuaded to return to him the amount of his advance, adding that he would willingly throw off his "interest."

Leaving the place, and walking together across town, Mr. Barnes said to Mr. Burrows:

"Tom, I am afraid you are on a wrong scent. That man Randal stole those pawn-tickets. He did not himself pawn the rings."

"Maybe," said the younger man, only half convinced. "But you mark my word. Randal is in this. Don't believe all that 'fence' says. He may be in with Randal. I fancy that Randal pawned the things, but made the Jew put Morgan's name on them. Now that we ask him questions, he declares that Morgan brought them to him, either to protect Randal, or most likely to protect himself. Since there is a real Morgan, and he knew the man, he had no right to write his name on those tickets for things brought to him by some one else."

"But why are you so sure that Morgan is innocent? How do you know that he was the one that went off with old Berial when they left the house?"

"Simply because the other man, Randal, took the wagon back to the stables."

"Are you certain of that?"

"Absolutely. I have been to the stables, and they all tell the same story. Randal took the wagon out, harnessing the horse himself, as he often did. And Randal brought it back again, after six o'clock;

of that they are certain, because the place is merely a livery for express wagons, trucks, and the like. The regular stable-boys go off between six and seven, and there is no one in charge at night except the watchman. The drivers usually take care of their own horses. Now the watchman was already there when Randal came in with the wagon, and two of the stable-boys also saw him."

"Now, Tom, you said that in your belief there was another man in this case, – one who really was the principal. Have you any suspicion as to that man's identity?"

"Here's my idea," said Mr. Burrows. "This fellow Randal was sounded by the man who finally engaged him for the job, and, proving to be the right sort, was engaged. He was to take the body out of the coffin and carry it away. The man who hired Randal must have been one of the brothers."

"Why?"

"It must have been, else the opportunity could not have been made, for, mark me, it was made. See! The widow was taken to the room to see the corpse, and then it was arranged that the coffin should be closed and not opened again before the funeral. That was to make all sure. Then came the closing of the coffin and the departure of two of the undertakers. The third, Randal, remained behind, and while the family lingered at dinner the job was done. The body was carried out to the wagon and driven off. Now we come to the question, which of the brothers did this?"

"Which have you decided upon?"

"Why, the object of this devilish act was to please the widow by preventing this cremation to which she objected. The man who concocted that scheme thought that when the body should be found it would then be buried, which would gratify the widow. Now why did he wish to gratify her? Because he's in love with her. She's not old, you know, and she's still pretty."

"Then you think that Mark Quadrant concocted this scheme?"

"No! I think that Amos Quadrant is our man."

It seemed destined that Mr. Burrows should surprise Mr. Barnes. If the older detective was astonished when he had heard Burrows suggest that Randal had been the accomplice in this affair, he was more astounded now to hear him accuse the elder brother of being the principal. For, had not Mark Quadrant told him that it was Amos who had insisted upon the cremation? And that Amos, being the elder, had assumed the control of the funeral?

"Burrows," said Mr. Barnes, "I hope that you are not merely following your impulsive imagination?"

Mr. Burrows colored as he replied with some heat:

"You need not forever twit me with my stupidity in my first case. Of course I may be mistaken, but I am doing routine work on this affair. I have not any real proof yet to support my theories. If I had I should make an arrest. But I have evidence enough to make it my duty to go ahead on definite lines. When the mystery clears a little, I may see things differently."

"I should like to know why you think that Amos is in love with his sister-in-law."

"Perhaps it would be safer to claim that he was once in love with her. The past is a certainty, the present mere conjecture. I got the tip from a slip of the tongue made by Dr. Mortimer, and I have corroborated the facts since. I was speaking with Dr. Mortimer of the possibility of there being any ill-feeling between the members of this family, when he said: 'I believe there was some hard feeling between the deceased and his brother Amos arising from jealousy.' When he had let the word 'jealousy' pass his lips, he closed up like a clam, and when I pressed him, tried to pass it off by saying that Amos was jealous of his brother's business and social successes. But that did not go down with me, so I have had some guarded inquiries made, with the result that it is certain that Amos loved this woman before she accepted Rufus."

"What if I tell you that I have heard that the younger brother, Mark, is in love with the widow, and that it was he who opposed cremation, while it was Amos who insisted upon carrying out the wishes of his brother?"

"What should I say to that? Well, I should say that you probably got that yarn from Randal, and that he had been 'stuffing you,' as the vernacular has it, hoping you'll excuse the vulgar expression."

It nettled Mr. Barnes to have his younger *confrère* guess so accurately the source of his information, and to hear him discredit it so satirically. He recognized, however, that upon the evidence offered Mr. Burrows had not yet made out his case, and that therefore the mystery was yet far from solved.

"Look here, Burrows," said Mr. Barnes. "Take an older man's advice. Don't go too fast in this case. Before you come to any conclusion, find this man Jerry Morgan."

"Why, there won't be any trouble about that."

"Oh, then you know where he is?"

"Why, he is still with Berial. At least he was up to last night."

"Ah, now we come to it!" Mr. Barnes was gratified to find that Burrows had not kept full control of his case. "Last night was many hours ago. Morgan threw up his job this morning, and left."

"The devil you say!"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Barnes, determined now to make Mr. Burrows a little uncomfortable. "I have no doubt he intends to skip out, but, of course, he cannot get away. You have him shadowed?"

"Why, no, I have not," said Mr. Burrows, dejectedly. "You see, I did not connect him in my mind with – "

"Perhaps he is not connected with the case in your mind, Burrows, but he is connected with it in fact. He is unquestionably the key to the situation at present. With him in our hands we could decide whether it was he or Randal who pawned those rings. Without him we can prove nothing. In short, until you get at him the case is at a standstill."

"You are right, Mr. Barnes," said Mr. Burrows, manfully admitting his error. "I have been an ass. I was so sure about Randal that I did not use proper precautions, and Morgan has slipped through my fingers. But I'll find his trail, and I'll track him. I'll follow him to the opposite ocean if necessary, but I'll bring him back."

"That is the right spirit, Tom. Find him and bring him back if you can. If you cannot, then get the truth out of him. Let me say one thing more. For the present at least, work upon the supposition that it was he who pawned those rings. In that case he has at least two hundred dollars for travelling expenses."

"You are right. I'll begin at once without losing another minute."

"Where will you start?"

"I'll start where he started – at his own house. He's left there by now, of course, but I'll have a look at the place and talk a bit with the neighbors. When you hear from me again, I'll have Morgan."

VIII

Mr. Barnes returned to his home that night feeling well satisfied with his day's work. With little real knowledge he had started out in the morning, and within ten hours he had dipped deeply into the heart of the mystery. Yet he felt somewhat like a man who has succeeded in working his way into the thickest part of a forest, with no certainty as to where he might emerge again, or how. Moreover, though he had seemingly accomplished so much during the first day, he seemed destined to make little headway for many days thereafter. On the second day of his investigation he ascertained one fact which was more misleading than helpful. It will be recalled that Mark Quadrant had told him that his brother had a scar on the sole of his foot made by cutting himself whilst in swimming. Mr. Barnes went to the Morgue early, and examined both feet most carefully. There was no such scar, nor was it possible that there ever could have been. The feet were absolutely unmarred. Could it be possible that, in spite of the apparently convincing proof that this body had been correctly identified, nevertheless a mistake had been made?

This question puzzled the detective mightily, and he longed impatiently for an opportunity to talk with one of the family, especially with the elder brother, Amos. Delay, however, seemed unavoidable. The police authorities, having finally accepted the identification, delivered the body to the Quadrants, and a second funeral occurred. Thus two more days elapsed before Mr. Barnes felt at liberty to intrude, especially as it was not known that he had been regularly retained by Mrs. Quadrant.

Meanwhile nothing was heard from Burrows, who had left the city, and, as a further annoyance, Mr. Barnes was unable to catch Mr. Mitchel at home though he called three times. Failing to meet that gentleman, and chafing at his enforced inactivity, the detective finally concluded to visit the cemetery in the hope of learning what had occurred when Mr. Mitchel had inspected the ashes. Again, however, was he doomed to disappointment. His request to be allowed to examine the contents of the urn was refused, strict orders to that effect having been imposed by the Chief of the regular detective force.

"You see," explained the superintendent, "we could not even let you look into the urn upon the order of one of the family, because they have claimed the body at the Morgue, and so they have no claim on these ashes. If a body was burned that day, then there is a body yet to be accounted for, and the authorities must guard the ashes as their only chance to make out a case. Of course they can't identify ashes, but the expert chemists claim they can tell whether a human body or only an empty coffin was put into the furnace."

"And are the experts making such an analysis?" asked Mr. Barnes.

"Yes. The Chief himself came here with two of them, the day before yesterday. They emptied out the ashes onto a clean marble slab, and looked all through the pile. Then they put some in two bottles, and sealed the bottles, and then put the balance back in the urn and sealed that also. So, you see, there isn't any way for me to let you look into that urn."

"No, of course not," admitted the detective, reluctantly. "Tell me, was any one else present at this examination besides the Chief and the two experts?"

"Yes. A gentleman they called Mitchel, I believe."

Mr. Barnes had expected this answer, yet it irritated him to hear it. Mr. Mitchel had information which the detective would have given much to share.

During the succeeding days he made numerous ineffectual efforts to have an interview with Amos Quadrant, but repeatedly was told that he was "Not at home." Mrs. Quadrant, too, had left town for a rest at one of their suburban homes, and Mark Quadrant had gone with her. The city house, with its closed shutters, seemed as silent as the grave, and the secret of what had occurred within those walls seemed almost hopelessly buried.

"What a pity," thought the detective, "that walls do not have tongues as well as ears."

A week later Mr. Barnes was more fortunate. He called at the Quadrant mansion, expecting to once more hear the servant say coldly, "Not at home," in answer to his inquiry for Mr. Quadrant, when, to his surprise and pleasure, Mr. Quadrant himself stepped out of the house as he approached it. The detective went up to him boldly, and said:

"Mr. Quadrant, I must have a few words with you."

"Must?" said Mr. Quadrant with an angry inflection. "I think not. Move out of my way, and let me pass."

"Not until you have given me an interview," said Mr. Barnes firmly, without moving.

"You are impertinent, sir. If you interfere with me further, I will have you arrested," said Mr. Quadrant, now thoroughly aroused.

"If you call a policeman," said Mr. Barnes, calmly, "I will have you arrested."

"And upon what charge, pray?" said Mr. Quadrant, contemptuously.

"I will accuse you of instigating the removal of your brother's body from the coffin."

"You are mad."

"There are others who hold this view, so it would be wise for you to move carefully in this matter."

"Would you object to telling me what others share your extraordinary opinion?"

"I did not say that it is my opinion. More than that, I will say that it is not my opinion, not at present at all events. But it is the view which is receiving close attention at police headquarters."

"Are you one of the detectives?"

"I am a detective, but not connected with the city force."

"Then by what right do you intrude yourself into this affair?"

Mr. Barnes knew that he must play his best card now, to gain his point with this man. He watched him closely as he answered:

"I am employed by Mrs. Quadrant."

There was an unmistakable start. Amos Quadrant was much disturbed to hear that his sister-in-law had hired a detective, and curiously enough he made no effort to hide his feelings. With some show of emotion he said in a low voice:

"In that case, perhaps, we should better have a talk together. Come in."

With these words he led the way into the house, and invited the detective into the same room wherein he had talked with Mark Quadrant. When they had found seats, Mr. Quadrant opened the conversation immediately.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"John Barnes," was the reply.

"Barnes? I have heard of you. Well, Mr. Barnes, let me be very frank with you. Above all things it has been my wish that this supposed mystery should not be cleared up. To me it is a matter of no consequence who did this thing, or why it was done. Indeed, what suspicions have crossed my mind make me the more anxious not to know the truth. Feeling thus, I should have done all in my power to hinder the work of the regular police. When you tell me that my sister-in-law has engaged your services, you take me so by surprise that I am compelled to think a bit in order to determine what course to pursue. You can readily understand that my position is a delicate and embarrassing one."

"I understand that thoroughly, and you have my sympathy, Mr. Quadrant."

"You may mean that well, but I do not thank you," said Mr. Quadrant, coldly. "I want no man's sympathy. This is purely an impersonal interview, and I prefer to have that distinctly prominent in our minds throughout this conversation. Let there be no misunderstanding and no false pretenses. You are a detective bent upon discovering the author of certain singular occurrences. I am a man upon whom suspicion has alighted; and, moreover, guilty or innocent, I desire to prevent you from accomplishing your purpose. I do not wish the truth to be known. Do we understand one another?"

"Perfectly," said Mr. Barnes, astonished by the man's manner and admiring his perfect self-control and his bold conduct.

"Then we may proceed," said Mr. Quadrant. "Do you wish to ask me questions, or will you reply to one or two from me?"

"I will answer yours first, if you will reply to mine afterwards."

"I make no bargains. I will answer, but I do not promise to tell you anything unless it pleases me to do so. You have the same privilege. First, then, tell me how it happened that Mrs. Quadrant engaged you in this case."

"I called here, attracted merely by the extraordinary features of this case, and Mrs. Quadrant granted me a short interview, at the end of which she offered to place the matter in my hands as her representative."

"Ah! Then she did not of her own thought send for you?"

"No."

"You told me that the regular detectives are considering the theory that I instigated this affair. As you used the word instigated, it should follow that some other person, an accomplice, is suspected likewise. Is that the idea?"

"That is one theory."

"And who, pray, is my alleged accomplice?"

"That I cannot tell you without betraying confidence."

"Very good. Next you declared that you yourself do not share this view. Will you tell me on what grounds you exculpate me?"

"With pleasure. The assumed reason for this act of removing your brother from his coffin was to prevent the cremation. Now it was yourself who wished to have the body incinerated."

"You are mistaken. I did not wish it. On the contrary, I most earnestly wished that there should be no cremation. You see I incriminate myself."

He smiled painfully, and a dejected expression crossed his face. For an instant he looked like a man long tired of carrying some burden, then quickly he recovered his composure.

"You astonish me," said Mr. Barnes. "I was told by Mr. Mark that you insisted upon carrying out your brother's wish in this matter of disposing of his body."

"My brother told you that? Well, it is true. He and I quarrelled about it. He wished to have a regular burial, contrary to our brother's oft-repeated injunction. I opposed him, and, being the elder, I assumed the responsibility, and gave the orders."

"But you have admitted that you did not wish this?"

"Do we always have our wishes gratified in this world?"

The detective, watching the man's face closely, again noted that expression of weariness cross his features, and an instinctive feeling of pity was aroused. Once more the skein became more entangled. His own suspicion against Mark Quadrant rested upon the supposition that the act was committed with the intent of making capital out of it with the widow, and was based upon the theory that Amos wished to have his brother incinerated. If now it should transpire that after all it was Amos who managed the affair, his motive was a higher one, for, while appearing to carry out the wishes of his deceased brother, he must have aimed to gratify the widow, without admitting her to the knowledge that his hand had gained her purpose. This was a higher, nobler love. Was Amos Quadrant of this noble mould? The question crossing the detective's mind met a startling answer which prompted Mr. Barnes to ask suddenly:

"Is it true that, speaking of this cremation, you said: 'Let him burn; he'll burn in hell anyway'?"

Amos Quadrant flushed deeply, and his face grew stern as he answered:

"I presume you have witnesses who heard the words, therefore it would be futile to deny it. It was a brutal remark, but I made it. I was exasperated by something which Mark had said, and replied in anger."

"It is a sound doctrine, Mr. Quadrant," said the detective, "that words spoken in anger often more truly represent the speaker's feelings than what he says when his tongue is bridled."

"Well?"

"If we take this view, then it is apparent that you did not hold a very high regard for your brother."

"That is quite true. Why should I?"

"He was your brother."

"And because of the accident of birth, I was bound to love him? A popular fallacy, Mr. Barnes. He was equally bound, then, to love me, but he did not. Indeed he wronged me most grievously."

"By marrying the woman you loved?"

Mr. Barnes felt ashamed of his question, as a surgeon often must be sorry to insert the scalpel. To his surprise it elicited no retort. Mr. Quadrant's reply was calmly spoken. All he said was:

"Yes, he did that."

"Did she know?" ventured the detective hesitatingly.

"No, I think not – I hope not."

There was a painful pause. Mr. Quadrant looked down at the floor, while Mr. Barnes watched him, trying to decide whether the man were acting a part with intent to deceive, as he had announced

that he would not hesitate to do; or whether he were telling the truth, in which case the nobility of his character was brought more into perspective.

"Are you sure," said Mr. Barnes after a pause, "that the body taken from the river was that of your brother Rufus?"

"Why do you ask that?" said Mr. Quadrant, on the defensive at once. "Can there be any doubt?"

"Before I reply, let me ask you another question. Did your brother Rufus have a scar on the sole of his foot?"

The other man started perceptibly, and paused some time before answering. Then he asked:

"What makes you think so?"

"Mr. Mark Quadrant told me that his brother had such a scar, caused by gashing his foot while in swimming."

"Ah, that is your source of information. Well, when Mark told you that his brother had met with such an accident, he told you the truth."

"But did the accident leave a scar?" Mr. Barnes thought he detected a carefully worded evasive answer.

"Yes, the cut left a bad scar; one easily noticed."

"In that case I can reply to your question. If, as you both say, your brother had a scar on the sole of his foot, then there exists considerable doubt as to the identification of the body which was at the Morgue, the body which you have both accepted and buried as being that of your relative. Mr. Quadrant, there was no scar on that body."

"Odd, isn't it?" said Mr. Quadrant, without any sign of surprise.

"I should say it is very odd. How do you suppose it can be explained?"

"I do not know, and, as I have told you before, I do not care. Quite the reverse; the less you comprehend this case the better pleased I shall be."

"Mr. Quadrant," said Mr. Barnes, a little nettled, "since you so frankly admit that you wish me to fail, why should I not believe that you are telling me a falsehood when you state that your brother told me the truth?"

"There is no reason that I care to advance," said Mr. Quadrant, "why you should believe me, but if you do not, you will go astray. I repeat, what my brother told you is true."

It seemed to the detective that in all his varied experience he had never met with circumstances so exasperatingly intricate. Here was an identification for many reasons the most reliable that he had known, and now there appeared to be a flaw of such a nature that it could not be set aside. If the body was that of Mr. Quadrant, then both these men had lied. If they told the truth, then, in spite of science, the doctors, and the family, the identification had been false. In that case Rufus Quadrant had been cremated after all, and this would account for the statement in Mr. Mitchel's note that a human body had been incinerated. Could it be that these two brothers were jointly implicated in a murder, and had pretended to recognize the body at the Morgue in order to have it buried and to cover up their crime? It seemed incredible. Besides, the coincidence of the external and internal diseases was too great.

"I would like to ask you a few questions in relation to the occurrences on the day and evening preceding the funeral," said Mr. Barnes, pursuing the conversation, hoping to catch from the answers some clue that might aid him.

"Which funeral?" said Mr. Quadrant.

"The first. I have been told that you and your brother were present when the widow last viewed the face of her husband, and that at that time, about five o'clock, you jointly agreed that the coffin should not be opened again. Is this true?"

"Accurate in every detail."

"Was the coffin closed at once? That is, before you left the room?"

"The lower part of the coffin-top was, of course, in place and screwed fast when we entered the room. The upper part, exposing the face, was open. It was this that was closed in my presence."

"I would like to get the facts here very accurately, if you are willing. You say, closed in your presence. Do you mean merely covered, or was the top screwed fast before you went out of the room, and, if so, by whom?"

"Mark took our sister away, but Dr. Mortimer and myself remained until the screws were put in. Mr. Berial himself did that."

"Did you observe that the screws were odd? Different from common screws?"

Mr. Barnes hoped that the other man would betray something at this point, but he answered quite composedly:

"I think I did at the time, but I could not describe them to you now. I half remember that Mr. Berial made some such comment as 'No one can get these out again without my permission.'"

"Ah! He said that, did he? Yet some one must have gotten those screws out, for, if your identification was correct, your brother's body was taken out of that casket after the undertaker had put in those screws, which he said could not be removed without his permission. How do you suppose that was accomplished?"

"How should I know, Mr. Barnes, unless, indeed, I did it myself, or instigated or connived at the doing? In either case, do you suppose I would give you any information on such a point?"

"Did your brother Rufus have any rings on his fingers when placed in the coffin?" asked Mr. Barnes, swiftly changing the subject.

"Yes – three: a diamond, a ruby, and a ring bearing his initial set in diamonds."

"These rings were not on the body at the Morgue."

"Neither was that scar," said Mr. Quadrant, with a suppressed laugh.

"But this is different," said Mr. Barnes. "I did not find the scar, but I have found the rings."

"Very clever of you, I am sure. But what does that prove?"

"It proves that your brother's body was taken from the coffin before the coffin was placed in the crematory furnace."

"Illogical and inaccurate," said Mr. Quadrant. "You prove by the recovery of the rings, merely that the rings were taken from the coffin."

"Or, from the body after it was taken out," interjected Mr. Barnes.

"In either case it is of no consequence. You have rooted up a theft, that is all. Catch the thief and jail him, if you like. I care nothing about that. It is the affair of my brother's death and burial that I wish to see dropped by the inquisitive public."

"Yes, but suppose I tell you that the theory is that the man who stole the rings was your accomplice in the main matter? Don't you see that when we catch him, he is apt to tell all that he knows?"

"When you catch him? Then you have not caught him yet. For so much I am grateful." He did not seem to care how incriminating his words might sound.

"One thing more, Mr. Quadrant. I understand that you retired at about ten o'clock on that night – the night prior to the first funeral, I mean. You left your brother Mark down here?"

"Yes."

"Later you came downstairs again."

"You seem to be well posted as to my movements."

"Not so well as I wish to be. Will you tell me why you came down?"

"I have not admitted that I came downstairs."

"You were seen in the hall very late at night, or early in the morning. You took the lamp out of the room where the casket was, and came in here and looked at your brother, who was asleep. Then you returned the lamp and went upstairs. Do you admit now that you had just come downstairs?"

"I admit nothing. But to show you how little you can prove, suppose I ask you how you know that I had just come downstairs? Why may it not be that I had been out of the house, and had just come in again when your informant saw me?"

"Quite true. You might have left the house. Perhaps it was then that the body was taken away?"

"If it was taken away, that was certainly as good a time as any."

"What time?"

"Oh, let us say between twelve and two. Very few people would be about the street at that hour, and a wagon stopping before a door would attract very little attention. Especially if it were an undertaker's wagon."

"An undertaker's wagon?" exclaimed Mr. Barnes, as this suggested a new possibility.

"Why, yes. If, as you say, there was an accomplice in this case, the fellow who stole the rings, you know, he must have been one of the undertaker's men. If so, he would use their wagon, would he not?"

"I think he would," said Mr. Barnes sharply. "I thank you for the point. And now I will leave you."

IX

Mr. Barnes walked rapidly, revolving in his mind the new ideas which had entered it during the past few minutes. Before this morning he had imagined that the body of Rufus Quadrant had been taken away between five and six o'clock, in the undertaker's wagon. But it had never occurred to him that this same wagon could have been driven back to the house at any hour of the day or night, without causing the policeman on that beat to suspect any wrong. Thus, suddenly, an entirely new phase had been placed upon the situation. Before, he had been interested in knowing which man had been left behind; whether it had been Morgan or Randal. Now he was more anxious to know whether the wagon had been taken again from the stable on that night, and, if so, by whom. Consequently he went first to the undertaker's shop, intending to interview Mr. Berial, but that gentleman was out. Therefore he spoke again with Randal, who recognized him at once and greeted him cordially.

"Why, how do you do," said he. "Glad you're round again. Anything turned up in the Quadrant case?"

"We are getting at the truth slowly," said the detective, watching his man closely. "I would like to ask you to explain one or two things to me if you can."

"Maybe I will, and maybe not. It wouldn't do to promise to answer questions before I hear what they are. I ain't exactly what you would call a fool."

"Did you not tell me that it was Morgan who was left at the house after the coffin was closed, and that you came away with Mr. Berial?"

"Don't remember whether I told you or not. But you've got it straight."

"But they say at the stables that it was you who drove the wagon back there?"

"That's right, too. What of it?"

"But I understood that Morgan brought the wagon back?"

"So he did; back here to the shop. He had to leave all our tools and things here, you see. Then he went off to his dinner, and I took the horse and wagon round to the stables."

"Where do you stable?"

"Harrison's, Twenty-fourth Street, near Lex."

"Now, another matter. You told me about the loss of those rings?"

"Yes, and I gave you the tip where you might find them again. Did you go there?"

"Yes; you were right. The rings were pawned exactly where you sent me."

"Oh, I don't know," said the fellow, airishly. "I ought to be on the police force, I guess. I can find out a few things, I think."

"It isn't hard to guess what you know," said the detective, sharply.

"What do you mean?" Randal was on the defensive at once.

"I mean," said Mr. Barnes, "that it was you who pawned those rings."

"That's a lie, and you can't prove it."

"Don't be too sure of that. We have the pawn tickets."

This shot went home. Randal looked frightened, and was evidently confused.

"That's another lie," said he, less vigorously. "You can't scare me. If you have got them, which you haven't, you won't find my name on them."

"No; you used your friend Morgan's name, which was a pretty low trick."

"Look here, you detective," said Randal blusteringly, "I don't allow no man to abuse me. You can't talk that way to me. All this talk of yours is rot. That's what it is, rot!"

"Look here, Randal. Try to be sensible if you can. I have not yet made up my mind whether you are a scoundrel or a fool. Suppose you tell me the truth about those tickets. It will be safest, I assure you."

Randal looked at the detective and hesitated. Mr. Barnes continued:

"There is no use to lie any longer. You were shadowed, and you were seen when you tore up the tickets. The pieces were picked up and put together, and they call for those rings. Don't you see we have you fast unless you can explain how you got the tickets?"

"I guess you're givin' it to me straight," said Randal after a long pause. "I guess I better take your advice and let you have it right. One afternoon I saw Morgan hide something in one of the coffins in the shop. He tucked it away under the satin linin'. I was curious, and I looked into it after he'd gone that night. I found the pawn tickets. Of course I didn't know what they were for except that it was rings. But I guessed it was for some stuff he'd stolen from the corpse of somebody. For it was him took the other jewels I told you about, and I seen him with a screw-driver the match to the boss's. So I just slipped the tickets in my pocket thinkin' I'd have a hold on him. Next day I read about this man bein' found in the river, and I stopped to the Morgue, and, just as I thought, his rings was gone. I worried over that for an hour or two, and then I thought I better not keep the tickets, so I tore them up and threw them away."

"That, you say, was the night after this affair was published in the papers?"

"No; it was the same night."

"That is to say, the night of that day on which I came here and had a talk with you?"

"No, it was the night before. You're thinkin' about the mornin' papers, but I seen it first in the afternoon papers."

This statement dispelled a doubt which had entered the mind of the detective, who remembered that Mr. Burrows had told him that the pawn-ticket incident had occurred on the evening previous to their meeting. This explanation, however, tallied with that, and Mr. Barnes was now inclined to credit the man's story.

"Very good," said he. "You may be telling the truth. If you have nothing to do with this case, you ought to be willing to give me some assistance. Will you?"

Randal had been so thoroughly frightened that he now seemed only too glad of the chance to win favor in the eyes of Mr. Barnes.

"Just you tell me what you want, and I'm your man," said he.

"I want to find out something at the stable, and I think you can get the information for me better than I can myself."

"I'll go with you right away. The boy can mind the shop while we're gone. Charlie, you just keep an eye on things till I get back, will you? I won't be out more'n ten minutes. Come on, Mr. Barnes, I'm with you."

On the way to the stable Mr. Barnes directed Randal as to what he wished to learn, and then at his suggestion waited for him in a liquor saloon near by, while he went alone to the stable. In less than ten minutes Randal hurried into the place, flushed with excitement and evidently bubbling over with importance. He drew the detective to one side and spoke in whispers.

"Say," said he, "you're on the right tack. The wagon was out again that night, and not on any proper errand, neither."

"Tell me what you have learned," said Mr. Barnes.

"Of course the night watchman ain't there now, but Jimmy, the day superintendent, is there, and I talked with him. He says there was some funny business that night. First I asked him about the wagon bein' out or not, and he slaps his hand on his leg, and he says: 'By George!' says he, 'that's the caper. Didn't you put that wagon in its right place when you brung it in that afternoon?' he says to me. 'Of course,' says I; 'where do you think I'd put it?' 'Well,' says he, 'next mornin' it was out in the middle of the floor, right in the way of everything. The boys was cussin' you for your carelessness. I wasn't sure in my own mind or I would have spoke; but I thought I seen you shove that wagon in its right place.' 'So I did,' says I, 'and if it was in the middle of the stable, you can bet it was moved after I left. Now who moved it?' 'I don't know,' says he, 'but I'll tell you another thing what struck me as odd. I didn't have nothin' particular to do that night, and I dropped in for an hour or so to be sociable like with Jack' – that's the night watchman. 'While I was there,' he goes on, 'while I was there, who should come in but Jerry Morgan! He didn't stop long, but he took us over to the saloon and balled us off' – that means he treated to drinks. 'Next day I come round about six o'clock as usual,' says Jimmy, goin' on, 'and there was Jack fast asleep. Now that's the fust time that man ever dropped off while on watch, and he's been here nigh on to five years. I shook him and tried every way to 'waken him, but it didn't seem to do no good. He'd kind of start up and look about dazed, and even talk a bit, but as soon as I'd let up, he'd drop off again. I was makin' me a cup of coffee, and, thinkin' it might rouse him, I made him drink some, and, do you know, he was all right in a few minutes. At the time I didn't think much about it, but since then I have thought it over a good deal, and, do you know what I think now?' 'No,' says I; 'what do you think?' 'I think,' says he, 'I think that Jimmy was drugged, and if he was, Jerry Morgan done the trick when he balled us off, and you can bet it was him took that wagon out that night.' That's the story Jimmy tells, Mr. Barnes, and it's a corker, ain't it?"

"It certainly is important," said Mr. Barnes.

Once more he had food for thought. This narrative was indeed important; the drowsiness of the watchman and his recovery after drinking coffee suggested morphine. The detective likewise recalled the story of the butler who claimed that he had seen Mark Quadrant asleep while he was supposed to be guarding the coffin. Then, too, there was the empty paper which had once held some powder, and which he had himself found in the room where Mark Quadrant had slept. Had he too been drugged? If so, the question arose, Did this man Morgan contrive to mix the morphine with something which he thought it probable that the one sitting up with the corpse would drink, or had Amos given his brother the sleeping-potion? In one case it would follow that Morgan was the principal in this affair, while in the other he was merely an accomplice. If his hand alone managed all, then it might be that he had a deeper and more potent motive than the mere removal of the body to avoid cremation, the latter being a motive which the detective had throughout hesitated to adopt because it seemed so weak. If Morgan substituted another body for the one taken from the coffin, then the statement of Mr. Mitchel that a body had been cremated was no longer a discrepancy. There was but one slightly disturbing thought. All the theorizing in which he now indulged was based on the assumption that Randal was not deceiving. Yet how could he be sure of that? Tom Burrows would have said to him: "Mr. Barnes, that fellow is lying to you. His story may be true in all except that it was himself and not Morgan who did these things." For while he had thought it best to let Randal go alone to the stable to make inquiries, this had placed him in the position of receiving the tale at second-hand, so that Randal might have colored it to suit himself. For the present, he put aside these doubts and decided to pursue this clue until he proved it a true or false scent. He dismissed Randal with an injunction to keep his tongue from wagging, and proceeded to the house of the man Morgan, regretting now that he had not done so before.

The tenement on Eleventh Avenue was one of those buildings occupying half a block, having stores on the street, with narrow, dark, dismal hallways, the staircases at the farther end being invisible from the street door, even on the sunniest days, without a match. Overhead, each hallway offered access to four flats, two front and two back, the doors being side by side. These apartments each included two or three rooms and what by courtesy might be called a bathroom, though few indeed of the tenants utilized the latter for the purpose for which it had been constructed, preferring to occupy this extra space with such of their impedimenta as might not be in constant use.

When one enters a place of this character asking questions, if he addresses any of the adults he is likely to receive scant information in reply. Either these people do not know even the names of their next-door neighbors, or else, knowing, they are unwilling to take the trouble to impart the knowledge. The children, however, and they are as numerous as grasshoppers in a hayfield, not only know everything, but tell what they know willingly. It is also a noteworthy fact that amidst such squalor and filth, with dirty face and bare legs, it is not uncommon to find a child, especially a girl, who will give answers, not only with extreme show of genuine intelligence, but, as well, with a deferential though dignified courtesy which would grace the reception-rooms of upper Fifth Avenue.

It was from such an urchin, a girl of about twelve, that Mr. Barnes learned that Jerry Morgan had lived on the fifth floor back.

"But he's gone away, I guess," she added.

"Why do you think so?" asked Mr. Barnes.

"Oh, 'cause he ain't been in the saloon 'cross the way for 'bout a week, and he didn't never miss havin' his pint of beer every night 's long 's he 's been here."

"Do you think I could get into his room?" asked Mr. Barnes.

"I could get you our key, an' you could try," suggested the girl. "I reckon one key will open any door in this house. It's cheaper to get locks in a bunch that way, I guess, an' besides, poor folks don't get robbed much anyhow, an' so they ain't got no 'casion to lock up every time they go out. What little they've got don't tempt the robbers, I guess. Maybe the 'punushment fits the crime' too quick."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.