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# Crime Tears On

by  
Carolyn Wells

## Chapter 1

Craig Madison liked cocktail parties. He held that one could go to them without that feeling of responsibility which devolves on a guest at a dinner or a dance.

Not that Madison was a shirker. Upon occasion he gaily shouldered the onus of social duties and was the dependable holder-upper of many smart hostesses in their efforts at entertainment. One lovely October day, at the hour of dusk, he dropped in at Amy Crosby's for a few moments and a few cocktails. A gay greeting to Amy and then he was lost in the chattering crowd. But Craig had a special faculty for sizing up a crowd and discovering quickly if it contained any people interesting to him. And failing, in the present instance, he was about to leave when across the room he saw an almost familiar face. Trying to place it, he stared, and suddenly, he knew.

It was Yvette Verne, the new film star that everybody was raving over. And the reason he didn't know her just at first, he told himself, was that she wore civilian dress. In her pictures she was usually in foreign scenes and bizarre costumes, but here, in the home of New York's society queens, and garbed in quite tailored elegance, Yvette Verne was charming in her own right.

With practised skill he made his way through the massed humanity that separated them, and had almost reached her, when he suddenly found she had disappeared. He thought she had turned into a small alcove room near which she had stood, and he followed the trail. A short corridor led to this room and as he stepped nearer he heard her voice, not loud, but tense with anger and, he thought, fright. He heard her say, 'You are a brute and a cad. Leave this room, and never dare speak to me again.'

He couldn't listen deliberately, and he half turned away, when he heard the man's voice, raised a trifle and speaking in menacing tones.

'Yes, I'll go now; we don't want a scene here. But you'll take back every word you've said, you'll beg my forgiveness, you'll crave my pardon, you'll grovel at my feet—'

'Go! If you speak another word to me I shall scream!'

'Don't be silly!'

And with a light laugh the man came out of the little room and left the girl there. Madison had stepped back, and then came on as if just appearing. But the other paid no attention to him, and passed him

without a glance. Then, giving free rein to his eager curiosity, Craig Madison walked straight into the little room where the actress stood, still quivering with fury.

‘Talk to me a few minutes,’ he said, smiling at her; ‘it’ll help you to get yourself collected—and somebody may drift in here any minute.’

‘Do I know you?’ and the big dark eyes looked at him, but not reprovingly.

‘You will, very soon. I’m Craig Madison, and something tells me you are Yvette Verne.’

‘And what if I am?’ A flashing smile showed him her dimples.

‘Only that now we’re friends, and I want you to forget the late unpleasantness somebody wished on you. But you’re calm already—’

‘Yes; that wretch was Billy Gomez, and while he is a pest, he’s not worth worrying about. But it will take a few minutes to regain my temper, and my good looks.’

She produced a vanity gadget and put it to use. Madison leaned against the door jamb and watched her. His acquaintance with artists of the screen was limited; he seldom cared to meet the lesser lights and few of the stars had come his way. Yvette Verne was one of his favourites and he admired her acting for the art it displayed. Naturalness was all very well, but it took art to put it over, in his opinion. And he liked her because she was dark. Bisque-doll blondes had begun to pall on him and the brunette beauty of this girl seemed to him a shady wood after a glaring sunlit beach.

She made short work of her cosmetics, and raised her finished face from the tiny mirror in which she had been gazing.

‘Better?’ she asked, as she put the little implements in their case.

‘Unnecessary, from my point of view, but I daresay you feel more fully dressed.’

‘Yes, I do. And more complacent, too. That man did stir me up, but you are a born anodyne.’

‘Not a compliment I care for. I can be a stimulant, if you like. May I?’

‘Not just now. I have a business engagement I must keep.’

‘Are you making a picture now?’

‘No, indeed, I’ve a two-months layoff, and I’m living my own life.’

For the next few moments Madison forgot the girl was there. He was weighing arguments on a finely adjusted mental scale. Uncle Harley? He’d simply love it. Aunt Cornelia? She was always persuadable and ready to do her part. Sheldon? None of his business, anyhow. The scale swung in favour of the plan that was rapidly taking shape, and without further consideration, Craig put it into words.

‘I say, how’d you like to come out to our place for a bit?’

‘A bit of what?’

‘Oh, fun, rest, recreation, whatever you’re most in need of.’

‘What makes you think I’m in need of anything?’

‘Everybody’s in need of something, though he may not know it. But just for a lark, take a chance and come out for a week-end. How about it?’

Craig Madison was very good looking, an attribute which took him far. Although nearly thirty, he had a boyish cajolery which oftener than not brought him what he wanted.

‘Where is out?’ she continued.

‘Oh, my home. You’ll hate it, it’s a fearful place, but it will be better soon. And our week-ends are fun. Do say you’ll come!’

‘But where is it? Is it in America?’

‘Oh, that. Why, yes, it’s on Long Island.’

‘What part of Long Island? Is it a secret?’

‘No—though it ought to be. Its up in the bleak northern reaches of Queen’s County, and—’

‘Haunted?’

‘Not that I know of! Its a lovely place. Silver Hill, you know. The paradise spot of the whole map!’

‘Your stories don’t hang together. When do you want me to come?’

‘Friday; the very next Friday you meet. I’ll come in and fetch you.’

‘Oh, no, you won’t. I’ll go in my own car. What have you in the line of family?’

Craig looked comically distressed.

‘Formidable,’ he said; ‘quite so.’

‘You don’t scare me at all. I eat up formidable people. A wife?’

‘You know I haven’t! Do I talk like a married man? But there’s an uncle of certain disturbing ways and uncertain temper. There’s an aunt, of great resource and sagacity, but who would include you out if for any reason my uncle didn’t take to you.’

‘How can he help taking to me?’ she asked, saucily. ‘Is he under his wife’s thumb?’

‘Oh, my aunt isn’t my uncle’s wife, they’re brother and sister. And I’ve a cousin there, a chap about my age, but better-mannered. And a secretary, with whom you must not fall in love. And a housekeeper who is a scream. That’s our ill-assorted family. Only a few people are coming this week-end; I doubt if you know any of them. Shall I ask Amy Crosby?’

‘Oh, please not. Amy’s a dear, but your list is long enough. I hate big house parties. Don’t tell me about the people, I like to puzzle them out myself. But tell me of the house. It must be a big one.’

‘It is—enormous. And a conglomeration of all the worst styles of architecture ever invented by man. And added to here and there by the successive Madisons who have lived in it. We are the Montauk Madisons, you know—a fact dear to the heart of Uncle Harley.’

‘Do you mean Harley Madison, the eccentric philanthropist?’

‘Is that what they call him? Well, it is descriptive.’

‘But he’s a great man! A celebrity for an uncle, if I choose? Of course. Is he nice?’

‘He’s a brick! A splendid all round man. Gets mad on every possible occasion, and forgets next moment what he was mad about. Then you’ll come on Friday?’

‘Yes, of course. What is uncle doing now, in a big way?’

‘Too big to tell about. But you may as well have an idea, for if you want to make good with him, you must talk about himself.’

‘Tell me, then.’

‘Well, this is his present enterprise. We live in a thinly settled, sprawling hamlet named, grandiosely, New Plymouth. The place hasn’t kept up the march of progress, nor has it noticed the tearing on of time. It didn’t have proper care and feeding, and yet it is a possible paradise. One day, my uncle saw this, and decided he was the one to rescue the poor little waif, and fix it all up nice and pretty like Cinderella. There are some few big houses, you understand, and some few influential men, who, uncle assumed, would help him with his project. Of course, anything Harley Madison has charge of is flaw-proof—angle iron, sunk hinge construction, and a guaranteed money-maker.’

‘Didn’t the few men in the place realize this?’

‘Most of them; but there are those who say Madison is lining his own pockets at the expense of all others concerned.’

‘But your uncle is big enough to combat and conquer all such ideas.’

‘Would be, if he were let alone. But in a multitude of counsellors there is trouble, and uncle is bothered to death with his enemies. I tell you so you’ll be kind to him, when your own tact advises you to do so; and you’ll let him alone, when he wants to be let alone. That’s the whole secret of dealing with his somewhat all-of-a-sudden disposition.’

‘Glad you told me. Can I help in any way?’

‘I doubt it. Uncle doesn’t want money, nor advice, nor assistance. But he does want sympathy. So if you could be his understanding little friend it might give him a bit of real pleasure, and it would constitute your good act for the day.’

‘Of course I’ll do anything I can, but I’m staying only a day or two, and you can’t establish sympathetic relations in a few minutes.’

‘I suppose not. Don’t let it bother you. See that chap who just came in?’

‘The one with the grave, studious face? Yes, I know, he’s Fleming Stone. How I’d love to meet him!’

‘Seems to me that for a film queen, who is chased round by cameramen and polite, deferential autograph-hunters, you are unduly interested in making new acquaintances. But Stone is a worthwhile friend to meet, because he always remembers you, and that means if you ever need him he’ll be at your service.’

‘At my service! I thought he was a detective!’

‘He is. But isn’t it among the possibilities that you may some day need the services of a detective?’

‘Possibly, but not probably. We can’t catch Mr. Stone now, though; see, he’s going away. You must introduce him to me some other time. And I must go now. Are you staying in town?’

‘What for we consider Manhattan a suburb of New Plymouth, but not a fit place to live in. Shall I tell you how to reach us on Friday.’

‘Not necessary. I have a chauffeur of pure gold. I just say New Plymouth, and he flies to it like a homing pigeon. Thank you ever so very lots for my invitation. I look forward to my visit with keenest joy. May I advise uncle about his improvements?’

‘I’m by way of being a bit of a landscape gardener, and—’

‘Don’t plan. Wait until you see uncle, and then use your judgment as to what you shall say to him. But why is your interest all for him? My cousin Tom Sheldon and Ames, the secretary chap, are both worthy of your look-see.’

‘They’ll get it. Come with me to say good-bye to Amy.’

And Amy responded, gaily. ‘So nice of you to come, Craig. Come again, soon. Good-bye Yvette—I rather fancy you’re up to your old tricks! What a girl it is, to be sure. Come in again, both of you. Goodbye.’

And then Craig Madison put his new friend in her car, and went away with his mind and heart full of her allure—the deep, deep wells of her violet eyes and the glints of red gold in her brown hair.

JUST WHY the Madison house was called Silver Hill nobody knew for certain. It was said that an early ancestor had owned a silver mine, but even that wouldn’t account for the Hill part, for though the house was on a great slope of woods and grasslands, no imagination could call it a hill. The house itself was old and colonial, but it had been added so, so often and so culpably, that the colonial parts were difficult to discover. The present Madisons liked it, for the atmosphere was cosy and comfortable, and there were so many rooms that everybody could have as many as he wished.

Harley Madison, autocratic by nature and plutocratic by circumstances, ruled with an iron hand in a velvet glove. He seldom had reason to remove his glove in the house, but in the village he often went barehanded. A well set-up man of forty-five, he was heavy, but not fat, hale and hearty of appearance, with graying hair and merry blue eyes. He was not fond of responsibility, though his doings of late years had piled them high on his shoulders.

When his wife died ten years ago he felt lonely and helpless. His sister, Cornelia kept house for him. As the years passed, Cornelia became more and more efficient in the household, and at last began to help Harley with his business affairs, and was soon accomplishing as much of the work as he did himself.

Harley wanted to get through with all business and be a landowner and a gentleman of leisure. But somehow, suddenly he conceived a plan of rejuvenating the old and shabby village, and decided to put a lot of his money in it and a lot of Cornelia's time. His sister made no objection to this. She was devoted to her brother and she loved responsibility and planning and achieving. She didn't care very much about New Plymouth, but it was Harley's hobby, and she was more than ready to help him.

The big enterprise he had undertaken would cost a great amount of money, but he had formed a sort of syndicate, and interested a few other men in the plan. He expected to put in the most capital, and therefore he expected to be at the head of the whole affair, and this was as it should be, for no other had his zeal and energy, or a sister to help him.

Also, the business meant a greatly changed will to be put into the hands of his executors when the proper time came. Up to now, his will, had been simple, leaving his entire fortune to his sister and his two nephews who lived with him, with ample provision for dependents and for charities. But now he proposed to bequeath his large estate in a different manner. Two-thirds of his possessions would go to the town he was now building up, and which he hoped would be a city by that time. The third of his estate would be divided equally among his sister and his two nephews. He had discussed this with Cornelia and she had agreed to his wishes. She was not mercenary and wanted only enough to live in the way she had always lived, which she could easily do on the legacy she would receive.

As to the boys, Cornelia pointed out that they were his nephews, not sons, and would doubtless be satisfied with whatever their uncle chose to give them. She held that since Harley had made his own fortune it was his right to do as he chose with it, and there should be no criticism. No one contradicted her, because no one knew anything about it, except Harley's lawyer, who was against the whole improvement project, and so could not be expected to advise Harley as he wanted to be advised.

Cornelia Madison was an admirable character. She did so many things and did them so well that she could scarcely help realizing the fact and becoming a little conceited over it. Not that she was a vain woman, but she had achieved a certain consciousness of power and satisfaction in her own ability. She never showed this feeling, however, and her two nephews adored her. The servants gave her both respect and admiration.

And so the Madison household, self-contained, was a peaceful, happy place. But when it brushed up against or ran counter to the inhabitants of the village all was not beer and skittles. Many of the ladies of the town had stopped calling at Silver Hill, and those who did come were consumed with curiosity or anxious to air a grievance.

Cornelia received those who came with pleasant cordiality, yet with an edge of hauteur that was removed only if they behaved themselves as she thought they ought to. Although forty years old, Cornelia Madison could have passed for less. She was active and agile as a girl, her brown hair was short and clustered all over her head in natural ringlets. Her large calm eyes were; now blue and now gray, and humorous wrinkles at the corners kept them from ever being severe. Children and dogs liked her, though she seldom had occasion to play with either of them.

But the kingpin, the cap sheaf of the whole establishment was Mrs. Hetty Garson, housekeeper. Really, Cornelia was the keeper of the house, but Cornelia was of the chatelaine type. Had she happened in the Middle Ages, she would have adored going about with a big ring of jangling keys and a long peaked headgear with a cluttering veil.

So, at Silver Hill, Cornelia was the housekeeper de luxe; Hetty was the working model. And work she did! And she could get work out of other people. Why, if Hetty got after her, even that perky little Agnes, the parlor maid, would do some work and like it!

Agnes was a thorn in Hetty's flesh. She was so pretty that the young men in the family couldn't help looking at her, and the more Hetty warned her not to notice these looks, the more coy and self-conscious Aggie became, and consequently, the prettier.

Miss Cornelia was meticulous about her employees' uniforms, and the parlor maid wore a neat black silk frock and a filmy white apron with frills. On her yellow hair sat a bit of pleated white stuff like a tiara, with a scrap of black velvet by way of mooring.

Hetty, too, wore black silk, taffeta in the morning, grosgrain of an afternoon. She was tall and thin, scrawny is a better word, and her muscular power was evident. Not exactly a member of the family, she was a privileged character, and on Sunday evening, as Craig was telling his uncle about the film star he had met and invited to the home, Hetty walked into the living-room and sat down to listen.

'Do I take it,' she said, 'that a bold-faced jig from the movies is coming to this house?'

'Be careful what you talk, Hetty,' said Craig. 'The lady is a friend of mine, and I forbid any further expressions such as that you just used. Miss Verne will come on Friday and remain over the week-end. You will watch your step. Get me?'

Hetty flounced out of the room, and Harley Madison said, in his quiet way, 'I sometimes think, Cornelia, that we've spoiled Hetty, and if we're not careful she'll get out of hand.'

'I'm afraid that's true, Harley,' his sister agreed. 'I'll speak to her. And I can assure you, Craig, that Hetty will do or say nothing that can possibly annoy Miss Verne.'

'You bet she won't,' said Tom Sheldon.

'I say, Craig, how did you manage to get her? Those film stars are hard to come by. Maybe she won't come, after all.'

'Maybe she won't,' said Craig, placidly. 'But she wasn't a bit actressy, just a natural, well-bred girl.'

'That so?' Harley looked up from the paper he was reading. 'I thought she'd be slangy and unconventional. Sure she isn't?'

'Maybe she is. I saw her only a short time, and I may have misjudged her. But it seemed to me she'd please Aunt Cornelia.'

'What's she like?' Ames inquired. 'Doth she look the same on the stage as off?'

'Almost,' Craig answered, 'but not quite. Off stage, she can talk impromptu, say whatever she chooses, and make natural and unrehearsed gestures. So, she does not seem different.'

'She's lovely on the screen, anyway,' Ames summed up, and then he turned his attention back to the bit of work he was doing for Madison.

'The estimates for the Town Hall are quite a bit more than we expected,' he said, and Madison listened attentively.

'If you two are going to talk estimates, do go to the study,' Cornelia said, pleasantly. 'I want to hear a little more about this paragon, we are to entertain. Not curiosity, Craig, but I must know where to place

her. Anita Boyce is coming, and she always has the best chamber. Shall I take it away from her, and give it to your friend?’

‘I don’t think so, Aunt Corny. Let Mrs. Boyce keep it, and put Yvette in some smaller room, something pretty and pleasant.’

‘I think that would be better. Is she a—a lady, Craig?’

‘She certainly is. Lay your doubts aside. I think she’ll fit herself right in with our crowd. And if she doesn’t like us, she can go home.’

‘Oh, she’ll like us.’ Miss Cornelia looked haughty. ‘The question is whether we’ll like her. But if we don’t, we needn’t ask her again.’

## **Chapter 2**

Harley Madison was a fine man. The fact that he was quick of thought, curt of speech and outspoken as to his opinions did not detract from the fineness of his nature. Nor did the fact that he was autocratic and pig-headed lessen his sterling worth. The trouble was that his fellow men did not believe the abovementioned, self-evident truths, and that’s why the one-time peaceful village of New Plymouth was more like a line of embattled farmers than a placid, easy-going community.

Though not so very many miles from settlements that prided themselves on being the Long Island of today and even the Long Island of to-morrow, New Plymouth was without doubt the Long Island of yesterday and the Long Island of the day before yesterday.

To this none of the townfolk objected, until Harley Madison told them they ought to object and told them why and how. It was the how that made the trouble. For though the citizens of the hamlet were by no means lacking in this world’s goods, they had an ineradicable notion that they wanted to spend their money in a way that would bring them acclaim and honor. And Mr. Madison’s way of putting all their donations in a common fund, and spending from it such sums as were needed left each donor uncertain whether he had contributed to the new town hall or the floral park.

For, you must understand, the plans were not on a niggardly scale. The town was to be made all beautiful within, and in Mr. Madison’s opinion it mattered not a jot which man paid for which added beauty. One thing was certain, Mr. Madison informed them, the architect of every new building was to be above criticism. He had himself engaged New York architects of renown, and he made it clear that if this made too great inroads on the building fund, he would attend to these bills personally.

Speaking now, from the platform of the old town hall, he held his audience’s attention. His splendid physical strength lent dignity to his few but forceful gestures, and his glowing personality swayed his hearers and convinced them that what he said was right. Harley Madison never made trouble, unless he wanted to do so. And now he had come to a point in his enterprise where he was inviting trouble.

He had asked several men to speak this evening and put into words the objections they felt toward his management of the work. Job Hendricks, the oldest citizen, and after Madison the wealthiest one, declared that it was human nature to want credit for any good work well done. For his part, he wanted to present a library to the rejuvenated town, and he proposed that the Hendricks Library should stand well forward among the libraries of the country. He had many rare books to grace its shelves, and he would endow it sufficiently to preserve it as long as New Plymouth should stand.



At the end of Job's speech, Madison said, quietly: 'Then I gather that you want to present the town with a first-class library, but the gift is contingent on permission to call the building by your name?'

'That's about the size of it,' Hendricks told him.

'And a mean little size it is,' declared Madison. 'A noble gift spoiled by a stipulation that it shall be an advertisement of the generosity of the donor! Perhaps a gold statue of Mr. Job Hendricks, gentleman, in the lobby.'

'And no reason why that shouldn't be,' responded Job, angrily, for already snickers were audible here and there.

'Yes, there are reasons, Hendricks, and one is that such a thing establishes a precedent. If you do that, others will want the same privilege.'

'We do,' sang out a raucous and unpleasant voice, the voice of Henry Potter, the butcher. 'That's what we do want, Mr. Madison. Here's me, ready and willin' to donate a park, a first-class affair, complete, with fountain, and a few busts, mebbe. Now, why shouldn't that pleasure ground be called Potter Park, and why shouldn't my noble features, cast in endurin' bronze, decorate the mall surroundin' the bandstand?'

Clarence Mason, a millionaire owner of very good oil stock, took up the tale.

'I hadn't thought of a Potter Park,' he said, 'and I hope no one will miscall it the Potter's Field, but I've no right to object to this naming business when I myself have toyed with the idea of Mason Hospital. A fine hospital is among the first of a city's needs, and as you all know, it is usual to call a hospital by the name of its donor. I seem to see the new town in my mind's eye, looking like a modern paradise.'

'Looks more like a modern Main Street to me.' Thus Harley Madison let his annoyance show plainly. He had heard rumors of this element of vain benefactors, and it jarred his aesthetic sense and also aroused a more practical and valid objection.

The meeting was informal. As president of the association, Madison sat on the platform, but so did several others, and many were tipped back in their chairs or sitting on the edge of a table. It was an open forum, and every man could speak his mind. Madison had intended this night to suggest that they organise themselves into a proper body, with rules and by-laws and officers.

He didn't understand those things himself, but Hiram Riley was an old and reliable lawyer who could do up the matter in proper shape. This matter of plastering names all over everything must be settled first, though, and Harley Madison decided to settle it.

He didn't use many words, but he told them plainly that this whole thing was his project. That he was ready to contribute a great deal of money, also time and influence, which three elements would surely make for success. He could probably make more of these three necessary contributions than any one else present, perhaps than all of those present. But he did not want his name celebrated in any way. His goal was a fine, thriving town, eventually a city, and he would make no apology for saying that if his support were withdrawn, the village of New Plymouth would remain in its present dilapidated and sordid condition till Judgment Day.

He would put forth another argument for his opinion, and then he would leave it to his colleagues to decide on their course. This argument was that if these men, who wanted their names permanently and blatantly in the public eye, had their way, the less wealthy but no less worthy and loyal citizens, who could not present a monument to their own fame and glory, would be dissuaded from doing anything at

all, and lose interest in the movement and frustrate entirely the ambitions of himself and of those he had considered his co-workers.

To some of those present, this speech, which Madison ended with dramatic suddenness, seemed a tempest in a teapot. To a few others and to Madison himself, it was the key of the whole situation. He knew that the men, to whose attitude he was objecting, had more self-aggrandisement in their minds than a gold-lettered name. They had plans for the spending of public moneys and the dictating of public procedure, which were secret, indeed, yet Madison knew of their existence.

He was honestly willing to do all he had to do, to give all he had to give, to use his widespread influence to the utmost; with no recognition. His one desire was to make that negligible little wilderness, among the Queen's County blossom like the rose. And he could not work with men who were secretly modelling their plans on Atlantic City or Coney Island. For he knew Potter Park meant no sylvan glades and shaded paths, but an amusement park. He had long since seen the undeveloped beauty in the environs of the village, and he had bought many acres of good brown earth, had improved it and sold it. At a profit? Yes, but getting only a well-deserved return for his wise and efficient work on it.

Harley Madison knew, too, that there was an undercurrent of hostility, secret but palpable, at least to him. He was intuitive and keen witted. He did not propose to combat this element unless some overt act made it necessary; but he was not going to work with it, and that left him no choice but to resign from his own enterprise. He did not want to carry on further without some more definite information, so he left the question of emblazoned names drift away, and brought up one or two less dangerous subjects. He even introduced a spirit of levity into his conversation, and fairly early he declared he must go home, but the others could discuss plans at their leisure.

As Hiram Riley said after he had gone, he didn't fool anybody. 'He was flabbergasted, that's what he was,' Riley declared. 'He wanted to get away and think it over by himself. That's Madison, never talks till he's think it well over. Do you know what I believe? I believe he'll resign.'

'Resign from what?' asked Potter. 'He ain't got any position to resign from.'

'Well, he has,' Mason assured him. 'We're not an organised body yet, but in an informal way we are sort of connected, and we've always called Mr. Madison president. And I can tell you if he does resign, or leave, or whatever you choose to call it, the improvement of this dump of ours explodes into thin air!'

'Nothing of the sort,' Potter told him. 'If our dictatorial friend severs relations, I know who is ready to step into the breach, and perhaps fill it more acceptably than the nabob of Silver Hill.'

'Meaning your utterly asinine self?' exclaimed Job Hendricks. 'I reckon you'll find you're going it alone, then!'

'Better alone than in poor company. And as this company is none too cordial, I think I'll seek some more congenial spirits.'

'I should have said all spirits are congenial to you,' Job observed with an intentionally annoying grin.

'Guess you're about right,' Potter agreed, and left, having no desire to get into a real quarrel just then.

Harley Madison walked home across the village green. He did not let the events of the evening weigh too heavily on his mind, for he knew they would grant anything he asked before they would lose his support. But he looked round at the green with apprehension.

For months he had had visions of the oval, reconstituted as to vegetation, reclaimed as to symmetry and shapeliness, the big trees trimmed and cared for, and, a very secret ambition, a little pond in the middle, with a tiny rustic bridge and lots of iris growing round. He had mentioned this to nobody but Cornelia, who adored the idea, but he was sure the boys would laugh at it.

He thought over the men who had stood up against him. He was peace-loving, and he hated the thought of real dissension, but something must be done. He must find out for a certainty, just what those traitors to the cause were doing. He must know at once, for he couldn't go another step in the dark. They had planned a meeting next week to organise themselves. He felt sure he would be the president, but did he want to be president of a bunch of traitors? He'd resign first.

And that would throw Craig out of business. For Craig was hard at work on plans for various buildings. A rising young architect, the boy welcomed this chance, and how could his uncle snatch it from him? He wondered how he could find out what he wanted to know. Perhaps Cornelia could help, and if she could she would.

## **Chapter 3**

ALTHOUGH it seemed to Craig Madison that Friday would never come, the old earth kept up its stolid diurnal motion, and Friday did come.

Anita Boyce was the first of the house party to arrive. She came early in the afternoon; determined to get all of the occasion that she possibly could. She was a pretty little widow, short of stature, and would have been dumpy of figure but for the extreme cleverness of her modiste. She had been a friend of Florence, Harley Madison's wife, and in their early married years the four had been a congenial quartet. Then Anita's husband died, and almost immediately she assumed that it was written in the Book of Fate she should marry Harley.

Harley didn't see eye to eye with her, but she still had hopes. She came frequently to Silver Hill; she used all her blandishments on a rather disinterested host. Anita was a strong believer in persistence. So, when she arrived she went at once to the best suite, which had always been hers when she visited there, and was rejoiced to find it was still hers. For she had greatly feared it would be given over to the celebrity whose coming seemed to be a matter of great pride to the entire household.

Cornelia Madison's competent maid Jenny was a little absent-minded as she looked after Mrs. Boyce's belongings.

'Mind what you're about, Jenny,' Anita said, crossly. 'I suppose you're fair daft at the thought of having a motion picture actress to look after.'

'I fear I am, Mrs. Boyce,' and Jenny laughed good-naturedly. 'I've seen the lady on the screen and she is so lovely I'm wondering if she can be like that in real life.'

'You'll soon have a chance to find out. Don't stand there crumpling that organdy shirtwaist in your hands.'

'No, ma'am,' and Jenny tried to put her attention on her work.

Anita decided to wear a casual dinner gown, a very smart affair that was surely beyond the criticism of any glamour girl that ever stepped out of Hollywood. Jenny helped her into it with exclamations of

approval. With a few final pokes and pats to her rolls of yellow hair, Anita went downstairs, paused in the doorway, with one hand on the door frame, and smilingly waited for applause.

Harley Madison knew his lines. 'Welcome, my Anita!' he cried out and rose, greeting her with outstretched hands. She knew Laura and George Lee, was delighted to meet a new man, Gifford Hale, and finally settled down beside her host with a rather definite air of proprietorship.

Harley, however, did not play up. He excused himself, saying he had important telephoning to attend to. Bidding Ames to come with him, he went to the study.

'How are things going in the town?' Anita asked as Craig Madison came over and sat beside her.

'Not so good. There was rather a stormy meeting a few nights ago. and its results are developing, slowly but unpleasantly.'

'Is Harley upset?'

'Oh, he never gets upset, but it keeps him guessing.'

'Tell me,' Anita reached her goal at last 'Tell me, Craig, about this fancy lady you've picked up. What is she like?'

'If you mean Yvette Verne, I don't like the term you use. She isn't like any one else; she's a goddess.'

'Hard hit, are you?'

'Oh, everybody is who sees her.'

Anita, who rather fancied herself one, was not pleased.

'You're not interesting to me any more. Go away and send that Hale man over here. He's looking at me as if he wanted to come.'

She smiled, to take away any hint of ill temper.

Craig went on the errand, Gifford Hale came duly, and Anita promptly made eyes at him. Her eyes were large and blue, a beautiful cerulean. but with no shadows or reservations. Her carefully preserved blonde beauty was all her fancy painted it, but the slightly injured look she habitually wore was fatal to her otherwise pretty charm. Her really golden hair was done by the most famous coiffeur, in the most stilted and artificial style. Hetty, who had caught sight of her, told the cook that Mrs. Boyce's head looked like a hayfield, cut and dried.

Cornelia, with her gracious ease, rescued Gifford Hale and gave him over to Laura Lee, while she sent Tom Sheldon to play round with Anita. Craig was outside patrolling the drive when, to his great relief and delight, Yvette's car appeared, far down the long driveway.

The girl was smiling to herself; she was going to be one of a house party, only one member of which she knew anything about. And she could scarcely be said to know much about him, for that short interview at Tiny Crosby's meant little by way of acquaintance. But, she told herself, a friendship with this Madison family might mean a lot to her, for she often felt the need of talking some other language than the jargon and argot of Hollywood. And since this opportunity presented itself, she was going to make the most of it, and she fully intended to become the joy of the party and the Golden Girl of Silver Hill.

She looked the part. The autumn brown tailored suit of soft wool twill she wore showed red glints here and there. A trifle of white at neck and sleeves and the smartest hat in the world were mere accessories to the charm of the lithe figure and vivid, sentient face.

Barry, Miss Verne's capable chauffeur, had had no difficulty in finding the negligible New Plymouth, and he brought the car to the imposing entrance of Silver Hill with a flourish.

'Pipe down Barry,' the girl said, quietly. 'This is ladies' day for me. I don't want to drive up like an army with banners.'

Barry assumed a correct stolidity, and Craig Madison came smiling to greet his visitor.

'I don't think I'll dare show you to Uncle Harley,' he said as he helped her out. 'He'll eat you up!'

'Let me look round a minute first.'

The girl marvelled at the wide spacious lawns, the gigantic shade trees and the massed flower gardens, gay with riotous autumn blooms.

'It's heavenly,' she said. 'I'm so glad I came.' She turned toward the big Colonial house, with additions that marred but did not completely spoil its proportions.

'No,' Craig disagreed, 'the place isn't grand; it's just comfortable and homey, that's all.'

They went inside, and Yvette realised he spoke truly. The great entrance hall had many old pieces of Colonial furniture, its polished surfaces rubbing elbows with some new pieces the young people had brought in, but somehow remaining harmonious through it all.

Craig led her to the living-room, where Harley Madison was the first to greet her. He came toward her, with outstretched hands.

'Miss Verne, you are very welcome,' he said, a little formally, but with growing admiration. 'I hope you will be glad you came. This is my sister Cornelia.'

Miss Madison, tall and dignified, haughty and aristocratic, smiled far more cordially than she had meant to, for the girl's charm was irresistible. Cornelia was not a snob, quite, but she had resented this rash move of Craig's. To bring a movie actress into the hallowed halls of Silver Hill, where none but the elite had ever before been received, was a daring thing for even her favourite nephew to do.

Then Craig carried Yvette off for introductions, carefully putting Mrs. Lee before Mrs. Boyce, a slight for which Anita never forgave him. Needless to say, Yvette made good. They all liked her. She was so natural, so spontaneous, so free from any trace of artificiality or any suggestion of the stage.

'I wondered,' she said to Craig, 'when I met you last Sunday, why you didn't live in New York. Now I know.'

'You mean that as a place to live New Plymouth is preferable to New York?'

This from Harley, who had managed to keep within speaking distance of the visitor ever since she came in.

‘I’d have to think that over,’ she smiled at him. ‘But I can say right off, I can see how it would be to one who had his home here. You couldn’t have a home like this in the city. Ooh, cocktails arrive. Let’s sit right down here.’

She chose a seat in the middle of a divan, and somehow Harley Madison was on one side of her and Craig on the other.

Cornelia Madison looked at the group and then cast a humorous glance at Anita Boyce. But Anita didn’t think it at all humorous, and being forced to put up with the attentions of either Tom Sheldon or Everett Ames, she was just about ready to go home. Even Gifford Hale was hovering round the magnet, sitting on the arm of the davenport or on a hassock at the divinity’s feet. Yet Yvette was saying nothing of special interest. It was the way she said it, the merry little laugh you found yourself waiting for, the quick, appreciative glance at a happy speech, and the glorious smile that flashed out now and then, when she was silent, and seemed to tell of happiness and content.

Wilkins the butler and Rosie the waitress, were completely bowled over, though nobody knew this. But their few words on the situation, as they went back and forth to the pantries, so roused Hetty that she marched in to see for herself. Cornelia saw her come in, and took the situation in hand.

‘This is our Hetty,’ she said, ‘our major domo, Miss Verne. If you want for anything while you are here, and I refuse to give it to you, just call on Hetty and you will get it.’

Cornelia’s smile gave Yvette her cue, and she held out a hand to Hetty, with a pretty word of appreciation, then turned back to Craig.

Hetty made for the kitchen, and found Mrs. Quinn, the cook.

‘Land o’ Goshen!’ Hetty breathed, in a scared whisper. ‘She’s got ’em all hypnotized. They’re grovellin’ at her feet, and she’s quite at home, thank you, fingerin’ of her cocktail glass.’

‘Forward piece?’ said Mrs. Quinn.

Hetty gave her a look of mingled pity and scorn.

‘A heap you do know, don’t you? That young lady is as much quality as any Madison who ever breathed! A king would be proud to shake hands with her, and—’ Hetty paused, with the intention of making Mrs. Quinn faint and fall to the floor, ‘and, she shook hands with me!’

‘She never!’

‘She did!’

‘Well, I’ll be blowed!’

And Miss Cornelia Madison was experiencing a similar apprehension that she would be blowed—though not in those words—as she quite understandingly watched her brother fall in love with Yvette Verne.

## **Chapter 4**

MRS. HETTY GARSON, housekeeper inordinary at Silver Hill, was the wife of Elkanah, a man of illimitable ability. He was a modified valet to Harley Madison, and looked after the boys a bit and

attended to civil wars among the servants, and was so trustworthy that he was called steward; and he was a good one.

He was Miss Cornelia's right-hand man, and was afraid of nobody on God's green earth, with the single exception of his wife, Hetty. Her opinion of him may be summed up in the phrase she used to describe him: 'That worthless Elk! He's such a blessin'!'

Elkanah was long and lank, with a wiry strength and a great power of endurance. His eyes were keen and shrewd, his understanding quick and his response even quicker. His homely face seemed to show a high grade of intelligence, but the trouble with Elk was he seldom fulfilled that promise. He was sure of his facts, sure of his memories, sound in his logic, but he had little intuition and no imagination. However, Hetty had enough of these things for both, and with her guidance the pair achieved wonders.

By Saturday noon, the day following Yvette's arrival, Hetty had sized up the visitor and was giving Elkanah the net result.

'She's fine,' Hetty declared, 'and she's deep. Mr. Craig is mad about her, and Mr. Madison is nigh off his head, too.'

'Sho, Hetty. Not Mr. Harley Madison!'

'That's what I said. But he ain't fell yet; he's hoverin' on the brink. It's up to her. If she wants him she can easy get him. But I doubt she wants him. He's rich, to be sure, but she's likely got a hundred wealthy sooters, maybe dooks and earls and such, like as not.'

'Mr. Madison's a good catch though. But what would Miss Cornelia say to such a mad marriage?'

'Well you know Miss Cornelia thinks everything and anything her brother does is perfect.'

'Blest be-ee the ti-i-i that binds  
Our hear-arts in Chris-istian love—'

It was Hetty's habit to break into a hymn, even during her own conversations. 'But,' she went on, 'I know who would be mad and she'd raise the devil's own row, and that's Mrs. Boyce. She's always expected to have Harley Madison before she dies as much as she expects to have heaven after.'

'If he marries her, he won't have much heaven before he dies, whatever he gets after. But our Mr. Madison isn't thinking about marryin' or givin' in marriage. He's all roiled up with his fancy town buildin' and improvin'. He only looks at this stage girl like a picture, you know. Besides, she is Mr. Craig's girl, if she's anybody's. Mr. Harley ain't a snitcher.'

The pair were sitting in the steward's pantry, and to them appeared Miss Cornelia, with lists in her hand. Miss Cornelia was great on lists and woe befell any one who omitted an item meant for his attention.

'We're having a picnic this afternoon,' the lady told them. 'I've seen Wilkins about the food, and I want you two to take the thing in charge. The two big cars will hold us all, and we shall go to Felton Falls for the supper. Have an eye on everything, Elkanah, for though we pretend it is an old-fashioned picnic, I want it to be both comfortable and beautiful. Elkanah, look after the cocktails and champagne, and see to the hot coffee and tea bottles. Take the station car as usual. Wilkins will need your help. And Hetty, have simple but very nice china and napery. It is a pleasant thought to me that I can entrust it all to you two, knowing that it will be the same as if I had done it all myself.'

Cornelia had been relieved of her sudden fear that her brother would make a fool of himself over Yvette. When, a short time ago, Harley had asked her to go for a drive with him in the afternoon, Yvette said, 'Oh, let's make it a picnic and all go.'

Wherefore Cornelia had taken hope that even if Harley was deeply interested in the girl she was not leading him on. Harley Madison directed the guests to their seats in the cars, and when they started off, Yvette discovered herself on the back seat between Laurel Lee and Craig Madison, with Everett Ames and Gifford Hale facing her.

The October sunlight made the autumn leaves gay, the breeze was not too strong and the roads were fine.

'I do love a motor ride,' Yvette said, 'when all the conditions are right—the weather, the car, the people, all just as they are now. Can't we drive through the village? I want to see the improvements Mr. Madison is making.'

'Oh, they're not started yet,' Craig told her, and Everett Ames added, 'They may never be.'

'Why not?'

'Oh, there are some differences of opinion among the directors, and if it gets much worse, Mr. Madison may withdraw from the syndicate, and what would his fellows do then, poor things?'

'Further developments this morning?' Craig inquired.

'Well, yes,' Ames said. 'There were one or two disgruntled letters in, the mail, but I fancy Mr. Madison will know how to deal with them.'

'I rather think so,' Yvette said. 'He strikes me as a man who can deal with whatever comes his way.'

'He's really a wonder man,' said Laura. 'My husband has known him for years, and he says Mr. Madison is the most efficient person he has ever seen.'

'I take after him,' said Craig, wistfully, 'but I don't get glory and honor as he does.'

'You're too young,' Yvette smiled at him. 'When you're your uncle's age, you'll have the world at your feet.'

'You're all the world to me, but I don't want you at my feet!'

Yvette laughed. 'I'm all the world to so many people!' she said, looking regretful. 'I don't believe I want any more world to conquer.'

'Not a bit like Alexander, are you?' Clifford Hale said, gaily. 'But if ever you do want one to try on, remember I'm a candidate.'

'To try on?' Yvette smiled. 'Do you imply a possibility of my ever failing?'

'It might be a change,' Laura Lee put in. 'Monotony is always uninteresting.'

'Not always,' Yvette said, looking more serious. 'My life is so full, so varied, and so uncertain, I sometimes long for monotony.'



‘But can’t you get it if you really want it?’ Laura went on. ‘Can’t you go off, no one knowing where, and bury yourself in your monotony till you get tired of it?’

‘But you must remember,’ Craig put in, ‘that you can’t enjoy monotony unless you have already found happiness.’

‘But if I had found happiness I wouldn’t want monotony!’ Yvette exclaimed. ‘And this conversation is getting too psychological or something like that. Tell me about the picnic we are going to, Craig. Do we sit on the ground, and have butterflies in the butter and katydids in the cake?’

‘This is a Wilkins picnic, not a Sunday-school one. You’ll like it.’

‘I know I shall. Miss Cornelia has made it all pretty for me. She told me so. She is one lovely lady, is Miss Cornelia.’

‘She’s the salt of the earth,’ said Laura Lee.

‘I’ve known her all my life,’ Craig said, ‘and I echo your opinion.’

‘I wish somebody would praise me,’ Gifford Hale complained. ‘I get no bouquets and leis and things.’

‘You’re a dear,’ Yvette told him, ‘but I don’t know you well enough to sort out your good traits from your wicked ones.’

‘What makes you think I have any wicked ones?’

‘You wouldn’t be any good if you didn’t.’

‘One up for you. While Wilkins is laying the cloth for the picnic, you and I will take a twilight’ stroll, and I will tell you my favourite crimes.’

‘Let us hope Wilkins is of slow motion, for I’ve promised a lot of twilight strolls. Didn’t I say I’d wander a bit with you, Mr. Ames?’

‘You certainly did, Miss Verne, and I shall hold you to your promise.’

Soon they were at the picnic place.

‘Here we are!’ cried Harley Madison. ‘On with the hampers, Garson; it is later than I thought. You all right, Miss Verne? Not too tired?’

‘Not a bit. Come over here, Miss Cornelia, here’s a big stone to sit on, and Garson has spread a robe over it for us.’

The two sat down, while Garson prepared another rock for Anita and Laura Lee, and the men stood about or brought car cushions to sit on.

‘You like your picnic, Yvette?’ Cornelia asked, calling her guest by name for the first time.

‘Oh, yes, Miss Madison, I love anything outdoorsy.’

‘You have a lot of that in Hollywood?’

‘We do, but its such a different kind of outdoors that there ought to be another name for it.’

‘But you enjoy it all? You love your work?’

‘Much of the time yes. But there is repetition and more or less of what must be called drudgery. Have you seen any of my pictures?’

‘Yes I saw “The Young Lady of Nigar.” I thought it very amusing.’

‘Good! I’m glad you did. I like it; best of all I’ve done. I’ve just finished “Doubting Castle.” I hope you will like that, but it won’t be on for a long time yet. It’s very good of you to have me here, and it’s a lovely experience for me, I am so seldom in a home. A real home, I mean. With a living-room and dining-room and all. I shall always carry my memory pictures of Silver Hill among my favourites. Have you always lived there?’

‘Oh, no, only since the death of my brother’s wife. That was ten years ago, and I came to keep house for him, and have been here ever since.’

‘He’s fortunate in having a devoted sister. And the boys, too. How they all adore you.’

‘They do. They’re good boys. Craig, of course, is my pet. Why I hardly know. He is the son of my older brother, and his parents both died when he was little. I took him then and I suppose that is why he seems nearer to me than Tom, who has been with us only a few years.’

‘They’re fine chaps, but to me Tom seems difficult to get at. He is like a mimosa plant; you speak to him, and he shuts right up into himself.’

‘Yes, he does. To-morrow, you must have a hobnob with him. He improves on acquaintance.’

And then cocktails came round. The crowd closed in, and they stood near together, laughing and chattering. As Yvette had anticipated, Everett Ames drew toward her, and asked in a half whisper, ‘What did you mean by what you said in the car?’

‘That we’d wander? Well, why not? Right after supper?’

Ames nodded assent, and then Craig claimed Yvette and took her to the lavishly spread table, and placed her at the right hand of her host. And Yvette Verne, the motion picture star, looked just shy enough and just coy enough to seem to be fitting herself into her rightful place.

## **Chapter 5**

ON SUNDAY MORNING, the day after the picnic, the house seemed deserted. The women kept their rooms and some of the men had gone to play golf. Craig wandered around like a lost spirit, wondering when Yvette would come downstairs. Hetty saw him, and with the privilege of an old servant, said, ‘You won’t see the sweet face you’re lookin’ for so soon, Mr. Craig. She’s hobnobbin’ with Mrs. Lee, and they’re talkin’ right straight along, like a non-stop train of cars—Say, Mr. Craig shall I drop a hint to Miss Verne? Just a word, you know, that’ll show her how the land lies?’

‘Could you do that adroitly, Hetty?’

‘Couldn’t I just?’ Hetty disappeared up the stairs.

She went straight to Laura Lee’s room, and giving a light tap and entering at the same time, her vaunted adroitness took this form. ‘Just a word, ladies, may I speak? You see, it’s this way: Mr. Craig is sittin’ down there a mopin’ like a three-legged lamb. He wants somebody to ’sociate with, and I’m a wonderin’ if one of you two ladies wouldn’t go down and cheer him up. He’s my boy, and a smart one.’

‘Yes, he is,’ Yvette agreed, ‘I’ll go and dress, Laura, and we’ll both go down and cheer his loneliness.’

Yvette turned her attention to her wardrobe, and chose a white knitted silk sports suit, with black frogs and loops, and a white hat with a very cocky black feather. She went along the hall, moving with the same careful grace she would have shown in making a picture. In a sense she was always acting, because, with her, to live was to act and her movements and poses were all so perfect that it was a joy to watch her. And when Craig Madison saw this paragon of all the virtues coming toward him, he jumped up and ran to meet her.

‘Shall we go for a walk?’ he asked, eagerly. ‘Quick, before anybody comes to spoil it?’

‘Yes, come along,’ and Yvette held out her hand, which Craig grasped and led her swiftly down the long hall and out the back door to the gardens. They went on, through the gardens and across a field and entered a little piece of woods, where the sunlight drew traceries on the leaf strewn ground. There was a rustic settee, and they sat down, quiet for a moment, at the peace and beauty of the scene.

‘I’ve been wanting to get you alone,’ he said, ‘to thank you for coming. How could you get away, when you must have had heaps of engagements in the city?’

‘Yes, I did. But I just broke them all. I made two enemies for life, hurt deeply the feelings of a dear friend and lost a really big business opportunity, but—I wanted to come, so I came.’

‘And you came just because you wanted to see me, didn’t you?’

Craig’s handsome face looked roguish as he awaited her answer.

‘Not entirely,’ she said, frankly; ‘but you told of such a dear homey sort of place, I just felt a longing to see it, so I came.’

‘And you’re glad you did?’

‘Oh, yes, but its over so soon. I must go back to-morrow.’

‘Why must you?’

‘Week-end parties always let out on Monday.’

‘This one doesn’t. Do stay over a day or two longer.’

‘Not on your invitation.’

‘On Aunt Cornelia’s, then? Or Uncle Harley’s?’

‘Yes, either of them. But it must be spontaneous. You’re not to put them up to it. I like them both too much to impose on their hospitality.’

‘Well, something tells me they’ll invite you. They like you, you see. I say, do you know you seem different from that day I saw you at Amy Crosby’s. You’ve more life, more colour—more glamour.’

Yvette laughed out. ‘And why not, foolish boy? That day I was angry, in a jam, bothered by that man who was with me when you came, not very well dressed or made up, in fact I was unhappy. Now, here I am, among friendly, congenial people, in a charming home, wearing my best clothes, and as much make-up as I dare for fear of Aunt Cornelia—and—having a tête-à-tête with you! What more could I want, and why shouldn’t all this make me look more contented, happier and—better-looking?’

‘Yes, I think all those things have made the difference. I hope you got out of the jam successfully.’

‘Yes, I did. It was a business matter. That man who was making himself obnoxious, was one of the assistant directors, and he wanted to tell me how to read my part. Well, never mind about him.’

‘He sounded as if he were discussing a more personal matter, but you know best.’

‘Yes, I ought to. He is a bad man, don’t let’s talk about him.’

‘No, we won’t. Are you enjoying it here?’

‘Yes, I am. Everybody is lovely to me, and yet—what is it, Craig? I seem to sense undercurrents, unspoken thoughts, unvoiced opinions. Are we all sincere? Are you? Am I?’

Craig looked at her in astonishment. ‘I don’t think I quite get you.’

‘Perhaps it doesn’t matter.’

‘This matters, though. There is an undercurrent in my thoughts, which will not be stilled; which keeps me wondering and thinking and despairing, by turns. Can you help me to quiet it? Can you guess what it is, and do you care?’ The last words were spoken with the earnest face near her own, with the imploring eyes looking into her startled ones, and with Craig’s arm daringly creeping round her shoulder.’

‘Don’t tell me,’ she begged, pushing him gently away, ‘No, I can’t guess, and I don’t want to try. Not now, not here. I’m changeable, you know, I’m fickle; I’m one thing today and another to-morrow. And just now, I’m in danger, yes, real danger, but you can’t help me. Nobody can help me, unless—oh, never mind, forget it.’

‘Forget it! I shall think of nothing else, until you tell me it is a thing of the past. Is it money trouble? For I can help that.’

‘Oh, no, of course not. But you’re a dear to think of it. No, it’s a bad man in the company, and I’ve told the manager he will have to get out or I shall. But you know, in a big company of important actors they can’t fire one of them because another of them asks it.’

‘No, I suppose not.’

‘Well, forget it, anyway. I’ll promise you this. If it ever happens that you can help, I’ll let you know.’

‘Oh, will you! I’ll be so glad to help. Come on, we must go back to the house. It’s nearly lunch time.’

They went back slowly. They found everybody in the living-room, and a wild discussion was going on. It was soon evident that the subject was the improvement of the village.

‘Since I’ve seen it,’ Yvette observed, ‘I feel that it could stand improvement, quite a lot of it. And, too, it would well repay effort. There are really lovely bits,—that is, they could be made lovely;—if I weren’t under contract, I’d turn myself into a landscape artist and help you out, Mr. Madison. But I daresay you’ve enough helpers.’

‘Enough would-be helpers,’ Harley said, ‘but they don’t help.’

‘Ignorant?’

‘No; ill-tempered, greedy, jealous, envious, deceitful—’

‘Are they mad at you?’ Yvette looked incredulous.

‘They are indeed! But what’s the use of repining. Where are those cocktails? Aggie, go and tell Wilkins we didn’t ask to have them aged in the wood!’

‘I know quite a bit about modern architecture and decoration,’ Anita said; ‘I’m sure I could help you out, Harley.’

‘My dear girl, I’m overrun with expert designers of all sorts. What I want is a peacemaker, an efficient trouble-man for real trouble, a calmer-down of ruction-loving citizens, a settler of stirred-up tempers.’

‘I’m afraid that’s beyond me,’ Anita said, regretfully, and her host’s ‘Thank God’ was inaudible, but none the less fervent.

‘I don’t mind the ingratitude,’ Madison went on; ‘one expects that, but it is the injustice and the real basic wickedness of men whom I considered my friends. At first, they were all with me, and ready to take their part and pay their share with what seemed true willingness. Now, for some unacknowledged reason, they are all in a rambunctious cantankerous, vicious opposition.’

‘Not all of them, Mr. Madison,’ said Ames; ‘some are still loyal to your plans and ideals. But they want to shave the expenses by buying inferior material, and having incompetent workmen, so that the plans, one by one are being ruined.’

‘That’s it,’ Harley said. ‘And worse than that, they are underhandedly persuading the various contractors to make their estimates prohibitively high, or in other ways to injury and harm every project planned.’

‘But this is criminal procedure,’ said George Lee. ‘You should get after them legally, Harley.’

‘Yes, I know all that, but I went into this whole thing as a hobby as something to enjoy. I don’t want to make any profit out of it, it is my way of doing something for my fellow townsmen that shall last and grow better with time and care. I intend to endow the thing with a trust fund, to be used as long as it will last, and I assure you that will be a long time.’

‘That’s all right, too, but you mustn’t let these thieves and robbers lay you out cold. It’s a shocking state of affairs! Just how do you stand now?’

‘Well, we’ve so far been a rather informal association, of which I am president by courtesy only. Now we propose to organise properly and become incorporated, and all that; and I shall be expected to put up a

large sum of money, which I am more than willing to do, but not if it is going to be used and squandered, without my sanction. Oh, there's a lot to be considered, and I fear it is getting to the point, where I must drop out of it, in which case I daresay I should have to fly by night, to avoid tar and feathers. The alternative would be to have a professional auditor come in and go over the whole thing, with an eye looking for dishonesty. And I fear the net result to me of such a procedure would be worse than the first proposition. So, I'm between the devil and the deep sea, and I have lost faith in my neighbours whom I have trusted for many years, and that is a blow that hurts.'

'Indeed it must,' Yvette said, impulsively. 'Nothing stirs me up like ingratitude. And there is lots of it in the world. In our profession there is much jealousy and envy. And in some—many natures, they fester and become very dreadful. It is only recently that this sort of trouble has come near me. and it may clear away. But if not. I should certainly abandon my career, for a life full of discord and injustice would be unbearable.'

'That's right,' Madison said. 'Sit up here by me. Yvette. but we must not refer to our injustices at luncheon.'

'No, indeed. And after all, they're in the great minority, compared with our pleasures.'

## **Chapter 6**

YVETTE WAS in her room, and very much wanted to telephone to New York, and there was an extension instrument right on her boudoir table. But her message was decidedly confidential, and experience had taught her that a film star is of inordinate interest to most people, and her communications had so often been overheard, that she was wary. She concluded to ask somebody, either Craig or Wilkins, if he could arrange a clear wire for her.

In a gorgeous gown Yvette went downstairs, hoping to be ahead of the crowd at Sunday night supper, and able to accomplish her own really important errand. But the rooms were already well filled, and, quite evidently, many were waiting to see her, with the usual curiosity about a celebrity.

Craig met her at the foot of the staircase and was about to direct her steps, when Harley Madison came by, and said:

'Oh, here you are. Miss Verne, I've been waiting for you.'

Craig always gave way to his uncle and was usually quite willing to do so, but this time he felt annoyed. Yvette was his friend. If he hadn't met her at Amy Crosby's she would never have been here, and he resented, a little, his uncle's usurpation of his rights.

Yvette was charming. She had no hauteur, no indifference, to annoy them, she seemed to each one she met to be glad of the meeting and determined to make the most of it. She wished she could help Harley in his trouble with the village fathers, but of course she couldn't broach a subject like that to a strange man. But she bethought herself of approaching the wives of those outrageous men, and perhaps do a little good. She began on Mrs. Job Hendricks.

'You're fortunate,' she said, 'to be the wife of one of the most important of the members of the committee. Mr. Madison has told me of Mr. Hendricks' generosity, and of his willingness to give a splendid library. I can't help feeling that that is the most worthy gift of all. Other things will come of themselves, but a library must be planned and selected by worthwhile minds, such as I feel sure you and your husband possess.'

‘Mr. Hendricks is a college man,’ was the proud response, ‘and I graduated from a Young Ladies’ Seminary.’

‘Good!’ cried Yvette, ‘so did I.’

She had never been inside the institution named, but she was willing to put truth on the scaffold, if that would help matters along.

Madison, getting the drift of the conversation, moved away a little to give Yvette her full chance. But the confab over, he hastened to her side and drew her away with him. Unheeding the beseeching looks of certain would-be-favoured guests, he led her directly and without pause, to his own study, took her inside and shut the door.

‘Do tell me,’ he cried, ‘what you were saying to that woman, before I die of curiosity and—fear!’

‘Fear?’ Yvette’s lovely laugh rang out. ‘What are you afraid of?’

‘Of what you said to her. Please tell me.’

‘Of course,’ she said, seeing he was in earnest, ‘I only gave her a fair-sized dose of flattery, and told her how noble her husband is.’

‘Saying nothing about me?’

‘Not definitely. Of course, I had to tell her that you were the source of information as to her husband’s nobility and generosity. Look here, Mr. Madison, I am not a silly young thing; I have learned, through experience, wisdom, tact, even diplomacy, and I want you to understand that I said nothing to Mrs. Hendricks that you would disapprove of.’

‘I don’t believe you did, my dear, but of course you don’t know what a delicate situation it is.’

‘Tell me, then, and I can help you more intelligently.’

Yvette was sitting on the corner of a table, and Madison stood beside her, ‘I wish you could help me,—now—and always!’ His arm went round her and she did not draw away, he bent his head a little and then there came a sharp rap at the door. Madison made no hasty movement; he held her close a moment and then went and opened the door. He found there Henry Potter and Hiram Riley, two of the men who had been at the town meeting.

‘We’d like you to come to a conference, Mr. Madison,’ Potter said; ‘kinda sudden, I know, but we wanta get this thing a-goin’. I take it you can leave your party doin’s, seein’ your sister can look after things.’

‘I’ll be glad to attend your meeting,’ Madison said, in a rather indifferent tone. ‘Where is it to be held?’

‘It’s bein’ held now—right over to my house,’ Potter told him, ‘and we’d like you to come right along.’

‘Very well, I will. You’ll excuse me, Miss Verne? This is an important matter.’

‘Certainly, Mr. Madison. Good-night. I’ll tell Cornelia where you have gone.’

The men went away, and Yvette had a sudden inspiration. Here she was, alone in Madison's study, and there was a telephone there, and she didn't believe it was connected with any other in the house. Here was her chance! She locked the door, and taking up the instrument, called a New York number. She talked a short time and replaced the telephone, looking a little anxious.

Cornelia was troubled by Yvette's story, and shook her head, saying, 'I don't like it. The idea of those men coming for him like that. And coming on Sunday, too!'

'Can I do anything for you?' Yvette asked, gently.

'No, my dear. Run away and find Craig. The boy has been looking for you.' But Yvette did not look for Craig. She decided that Tom Sheldon rated a little attention from her, and she went toward him, smiling.

'Craig just went through here,' he said, returning her smile. 'I think he's—'

She interrupted him. 'Who said I wanted Craig? Why can't I talk with you?'

'I never thought of that! Talk ahead.'

'Let's go to the dining-room. I haven't had a bite since lunch and I'm starving.'

'So'm I. I always am. But I'm sure you can find something you like, for there's everything here.'

Nor was he wrong. Yvette had attended many lavish feasts, but this was the most elaborate she had even seen. 'Why?' she asked, looking at Sheldon, after they both were supplied with well-filled plates.

'Why so much? Well, really, there won't be such a lot left over. Crowds of people will come all evening. New Yorkers make this a regular pilgrimage, and they come from all places round about.'

'Is it ostentation?'

'It is not. Uncle Harley doesn't know the meaning of that word. It is hospitality. That man has no sense of moderation. He always is like that. If he buys a lead pencil he buys a gross. If he buys a shirt, he buys twelve dozen.'

'Yes. I've noticed that tendency, but I hadn't realised how strong it is in his nature.'

'It's what is spoiling all his beautiful scheme of fixing up the village, you know. He really wants to do it all. He would put every cent he owns into it, but he knows his duty to his sister and us boys, and, thank goodness, he hasn't cut us off—yet.'

'But it's shocking, to have him pour out his wealth like that on a town that gives him no credit for it, and even refuses to help him properly.'

While they ate their supper, Yvette kept her companion on the subject of his uncle's hobby, and at last she began to understand the strange idiosyncrasy of Harley Madison's behaviour.

When they left the dining-room, Yvette felt very tired and utterly unwilling to make pretty talk for the hordes of people who were still arriving. She confided this to Cornelia, who, with ready sympathy and tact, told her to go at once to her room, and rest, and go to bed when she wished.



‘You have done your part,’ Cornelia said, ‘we owe you many thanks for giving our friends the joy of meeting you, and for your delightful kindness and courtesy to them. Run along now, dear, and have a good rest.’

Touched by this appreciation, Yvette gave her hostess a light kiss on the cheek, hoping it would not offend her. But Cornelia seemed pleased, and patted the girl’s hand as she sent her away.

Yvette went to her rooms, and taking off the rainbowed gown, threw on a negligee and lay down on her chaise lounge. She thought for a long time, and then fell into a short, restless sleep.

Downstairs, the party began to thin out after Yvette’s departure, but it was nearly midnight, when Miss Cornelia turned her weary steps toward her bedroom. The party had been a nervous strain, and sleep came quickly to the tired hostess, but as was her custom she awakened early, and at six o’clock in the morning, she opened her eyes to see Hetty sitting beside her bed.

‘For Heaven’s sake! what’s the matter?’ exclaimed Cornelia sitting up straight, while Hetty threw a wrap round her shoulders.

‘What has happened to Harley?’

‘Nothing at all. Now, ca’am down, Miss Cornelia, your brother is all right, far’s I know. It’s something else I have to tell you.’

‘Go ahead, then.’

‘Bein’ wakeful about three o’clock, I seen Miss Verne a-meetin’ of a man in the Ivy Arbor.’

‘At three in the morning?’

‘Yes, Miss’ Verne sneak out of the house, and scoot into the Ivy Arbor and when she come out again there was a man with her, who had been waitin’ for her there.’

‘Who was the man?’

‘That I don’t know. I don’t think it was any of our men here in the house, but I couldn’t say for sure.’

‘I don’t believe Miss Verne did that. It would be too dark for you to see her anyway.’

‘I did see her.’

‘Go back to bed, Hetty, and forget it. I’ll ask Miss Verne about it in the morning, and she’ll tell me what happened, if anything.’

Hetty went off, rather miffed, but feeling sure that when she spoke to Miss Verne in the morning, Miss Cornelia would sing a different tune.

Cornelia was troubled. She had just begun to take a liking to the girl, and if her antecedents were all they ought to be, Cornelia was rather in favour of Craig’s marrying, her. She had been pleasantly surprised at Yvette’s innate good breeding and refinement. This story of Yvette going out at three, to meet a man in the Ivy Arbor, was as ludicrous as it was incredible. There was no sense in a New York man coming up here to see her clandestinely, for the girl knew he would be welcomed as a proper guest. She could scarce

wait for a late enough hour to disturb Yvette, but at eight, she sent Aggie to ask Miss Verne if Miss Madison might pay her a call.

The response was cordial, and in negligee and cap, Cornelia visited her guest.

Yvette had risen, and was robed in an elaborate kimono and waiting in her boudoir.

‘Miss Verne,’ Cornelia said, ‘did you go downstairs and outdoors this morning at three o’clock, to meet somebody in the Ivy Arbor?’

Yvette looked at her surprised, but entirely self-possessed.

‘No, Miss Madison, I did not.’

‘You did not leave your rooms after you bade me good-night and came up to bed?’

‘I did not.’

‘Thank you, I am sorry to have troubled you in the matter.’

## **Chapter 7**

MONDAY MORNING, in response to a message from his uncle, Craig Madison went into the study. He had a vague premonition of trouble.

He was greeted with a kindly ‘Hello, my, boy,’ and seated himself at the broad desk, opposite Harley Madison.

‘How much do you know about my dealings with the village people who are working with me in regard to fixing up the general appearance of New Plymouth?’

‘Not an awful lot, Uncle Harley, but I’ve picked up bits here and there from Ames, and Aunt Cornelia. As you know, I’d like to help with the architectural doings, but I know when and if you want me to do that, you’ll tell me so.’

‘Right. Well, Craig, the project is not running smoothly—not at all. In fact, its course is becoming so difficult, I am tempted to step out of it all.’

‘Whew! That would bring about a civil war, or something, wouldn’t it?’

‘Perhaps so. But there is another reason why I think of dropping the plan. I’m going to tell it to you, right now, and—you won’t like it at all.’

Craig stared. ‘You’re not going to put me in your place, I hope!’

‘No; on the contrary, I want to put myself in your place.’ Like a flash, Craig knew! It came to him, intuitively, a sudden revelation, the knowledge of a blow that must be met.’

‘Go on, sir,’ he said. His uncle gazed at him admiringly. ‘You’re wonderfully quick,’ he said; ‘I believe you know what I’m doing to say. Yes, it is about Yvette.’

‘And what about her?’ Craig tried to speak lightly, but didn’t quite succeed.

‘I want to marry her. I have fallen in love with her, not only with her beauty and grace, but with her fine character and noble nature. I loved my wife, but with a gentle, tender affection, compared with which my love for Yvette is a devotion, a passion that can scarce be controlled. But I cannot feel it honorable to tell her of this love without telling you first. Is she pledged to you, in any way? Is it your intention to marry her? Am I infringing on your rights?’

Craig said nothing for a few moments. Then: ‘Uncle Harley, it is fine of you to tell me of this matter. You have as much right as I, and more, to ask Yvette to be your wife. I do love her deeply, but I have not told her so, nor have I given her any definite reason to think it. The situation is a bit complex, but were it a thousand times more so, I would willingly relinquish my hopes in your favour. Go in and win. I will be the first to congratulate you, and that in all sincerity.’

‘You’re a brick, Craig, and I accept your offer as frankly as it is made. But we are not the final court of appeal. It would not be at all surprising if Yvette preferred your youthful charms to my more mature advantages. So, keep your hopes, and I will keep mine. We will say, a fair field and no favor, and may the best man win.’

‘I agree, heartily. Can we arrange matters before she leaves us?’

‘When is she going?’

‘To-morrow, I think. But if she is—er—interested, she might be persuaded to stay a few days longer.’

‘I shall find out about her feelings to-day. As you know, I’m impetuous, and I want to put my courage to the test to win or lose it all.’

‘Shall you go on with the village project, if Yvette accepts your proposal?’

‘No. That would be the reason I told you of for dropping the whole plan. I’m pretty sure she would not care to live here, and if we live elsewhere I should lose all interest in the place.’

‘Aunt Cornelia?’

‘I know my sister well enough to feel sure that she will gladly consent to anything that means my life’s happiness. I’ll give her this house, if she wants to stay here, or arrange, a home for her wherever she wants it.’

‘Of course, you will, Uncle. I know everything will fit into place and, in my opinion, Yvette already loves you.’

‘Yes,’ and Harley Madison looked complacent. ‘I, too, have a notion that way.’

‘I’d like to see the looks on the faces of those village fathers when you tell them the news!’

‘I shall not like to see it! I have ample reason to believe their looks will clearly indicate battle, murder and sudden death!’

‘Uncle, don’t say such things!’

‘I never spoke a truer word,’ Harley Madison said, almost solemnly.

‘When is the next meeting?’

‘Wednesday night. But if my lady doesn’t smile on my suit, there will be nothing to disturb further the already irate citizens.’

His mind and heart filled with various seething emotions, Craig went away to think things out by himself.

Craig Madison was not a sycophant or one inclined to agree to his uncle’s wishes unquestionably because of benefits past, present or to come. He was honestly and deeply grateful for the kindness shown him by his uncle all his life, and though startled by this amazing situation, he did not for one instant hesitate as to his response. And now, even while he realized how much more Harley Madison could offer, he had a faint hope, which he tried to stifle, that perhaps wealth and importance might not mean everything to Yvette Verne.

Meanwhile another confab, of dire import and perhaps grave consequences, was going on in the livingroom. Laura and George Lee and Anita and Gifford Hale had gone to play golf. Craig and his uncle were in the study, and Ames busy in his office, so that Tom Sheldon was the only one at loose ends, and when he wandered into the room to seek company, he came upon a strange quartet. Hetty and her husband Elkanah were opposite Yvette and Miss Cornelia, and the four faces showed signs of anger and bewilderment.

As Tom came in, he heard Hetty say: ‘I’m plain-spoken, I am, but I’m nobody’s fool. When I see a thing, I see it, and when I say I saw a thing, I did see it.’

‘Hetty’s got mighty good eyesight,’ Elkanah observed, ‘and I defy anybody to say she ain’t.’

As Cornelia saw Tom she said, ‘Come in. Perhaps you can help us. Yvette, are you willing Tom should join our discussion?’

‘Certainly,’ the girl said.

‘And what’s it all about?’ Sheldon asked, cheerily.

‘Just this,’ Cornelia said: ‘Early this morning at three o’clock, Hetty says she saw Yvette out on the lawn and in the Ivy Arbor, accompanied by a strange man. Yvette says she did not leave her room all night, after she went up there from the supper party.’

Sheldon looked at Mrs. Garson, who was tense with suppressed anger.

‘Hetty,’ he said gravely, ‘you saw a bear. Let’s get this thing straight. Where were you Hetty, when you saw this scene?’

‘A-lookin’ out of my window, and gazin’ down at the lawn and acrost it to the Ivy Arbor.’

‘And you saw?’

‘Miss Verne, as ever was! a-gallivantin’ with a young man at three o’clock in the mornin’.’

‘And you deny that Hetty saw you out on the lawn, Miss Verne?’

‘I surely do. I went to my rooms shortly after midnight, and I did not go out of them until about two hours ago.’

‘And that’s what they call perfidy,’ Hetty declared; ‘my brother-in-law did it once, and they put him in jail for quite a spell.’

‘Keep quiet, Hetty,’ Cornelia said; ‘it’s this way, Tom, I’ve talked to them a lot, and it comes down to the question of one’s word or the other’s. I cannot judge. I admire and respect Miss Verne, and I have no reason to doubt her word. I have known Hetty for many years, and I have never known her to tell a falsehood.’

‘That’s what we call a deadlock, Aunt Cornelia. Miss Verne, would you be willing to swear that you did not leave your room during the night?’

‘Mr. Sheldon, I swear I did not.’

‘Listen at her!’ Hetty cried out; ‘the wickedness of her. But actresses, they don’t care what they say, and they can make people believe their lies, because of their stage trainin’ in make-believe!’

‘Aunt Cornelia,’ Tom said, ‘without regard to the facts of the case, I think this conversation should, not be allowed to continue. I think Hetty should be sent from the room, because she is in no state of mind to give true or even rational information about the matter.’

‘I agree with you, Tom,’ his aunt told him; ‘go away now, Hetty, and I will see you alone later. And don’t prattle about this to the other servants, remember that. Elkanah, see to it, that she obeys me.’

The Garsons went away, because it was their habit to obey orders, and not because they wanted to.

Yvette said to Cornelia:

‘I don’t know what to say to you, Miss Madison. I have no guilty feeling, for I repeat that I did not leave my room last night, but I deeply regret the unpleasantness my presence here has brought about, and I think it is only right to you all that I should go away. I do not want to think that Hetty made up this story to annoy or to incriminate me, but I feel the woman has never liked me, though I have treated her tactfully.’

‘I say,’ Tom declared, suddenly, ‘I’ve just thought of something. You know, Yvette, you must know that your talent and fame rouse envy and jealousy in the hearts and minds of a certain type of people. Well, leaving Hetty aside for the moment, I can imagine a certain person dressing herself up to look like you, and with the assistance of a man carrying out that Ivy Arbor incident with the amiable intention of bringing criticism down on your fair head!’ Cornelia looked at him at first blankly, and then with a dawning understanding.

‘It might be, possibly it might be—’ she said, thoughtfully.

‘And we can all guess the clever little woman who put on the piece,’ Tom continued. ‘You and I, Aunt Corny, know that it was not Yvette that Hetty saw—if she saw anybody—but it could have been?’

‘Don’t say it,’ Yvette begged. ‘I know whom you mean, but we mustn’t accuse her, with positively no evidence,’

‘We won’t accuse her,’ Tom agreed, ‘but I’ll engage to find out who the man was, if, indeed, I don’t know already. And if he has an alibi, then let’s drop the subject.’

‘It’s almost luncheon time,’ Yvette said. ‘I’m going out for a run in the sunshine, and I want to go alone. I’ll be back soon.’

## Chapter 8

AS YVETTE walked across the lawn and through the garden, she pondered over the not very satisfactory situation in which she found herself. She knew, of course, who Tom had in mind—it must be Anita for no one could suspect demure little Laura Lee of anything in the nature of a practical joke. She wished Hetty hadn't said that she saw her, for she didn't.

At three o'clock that morning, she was in bed and asleep, and if anybody went into the Ivy Arbor at that time, it was not Yvette Verne. She had never been in the Ivy Arbor at all. But she was going there now.

She walked toward it, and just as she entered, she turned her head to look, and she was almost sure she saw Hetty's skirt flutter round the corner of the house. Nor was she mistaken. Hetty ran breathlessly to where Elkanah, her husband was and cried out: 'She's gone there again, Elk! She's just gone into the Ivy Arbor! Chase right over there and see what she's doin'!'

'Lawks, Hetty, she can't be doin' no harm.'

'Don't stop to heckle me, run, now.'

So Elkanah shambled along, and when he reached the arbor there was no one there. He didn't care much, but he thought it was queer. Where had the girl gone? If she had been going into the arbor when Hetty saw her, she couldn't have popped out of sight entirely while he was crossing the lawn. For the arbor was in full view all the time he was approaching it. And there was but the one door. He looked inside. It was round and plainly built; there were opening for windows, but no sashes or blinds. A seat went all round and there was no other furniture. Miss Verne could have climbed out through a window, perhaps, but there would surely be broken ivy sprays to mark her exit, and why would she do such a thing anyhow?

With a horrible feeling of foreboding, Elkanah began to wonder if Hetty was getting a habit of 'seeing things.' Elkanah set himself to a diligent search for Miss Verne, in hopes of dispersing the trouble before it came. He went round behind the arbor.

There was a row of proud old oaks between him and the further spread lawn, but the lowest branches sprang from high up the trunks, and he had a clear view beneath them. If Yvette Verne had climbed out a back window and sped across the wide stretches of lawn, she could not get out of his sight during his trip from the house to the arbor.

And so, with a sinking heart, he decided, that his wife's mind had failed in some way.

He dragged himself back to tell her his news, and found her entirely sane, and, agog to hear about Miss Verne. And when he told her she had imagined seeing Miss Verne, her scolding was almost harder to bear than the thought of her insanity. And then; in a doleful voice, Hetty began to sing:

'When the woes of life o'ertake me.  
Friends desert and fools annoy—'

Elkanah could bear no more, and he walked out.

Yvette Verne, feeling pretty sure that the Garsons were safe in the house, for a time, climbed down from the big oak tree and swung to the ground from its lowest limb. She went into the Ivy Arbor, and scanned the green leaved walls. It was a marvellous growth, the perfection of care and training giving the same

results both inside and out. At last she found what she was looking for. A packet of letters in ordinary sized envelopes held together by a rubber band.

‘Might have wrapped ’em up,’ she thought, putting the parcel in an inside pocket of her tweed coat, and starting back to the house. She arrived in time to join the cocktail service, and entertained the party with the tale of her adventure.

‘I went out for a breath of fresh air,’ she said, ‘and as, notwithstanding reports to the contrary, I had never been in the Ivy Arbor, I thought I’d take a look at the inside.’

‘Yes, Hetty said she saw you go in,’ Cornelia said.

‘Naturally,’ returned Yvette, ‘the blessed woman watched over me like a warder. Well, I got inside, and I think it is lovely. And I saw Elkanah tearing across the lawn, and some imp of depravity put it in my heart to give Elky a jolt. So, I went out through a back window, and when Elkanah arrived there was nobody home. It was funny to see the look on his face! It was more than surprise, it was something very like fear. Do believe he thinks I am in league with the powers of darkness.’

‘Where did you go?’ asked Harley Madison, smiling at her.

‘I climbed one of the big oak trees. You know Boscobel Oak, where Charles the Second hid, and every year since, they celebrated his birthday there. I’d like to have mine celebrated here.’

‘You shall,’ declared Harley. ‘If you haven’t a birthday nearby, I’ll lend you mine. It will be here next week.’

‘But I won’t.’

‘Oh, yes, you will. You’ll have to stay now until you convince the Garsons that you’re a proper human being.’

‘I know. Hetty thinks I’m insane.’

‘I want you to be friends with Hetty,’ Cornelia said, in her gentle way. ‘She is dear, to me, if she is odd in her manner.’

‘I will, Miss Cornelia, and I’m sorry I made Elkanah think I was a lemon of some sort. But I’ll make it up to them. I want to hop over to New York this afternoon, and I’ll bring them each something they’ll like. You advise me what it shall be.’

Yvette was so joyously eager, that Cornelia told her of various things the Garsons would like, so she could make her own choice. After luncheon, Yvette asked if she might be driven to the city, saying her own chauffeur would bring her back.

‘I’ll run you in, myself,’ Harley said, ‘and I’ll dawdle round till you’re ready, and then I’ll bring you back. And I’ll tell you what to buy for Hetty. I know what she likes as well as Corney does. Run along and get ready, Yvette, and we’ll start now, and have a long afternoon.’

‘Nobody asked you, sir, she said,’ Yvette retorted. ‘I’ll go in with you, but I have some business to attend to that will take some time. Perhaps, though, I can meet you later and come back with you.’

‘All that will take care of itself,’ Harley told her. ‘Any errand Cornelia?’

‘No, dear. But if the Village Fathers call up or send any message what shall I tell them?’

‘Tell, them first to go throw themselves in the lake, and if they don’t fall in with the suggestion, then tell them to wait till I get home and I’ll tell them where to go!’

Cornelia smiled at her brother, then looked suddenly serious.

‘Don’t take them too lightly, Harley. They are an untrustworthy lot, and they’ve treated you shamefully.’

‘Then it’s up to me to treat them shamefully. Is that what you advise, Corny? I thought your guide was the Golden Rule.’

Harley left the room, pausing to kiss his sister’s cheek as he passed her. ‘He’s such a boy,’ she said, to Anita.

‘I’ve heard those horrid men are planning against him, but he don’t listen to a word about it.’

‘Who are planning, and what, Aunt Cornelia?’ Craig asked.

He was flaming with jealousy because his uncle was taking Yvette to the city, but his staunch loyalty made him want to know if plans were being made that would harm Harley Madison.

‘I don’t know, Craig. I’ve only heard rumors. But I know Mr. Hendricks and Mr. Potter want to put him out of the village council.’

‘Put him out! Why, Aunt Cornelia, they can’t want that! There wouldn’t be any council left!’

‘I don’t know about those things, Craig, but I wish you and Tom would inquire, discreetly, and see what you can learn.’

She rose from the table, and the others followed her from the room and then went their several ways.

TOM SHELDON had a bee in his bonnet, which he wanted to see about. He sat down on a verandah bench that commanded a view of the interior of the living-room. He waited patiently until Aggie came, as he expected, to look after ash-trays and glasses, and what not in the way of tidying up. He managed to catch her eyes and beckoned her outside. The soft October breeze was not chilly, and the girl came out.

‘What is it, Mr. Sheldon?’ she said, nervously.

‘Why are you so upset, Aggie?’

‘Upset, sir?’

‘You heard me. What is the matter with you?’

‘Miss Cornelia doesn’t like to have me talk to the family or the guests, Mr. Tom. There is nothing the matter with me.’

‘But you must talk when you are asked to do so.’

‘No, sir. Did you ever see a little trinket, Mr. Tom, that is three monkeys?’



‘The Japanese toy? Yes. One has his hands over his eyes?’

‘Yes, that’s the thing I mean. Well, when I first came here to work, Miss Madison gave me a charm, she called it, like that. Mine is made of ivory. And she told me that it meant that I must hear no evil, see no evil, and speak no evil. And she said that in my place, it meant that I must see or hear or speak nothing that was not intended for me to know. I have obeyed her, Mr. Tom, and I don’t want to talk to you, for fear I might say something I didn’t mean to. So please, let me go now.’

Tom Sheldon spoke more seriously.

‘Aggie, you are quite right to obey Miss Madison, but there are times when you must be guided by others in authority. Now, I will explain to my aunt that I insisted on your talking to me. There is a grave question to be settled; and I have a notion you can be of help. So listen, and tell me the truth.’

Aggie’s eyes grew big, but she said:

‘Go on, then, Mr. Tom.’

‘First, then, own up that you are nervously upset about something, and tell me what it is.’

Several times the girl started to speak. At last, she said, ‘I can’t do it. I can’t tell you.’

Sheldon said, gently, ‘Is it about Hetty seeing Miss Verne in the Ivy Arbor?’

‘Well, go on. What about Miss Verne?’

A sudden change of expression came to Aggie’s pretty face.

‘Why, yes sir; it is.’

‘And you know something about Hetty’s story. What is it?’

In a low voice Aggie replied: ‘I only know this, Mr. Tom: What Hetty says is so. For I too, saw Miss Verne and a man in the Ivy Arbor about three o’clock this morning.’

‘You saw her! What were you doing, awake at such an hour?’

‘I was out with my boy friend. It was a special occasion, for it was my parents’ silver wedding. Miss Cornelia knew it would be a late party, and she told me I might stay out as late as I liked. So I went to the party, and Bob went with me. We never got away till about three o’clock, and Bob brought me home here, and left me at the door. I have my own key to the servants’ entrance.’

‘We came across the lawns, and as we passed the Ivy Arbor we saw Miss Verne and a man inside.’

‘Sitting down?’

‘No, sir, they were standing up.’

‘Were you close enough to hear what they were saying?’

‘Not quite, sir. But I could see ’em sorta peekin’ about as if ’fraid somebody would catch ’em.’

‘Now,’ how could you see them, Aggie? It was a dark night.’

‘Why,’ Mr. Tom, the moon was just coming up. A lop-sided old thing, but it gave quite a light. Anyway, I saw them, plain as plain.’

‘And you’re sure it was Miss Verne?’

Aggie twitched nervously, but she said: ‘Yes, Mr. Tom, I’m sure it was Miss Verne.’

## **Chapter 9**

‘DID YOU see her face clearly?’ Tom asked, noting Aggie’s hesitation.

‘Not very.’

‘Then how can you be so sure it was Miss Verne.’

‘Why, I knew her coat—that grand tweed coat she has. I could never mistake that coat! And her hat, with a jot of red velvet and a long black quill feather.’

‘Where does Miss Verne keep that hat and coat? Always in her room?’

‘Oh, no, sir. Lots of the time they hang on that rack in the game room. All the ladies keep some wraps there, so’s to be handy.’

‘Well, then, Aggie, couldn’t somebody else have put on Miss Verne’s coat and hat, and gone out to the Ivy Arbor to meet some man, and so you and Hetty thought it was Miss Verne?’

Aggie’s eyes flew open wide. ‘Oh, it could have been that way! It could! For, Mr. Tom, there was something about the figger I saw, that was the least mite different from Miss Verne’s figger!’

‘You’re very observant. But let’s suppose it was some one else, who had slipped on Miss Verne’s hat and coat. Could you make a guess—as to who she might have been?’

‘I could, Mr. Tom, but I don’t want to.’

‘You must tell me, This is not a trifling matter, Aggie, it is of serious importance. Speak out, now.’

‘Well, then— it might have been Mrs. Boyce.’

‘She is about the build of Miss Verne,’ Tom said, thoughtfully. ‘Now, listen, Aggie. Don’t you mention a word of this to anybody. If you obey me, you will be all right. Run along now, and do your work.’

The girl’s smiles came back, and relieved of her fears, she returned to her duties. Tom went in search of Cornelia and told her the story.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘if that’s the explanation, it’s a good one. I don’t know why Anita would go on a clandestine errand like that, and I’ve an idea who the man was—not you, Tom?’

‘Not guilty, my lady. But if it was an escapade, I’d sooner believe it was Anita than Yvette. We know Anita’s frisky ways, but you’ve never seen anything of that sort in connection with Yvette, have you, Aunt Cornelia?’

‘No, Tom, I haven’t. The girl seems a little mysterious to me, but I’ve never thought her sly.’

‘Uncle seems to like her pretty well.’

‘Don’t gossip. Your Uncle knows what he’s about. Should he choose to marry again, it would be quite all right Florence has been dead several years.’

‘Heavens, Aunt Cornelia, I never thought of that! I only meant he seemed to be flirting with our lovely guest. Likewise, Craig seems to show the lady less flattering attention than he did at first.’

‘Puzzle it out for yourself.’ Cornelia smiled at him.

‘But an actress at the head of the House of Madison! Our Colonial ancestors would jitter in their graves!’

‘Don’t take that tone, Tom. I only desire that my brother should have whatever he wants that will make his life happy. He has had sorrow and trouble, and I welcome any change that would give him the happiness he deserves. And, in such case, he might spend less time and worry on his village plans.’

‘And less money,’ Tom added. ‘Hello, here comes our own and only!’

Yvette came in, smiling, and handed Cornelia a great bunch of violets. The girl wondered a little at the cordial thanks she received, for she had thought her hostess was still perturbed about the Ivy Arbor incident.

‘Let’s tell her, Aunt Cornelia, shall us?’

Tom asked, and his aunt smiled and nodded. So Tom told again Aggie’s possible solution of the mystery, and Yvette listened with interest.

‘I don’t know about Anita,’ she said, ‘but it must have been something of that sort. I’m afraid I haven’t thought much about it, for I know I didn’t trail out on the lawns last night, and I don’t know who did.’

Harley appeared in the doorway, looking a little perturbed.

‘Any message come for me to-day, Cornelia?’

‘Yes, one letter. It was brought by a messenger, who instructed me to give it directly into your hand. Hold out your hand.’

Obediently Harley held out his hand and took the letter which his sister handed him. He looked at it with a frown, and said, half absently, ‘Forgive me if I run away now. I’ll return soon. Where is Ames?’

But even as he spoke, he was gone, and they heard the study door close after him. Cornelia drew a long sigh.

‘I’m a little alarmed,’ she said, frankly; ‘the lad who brought that letter for Harley was an evil-faced chap.’

And then the crowd of guests came trooping in. They had been over to the Country Club. Anita looked very sweet and pretty, but Tom and Cornelia scrutinized her trim figure with an idea of comparing it with Yvette's. The advantage was on the side of the girl, but there was a possibility that the older woman might be mistaken for her in a half light.

Gifford Hale had been lamenting the state of the untidy village, but positively declared that for Harley to remake and rebuild it was a wicked waste of money and time and energy.

'Better buy a parcel of new ground and start fresh,' he went on. 'I shall do all I can to get Harley to drop his scheme. I hadn't realized before what a hopeless task it would be.'

'I doubt if you can influence him, Gifford,' Cornelia said; 'he's a determined sort, and he's already in pretty deeply.'

'Well, I'll have a try at it, anyhow. Where is he?'

'Don't talk it to him now, he's busy with Ames in the study. And he's a bit bothered.'

'All right, I'll wait for the psychological moment. I say, Miss Verne, come out for a hike across the lawns. Do you good after a day in the city.'

Yvette agreed, and they walked away.

'I say,' Hale said, 'I think we have a mutual friend.'

'That's pleasant for the friend,' returned the girl, gaily. 'Look, here's the Ivy Arbor. A marvellous growth, isn't it?'

'Wonderful. Let's go inside.'

They went in and sat for a moment on the rustic seats. Then Yvette jumped up quickly, and said she must go back to the house at once.

'I've forgotten an important matter I must attend to,' she told him.

But Hale, rising, too, held her by the arm.

'Don't be in such an awful hurry. I haven't told you the name of our mutual friend.'

'A lady?'

'Lord no. One of the sterner sex.'

'I've no curiosity about him. I've too many friends already.'

'Perhaps you'd like to cross me off your list?'

Yvette smiled charmingly. 'I shall, unless you let me go. Truly, I've an important errand.'

'You said that before. Well our mutual friend is named Mosby. Now aren't you interested?'

‘Dick Mosby? Why, no. I’m not interested now.’

She had already started for the door. Laughing back over her shoulder she kept a few steps ahead of him, until they reached the house, then they went in together.

‘Cocktail time?’ she exclaimed, as she saw Wilkins bringing the essentials.

She ran upstairs to dress, which she did quickly. Her mind was full of pleasurable thrills and also some ill forebodings. She chose a simple white gown, and a hovering gilt butterfly in her dark hair and a pair of Cinderella-like gold slippers were her only adornments. She went downstairs slowly, wondering what she was walking into.

Harley had rejoined the group and he rose to greet her with a look that seemed almost one of ownership. Craig looked at her curiously, Gifford Hale looked at her smilingly, and Anita Boyce looked at her with admiring eyes and a heart black with jealousy. After dinner Harley Madison looked round the room at his guests, then rose and began to speak.

‘To-night,’ he said, ‘finds me the happiest man in the village of New Plymouth or in the whole length and breadth of Long Island. I am not fond of making speeches, nor do you care to hear one, so I will briefly tell you that I have won the loveliest and dearest girl in the world for my future bride. That right, Yvette?’

He took a few steps toward her, and she met him half way, holding out both hands to him, and smiling up into his face. Then the room was in an uproar.

Harley and his affianced bride stood side by side, and the good wishes and congratulations rent the air. Cheers were given, songs were sung, champagne appeared, causing more and merrier laughter and goodwill. At last, Yvette sank into a chair from sheer exhaustion, and Harley sat beside her. Cornelia, with a murmured excuse, left the room and returned in a moment. She brought with her the Madison pearls, a three-strand marvel of perfectly matched pearls. Anita gave a little squeal, that Tom said afterward, sounded like a hurt dog, but every one else exclaimed with joy.

Cornelia clasped the necklace round the neck of her brother’s bride-to-be, with a word of explanation.

‘They are to be yours, Yvette,’ she said, ‘but not until your wedding day. You must wear them to-night, and give them back to me to-morrow. Then when you are a real Madison, the Madison pearls shall be yours. God bless you.’

‘And to think,’ Laura Lee said, ‘that only a few days ago, Yvette stepped into this family—’

‘And stepped into my heart!’ Harley interrupted her. ‘I have heard of love at first sight, but I never hoped to experience it myself, yet I have!’

‘A little bit of melodrama now,’ he said, after a moment; ‘I had a threatening letter to-day, from an enemy whom I had supposed to be a trusty friend. In connection with my work in the village, you know. My present will devises half of my entire estate to the committee of village improvement. I now choose to rescind that bequest, and I want you all to bear witness that I hereby destroy it.’

He produced a legal document, showed it around a bit, proving that it was as he said, then tore the paper into strips and threw them into the open fire.

‘Yvette,’ he said, turning to her, ‘to-morrow morning, I shall have my lawyer here, and he will draw up my new will, in which you shall have a place.’

And shortly, after, Harley Madison went upstairs to his bed.

BUT, WHEN Wilkins went to his master's bedroom at eight o'clock the next morning, there was no response to his knock. Nor to his repeated rappings. Puzzled, he went downstairs again, and told Elkanah, the major-domo.

Using a ladder, Elkanah was enabled to look into the window and see Harley Madison apparently sound asleep. From his pocket he took the tools he needed to remove a circular piece of glass from the window. He put his hand in and turned the catch, and flung the window up as far as it would go. Then he stepped into the room.

He went at once to the still form on the bed, and the look of rigidity and the coldness of the hand that he touched, left him no doubt that his master was in his last long sleep. Elkanah told Wilkins and then he told Hetty. Hetty dressed, with the speed of a whirlwind, and said she'd tell Miss Cornelia herself.

In Miss Madison's bedroom, the lady lay fast asleep. Hetty waked her gently, gave her a moment to get fully awake, and then said: 'Miss Cornelia, ma'am,' her voice was tremulous, 'your brother, ma'am, he is in bed, and we think—we fear—he is dead.'

Miss Madison sat up straight and looked at her. 'Who killed him?' she said.

## **Chapter 10**

WHEN Hetty had told her husband, Elkanah, that she would break the news to Miss Madison, he had said, 'Wonder how she'll take it.'

And the wife of his bosom had returned, 'Don't be dumb! You know exactly how she'll take it. Like a soldier! Miss Cornelia loves her brother and his death will break her heart, but she'll be as spunky as a treed cat—What ailed him, Elk? Some unsuspected heart trouble, I suppose.'

'See what you can do for Miss Madison. This ain't like no triflin' troubles she's had before, it's a blow! And she won't take it none so easy as you're makin' out. Go on, now.'

'I'm dawdlin', Elk, as you well know, 'cause I can't a-bear to go. I don't know what I shall say to her—'

'She'll do the sayin' once you've broke the news to her. Get along, now.'

So Hetty went along, and when she told her sad tidings, Miss Cornelia stared at her, and said, 'Who killed him?'

And Hetty answered; 'Why, nobody, ma'am. He wasn't killed, he just dropped off in his sleep. Folks often go that way. My brother-in-law, he was found dead in bed. Heart trouble, you see. Did you know Mr Harley had heart trouble?'

'No. I'm sure he didn't. Help me into my clothes.'

Cornelia Madison was running true to form. The shock of her brother's death, the quick realization of what she had to face, the sudden wave of grief and loneliness that swept her very soul, well nigh caused her to collapse utterly. But she did not. Of her own will, she put personal feelings aside; she gave her mind entirely to her duty to others and to her brother's mute appeal. On her devolved the carrying on of his

affairs and the honoring of his memory. But even as she thought these things she knew the immediate present was calling to her. The boys must be told, Yvette must be told—how could she do these things?

‘Come with me, Hetty. I shall go first to my brother’s room.’

Marvelling at the brave attitude, even though she had prophesied it, Hetty followed her mistress to Harley Madison’s room.

The house was very wide. Where other houses had five or at most seven windows on the second floor, Silver Hill had nine, and at either end of the row, a large ell showed many more. The house faced south, and at the east end were the rooms that had been the abode of Madison and his wife. When Florence died, Harley kept the same suite, and in the great corner bedroom the man now lay, white and still.

Hetty tarried outside the door as Cornelia went in, and Elkanah, who was on guard, joined his wife, so the sister went alone to look at her dead brother. Somehow, it was the sudden and awful loneliness that affected her most deeply. How could she get along without Harley. He had looked after her so carefully all these years; and she had looked after him. How could she stand not having him to look after? Her sense of duty and her unconquerable will power asserted themselves, and laying her hand for a moment on Harley’s brow, she drew herself up and walked steadily from the room. Her two loyal helpers awaited her in the hall and she said:

‘Elkanah, I will go down to the living room. Get Mr. Craig and Mr. Tom out of bed and send them down there to me. Don’t tell them what has happened, I want to tell them myself. After you have them awake and getting dressed, then call Doctor Bascom on the telephone and ask him to come right over here. Don’t tell him Mr. Madison is dead, just say he is very ill, but make him understand he is to come at once. Hetty, don’t call Miss Verne yet, let me talk to the boys first. But stay around, and if she rings, you answer it, and ask her to go up and dress. Then let me know, and I’ll go in to see her.’

Cornelia went downstairs slowly, but her mind was galloping. Between the top step and the lowest one, she had planned the funeral, remembered distant relatives who must be notified, considered Yvette, thought of her house guests, but did not give one second’s thought to her own plans or the arrangements for her own well being.

She was in the living-room but a few moments when Craig came, and, on his heels, Tom.

‘You know?’ she asked, and as they shook their heads wonderingly, she told them.

‘Your Uncle Harley is dead,’ she said, simply. ‘He died in his sleep. I have sent for Doctor Bascom and he will be here soon. There is much to do and many things to be attended to. Just now it is our duty to consider such and leave our personal sorrow to be indulged in later. I hope this does not seem hard-hearted to you, but I realise better than you can, the conditions we must face, and—and I no longer have my brother to help me. I shall rely on you two for advice and assistance, and I know you will not fail me.’

‘You bet we won’t!’ Tom Sheldon crossed the room and sat beside his aunt. ‘We’re willing and glad to help, but you’ll have to direct us, eh, Craig?’

‘Have you told Yvette,’ Craig asked, not answering his cousin.

‘Not yet, I want to speak to you two first. I don’t know what Yvette will want to do. It’s a dreadful situation.’

For the first time, Cornelia’s face showed a helpless look.

‘I think we can feel sure you’ll do the right thing there, Aunt Cornelia,’ Tom said, ‘but there may be trouble with the Village Committee.’

‘I don’t think so,’ his aunt replied. ‘Death cancels all contracts. But those things we must discuss with Mr. Ames and with the lawyer.’

‘Here comes Doctor Bascom,’ Craig said, ‘just driving in the gate. What good can he do?’

‘None,’ Cornelia replied. ‘But it is customary to call him. You boys take him upstairs, won’t you, and I’ll go and see Yvette.’

She went away, and when the doctor came in he found the two cousins awaiting him.

‘Harley Madison sick?’ he said. ‘That will never do! We can’t keep that good man down! Let me at him.’

‘Wait a minute, Doctor,’ Craig said; ‘Uncle Harley is—is dead.’

‘What’s that? What do you mean, young man?’

‘Just what I said. Mr. Madison was found dead in his bed this morning. That’s why my aunt sent for you.’

‘Let me go to him,’ the doctor said, ‘where’s his room, Craig?’

The two cousins went upstairs with him, and the three went into the bed room.

A fine room it was, in the grandeur of a bygone period. Harley’s wife had chosen early American furniture of mahogany, which was very authentic and very heavy. The great bed was a four-poster, dressed with a curtained canopy, bedspread and valance, all like new. And on the pillow lay the head of the dead man, as though he were in a natural sleep. He lay on his left side, straight, but relaxed, and there was no sign of any other than a quiet natural passing.

‘Must have been a stroke?’ Tom said, inquiringly.

‘I can’t think it,’ Bascom replied; he’s only forty-five and sound as a nut. He had no organic trouble of any sort. You chaps leave me here alone for a bit, and I’ll examine him further. It’s the strangest thing I ever saw.’

‘Curare?’ asked the irrepressible Tom.

Doctor Bascom stared at him. ‘Certainly not. There is no hint of poison. But that, too, awaits further examination. Clear out, you two. And send me that handy-man, Garson, I mean.’

Meantime, Cornelia had gone on her difficult errand to tell Yvette the shocking news. She was uncertain how the girl would act, and almost equally uncertain how she wanted her to act. But she wanted her to go away, that was certain. So long as Harley had wanted her, it was all right, and she could stay, but now there was no Harley to want her, Miss Madison hoped the very disturbing young woman would go.

Yvette was waiting for her with a breakfast tray for two nearby. She smiled as Miss Cornelia came in, and offered a seat at the little table.



‘Hetty told me nothing,’ she said, ‘but that you are busy and troubled. So I just know a cup of hot coffee will help a little.’

Cornelia sat down, and took a cup of coffee from Yvette, which she proceeded to sip slowly but steadily until she finished it. Then she spoke.

‘I have sad hews for you, dear,’ Cornelia began.

Yvette’s hand flew to her throat. ‘Not Harley?’ she breathed, dramatically.

Through her own kaleidoscope of thoughts Cornelia’s brain registered this seizure of the dramatic situation, by the clever actress.

‘Yes,’ Cornelia said, gently; ‘yet, my dear, and I think you would rather be told frankly than to have me try to prepare you for it.’

‘Oh,’ Yvette’s eyes widened, ‘Is he dead? Don’t—don’t say that!’

Cornelia hardened a little. She hated anything like dramatics off stage, and she didn’t want to take care of a hysterical girl.

‘Yes, he is,’ she said, tenderly. ‘I feel more sorry for you, my dear, than I can tell you, but I have to ask you not to make a scene. I have so much to do. I have not yet told my guests, and I hoped I could depend on you for help. Real help, I mean, like telling Anita and Laura Lee.’

‘I want to help you, Miss Cornelia, I really do, but I have to run in to New York this morning. It is an imperative errand, one that affects my whole professional future. Please make no objection to my going, and I will come right back, and then I will help you. But do you realise that I have as much right to grieve over Harley as you have? More right, indeed, for had he lived my relation to him would be far closer than your own.’

‘I know, my dear, and I have every sympathy for you. Yes, go to New York, since it is so important, but come back early, can’t you? I daresay, I hope, Anita and Laura will go home to-day. I have to see the village people, you know, they will all call, out of both kindness and curiosity. And then—then, Yvette, there is the question of the Village Improvement Plan. What will happen about that? But I must not bother you with these things. Nor do I want to. It was only that I forgot myself for a moment. I have my duties and I can see them clearly. I shall attend to them properly.’

‘Do you know you haven’t told me anything about Harley? What did he die of? Is there any reason I shouldn’t know?’

Cornelia was horrified at herself. She hadn’t meant to be cruel to Yvette, but she was distracted, and the girl did put on theatrical airs.

‘I am sorry,’ she said, sincerely. ‘I beg your pardon, but I am under great nervous strain. Harley was found dead in his bed this morning, by Wilkins and Elkanah. Doctor Bascom is with him now, and I suppose he will say it was a stroke. I will go and find out and come back and tell you.’

‘I will bring back a black frock or two with me. I can’t seem to think. To be in the seventh heaven last night, and in the depths of woe this morning! I don’t know how to stand it!’

Fearing histrionics, Cornelia went away, but she realised she must tell the other women herself. Yvette would not be back in time. However, Anita had overheard things that made her curious and had ferreted the whole story out of Rosie. She sympathised with Cornelia, when she told her, and asked but one question. She said,

‘Then, Cornelia, he died intestate, didn’t he?’

## **Chapter 11**

DOCTOR BASCOM came downstairs to find the living-room a scene of leave-takings. Laura and George Lee were telling Cornelia they felt it was kinder to her for them to go home than to stay.

Gifford Hale was saying pretty much the same thing, but he was thinking that if there was any possibility of this death being a matter of inquiry, he’d rather get out while the getting was good.

Cornelia was truly glad to have them go. She was harassed by vague fears as to the men in the village who had become unfriendly to Harley. But as the guests drove away, Doctor Bascom demanded her attention. He was a doctor of the old school, which would have been nothing against him, if he had kept up with the discoveries and inventions of the new schools, too. Though less than average height, he believed he had an impressive presence.

‘Miss Madison,’ he said, ‘I am now in a position to state my findings in the case of your brother’s demise. As his attending physician, I can say positively, that Harley Madison was a well man. He had no organic troubles, no infirmities of age were upon him, and there is no indication of any illness that could account for his sudden death. Yet there must have been a reason. It must have been a disease of the heart of which I knew nothing. Such affections of the heart do sometimes develop suddenly, and bring about an unlooked for death. I do not declare positively that this is what happened in Mr. Madison’s case, it will require an autopsy to prove it. I cannot grant a burial certificate, the way matters stand, and I desire to call a colleague in consultation.’

‘Very well, Doctor Bascom,’ Cornelia said: ‘I am perfectly willing you should have a consultation. Whom do you think of calling?’

‘As the Assistant Medical Examiner is a friend of mine, I would like to ask him to come and give us his opinion.’

‘Why,’ Craig exclaimed, ‘I thought he was called only in case of somebody being killed.’

‘I don’t diagnose it that way,’ Bascom said, ‘but I hold that it is a mysterious death, and I feel sure if I called in another physician, he would at once send for the Medical Examiner, so I may as well call him myself.’

‘Very well,’ Cornelia said, wearily. ‘It is in your hands, Doctor Bascom. I want you to do what is right.’

‘Then I shall call Doctor Fenn.’

Acting on impulse, but sure he was doing right, Craig called Fleming Stone on the telephone. The two were good friends. Stone had taken a liking to the quick-witted and good-looking young man, and Craig looked upon the detective with hero-worship.

‘Natural death, isn’t it?’ asked Stone. ‘Why call me?’

‘The uncelebrated physician in charge of this hamlet says it is, but he also says it is mysterious.’

‘I’ll run over at once, if you say so.’

Fleming stone reached the scene of Harley Madison’s ‘mysterious death’ before the arrival of the Assistant Medical Examiner. Craig welcomed him and introduced him to Cornelia, who liked him at once. Everybody liked Stone. Intelligence and humor shone from his deep-set gray eyes, under their heavy brows. And he liked Cornelia. He recognised her fineness, her true aristocracy and her gentle dignity.

Anita planned to make a friend of him. Doctor Bascom was quite overcome with delight at the idea of working with the great man. For that was what it must come to. If Hurley Madison did not die a natural death, from a stroke or a heart attack, and Bascom earnestly hoped he hadn’t, then it was a case of homicide, and what marvellous good fortune to have Fleming stone right at hand.

‘I welcome you, sir,’ he said, grasping Stone’s hand. ‘I expect Doctor Fenn, our Assistant Medical Examiner, and with his skill and your own experience and my own humble assistance, what can we not achieve?’

‘What is to be achieved, Doctor Bascom?’ Stone asked. ‘Since you have sent for the Medical Examiner, and since you look forward to any possible help, you must have a suspicion of homicide. Have you?’

‘I can’t say that I have, Mr. Stone. And yet, I cannot say that I haven’t.’

Stone wanted to say, ‘Then why talk at all?’ but he restrained his desire and said, instead: ‘You are quite right not to express an opinion, if you haven’t one. Has Mr. Madison been ill?’

‘No.’ Cornelia answered, ‘he has never been ill in his life, so far as I know. He went to bed last night, to all appearances in his usual perfect state of health; and this morning he is dead.’

‘Why do you call it a mysterious death, Doctor, Bascom, when you mean only that you cannot discover the cause without an autopsy?’

Stone put no adverse criticism in his voice, but there was a hint of arraigning the doctor, who resented it. Yet he swallowed his resentment, and said:

‘It is mysterious to me because I knew the late Mr. Madison so well, and I know he had no conditions or symptoms that would make probable a stroke. We doctors learn our patients from studying their actions and reactions.’

When the Medical Examiner came, he too expressed satisfaction at seeing Fleming Stone there. The two men had met occasionally in matters of criminal investigation, and Fenn wondered whether Harley Madison’s death was due to crime.

The examiner turned to Bascom.

‘Mr. Madison was your patient?’ he asked.

‘Yes, Doctor Fenn, if one may use the term patient for a man who was never ill. I have seldom seen a human being so absolutely healthy and free from even minor ailments.’

‘And what caused his death?’

‘I don’t know. And that is why I call it mysterious. I have made all the tests and examinations, but I can find no reason for his demise.’

‘Then, it must be a matter of an autopsy. May I see him?’

‘Yes, of course.’

‘Let’s take Stone along,’ Doctor Fenn said; ‘he’s a wizard at finding out things that you and I might overlook.’

‘I think we should go by ourselves first,’ Bascom demurred. ‘Mr. Stone, as I understand it, is an investigator, not a member of the medical fraternity.’

‘Yes, go along, you two,’ Stone said; ‘if I can be of any service you can call me.’

The two doctors went upstairs. Then Craig said, ‘I think they should have let you go up with them Stone, I know you think so much of seeing a place before it is touched.’

‘My dear boy,’ Stone said, ‘we’re not talking of a homicide, are we?’

‘Oh, no! no, indeed!’ Craig said, ‘I don’t know what old Bascom means of his “mysterious.” But he’s a pompous old windbag, and loves to stir up excitement.’

‘I don’t think it’s so much that,’ Cornelia told them, ‘as it is his ignorance. My brother could have died from many causes that Doctor Bascom wouldn’t know anything about. He is an experienced, but not a learned man. I am glad Doctor Fenn is here, for he will tell us the reason for my brother’s death. I hope you will stay the night, Mr. Stone, we should all be glad to have you.’

‘Oh, do,’ twittered Anita.

‘Your brother was all right last night?’ Stone asked Cornelia. He was not at all drawn to Anita.

‘Entirely so,’ Cornelia replied. ‘We had a merry evening, and Harley was in the best of spirits, and the best of health. My brother lies as if in quiet sleep. His face is as composed as if he were alive.’

‘Mr. Madison might have eaten something that poisoned him. You had a feast last night?’

‘Yes. But nothing unusual was served. The food and drink was all from our own pantries, and quite the same as we use all the time.’

‘Mr. Madison was at ease in his mind? He had no especial crisis to meet or problems to solve?’

‘Yes,’ Craig put in. ‘He had a big portion of trouble with a lot of ignorant and unreasonable men. He couldn’t placate them, and the situation was getting worse every day. Then, on the other hand, a great happiness had just come into his life. But Uncle was not one to bow his head under mental trouble. He met such things as the mob of belligerent men with haughty scorn. I daresay that made them more angry. In fact he was about to resign from the whole matter, and leave them to shift for themselves. You see, Stone, he was concerned in a project for improving the town. So his brain was often in a moil and sometimes he seemed to be all in.’

‘Uncle Harley died from some physical ailment,’ Sheldon said, ‘even if old Bascom says he didn’t. An autopsy will tell what the trouble was. That is, unless the Examiner can tell by examination. He knows a

lot more than our Bright and Shining Light. By the way, Aunt Corny, Bascom is manoeuvring to have a statue of his blessed self in the rejuvenated New Plymouth.'

'It won't matter what manoeuvres he tries now,' Miss Madison said, with a wan smile, 'the Village Improvement may or may not go on, but I think, without the support, both personal and financial, of my brother, they will find their progress hard sledding.'

'You mean they wanted to makeover this village—modernize it?' Stone asked.

'That was their fond hope,' Craig informed him. 'And as Uncle planned it, at first, it was a good bet. But the ungrateful, pig-headed old back numbers, didn't appreciate Uncle's high ideals and sane propositions, and they turned the whole thing into an Exhibition of Bad Taste.'

'Had they a right to do this?'

'They hadn't really done it, yet, but the thing hung in the balance. Uncle showed his hand too plainly, He promised to put in something like two-thirds of his whole fortune, which would have made a medium-sized Paradise. He expected the others would put in, not nearly so much, but a fair proportion of their own wealth. The citizens are by no means paupers.'

'And then, you see,' Tom added, 'the profiteers! They wanted Uncle to buy their land for this or that purpose, whether it was the right location or not. And they asked such outrageous prices that once in a while Uncle was forced to tell them what he thought of them. This led to angry back talk, and it would be a wonder if the way the curmudgeons acted hadn't affected Uncle's brain. But it didn't. We all agreed to that. Harley Madison was too well-balanced.'

'Well, those racketeers won't get anything from Mr. Madison's estate,' Anita said, with an air of satisfaction, 'for I saw him tear up the will.'

'He died intestate, then?' asked Stone.

'Yes,' said Cornelia, 'his estate must be apportioned by law. I have not told my brother's lawyer yet, but of course, he will have charge of the settlements.'

'Who are the heirs?' asked Stone.

'There are but three, myself and my two nephews,' Miss Madison said.

## **Chapter 12**

FENN and Bascom were baffled. They had reached the conclusion that a post-mortem was distinctly indicated.

'It is, undoubtedly cerebral thrombosis,' the Examiner pronounced; 'but now can it be that, when the man is so relaxed and in a natural position?'

Doctor Bascom sighed. He had expected this great authority would state at once the cause of Madison's death, and would explain its mysterious aspects. Instead of that, Doctor Fenn seemed to know no more than the village G.P.

'Who came in here and saw him dead first?' he asked.

‘Elkanah; he’s a sort of steward, and while he was Mr. Madison’s valet, and he was a lot of other things beside.

‘Can we have him up here?’

‘Of course,’ and Doctor Bascom opened the door to the hall, Elkanah sat on a hall chair, waiting to be summoned.

‘Come in here, Garson,’ the doctor said, and the man obeyed. The Assistant Medical Examiner looked at him and said: ‘You’re the one who first discovered that Mr. Madison was dead? Tell me the circumstances.’

‘Well, sir, every morning, Wilkins, he’s the butler, took Mr. Madison some hot coffee at eight o’clock. That wasn’t his breakfast; it was just a sort of bracer.’

‘And when Wilkins brought the tray, what happened?’

‘Why, nothing. Mr. Madison always locked his hall door as soon as he got in his room. He had a fear of burglars. His winders, as you see, sir, all have those patent gadgets that lets you leave ’em some open, and yet a burglar couldn’t squeeze through.’

‘Then how does the butler get in with the tray of a morning?’

‘Mr. Madison was always awake early, sir. He’d hop outen o’bed and unlock the door, and hop back again. Wilkins would jest walk in, and put the coffee on a little table by the bed, and Mr. Madison helped himself.’

‘And this morning, Mr. Madison hadn’t unlocked the door; did he often forget?’

‘No, sir! Mr. Madison never forgot. And he didn’t forget it this morning, either—how could he, when he was dead?’

‘What did Wilkins do?’

‘He knocked, but soft like, cause he didn’t want to disturb other folks a-sleeping. And when there wasn’t no answer, he come downstairs alooking for me.’

‘What did you do?’

‘Well, sir, there’s no way to get into this room, ’cept through that one door. That other door there, goes into the bathroom, so I ups with a long, ladder, and looks in the window, and I see Mr. Madison lyin’ in bed like he was asleep.’

‘But I know he ain’t asleep. I sensed there was somethin’ the matter, soon’s I heard the door was locked. I was so sure I’d have to get in the winder, I took some tools with me up the ladder, and I cut out a ring around of the glass, and poked in my hand and turned the catch. Then o’course, I clumb in the winder, and I found him.’

‘What did you do then?’

‘I called Hetty, that’s my wife, and I told her to go and tell Miss Madison about her brother. My wife’s the housekeeper, but she and Miss Madison has always been friends like, and I knew Hetty could tell her gentle and respectful.’

But the Medical Examiner had ceased to listen; he was looking about the room, and staring at the walls. ‘I say, Doctor Bascom, would you be willing for Fleming Stone to come up here—now?’

‘Why, of course, Doctor Fenn,’ Bascom replied, but he was not enthusiastic. He had hoped to acquire merit by working with the Examiner, but he hadn’t acquired any, noticeably. And now, if the great detective came into the investigation, he, Bascom was not likely to attain any special prominence.

Doctor Fenn was telling Elkanah to go down and bring Mr. Stone up for consultation, if he would be kind enough to come. The errand was successful, and Stone came in, whereupon Fenn dismissed Elkanah, and closed the door.

‘Take a look at him,’ Fenn said, nodding toward the bed, and Stone obeyed.

‘Have you come to a decision?’ he asked.

‘We have come to a decision that we can’t come to a decision, without an autopsy,’ Fenn told him. ‘There is nothing to give us any hint as to the cause of death. But before we take him away, I wanted to call your attention to this room. I should say it is what you detectives call “a hermetically sealed” room. I mean, when Mr. Madison came in, and locked the door that leads into the hall, there was no possibility of entrance by any one else. This doesn’t matter, since we have no reason to think any ill intentioned person did intrude.’

‘No way in?’ said Stone, musingly. ‘There are five doors. May I open them?’

‘Of course,’ said Bascom. ‘They lead nowhere.’

The first one Stone tried led into a bathroom. It had no other door, and gave no outlet to the hall. Its one window was a long oval, high up on one wall, and was unavailable as an entrance. The next two were doors of clothes closets. The only other door was fastened with a large and heavy brass bolt. Stone looked at it curiously.

‘Do you know where this leads?’ he asked.

‘No,’ Fenn returned, ‘I thought it was another closet.’

Stone drew the heavy bolt, and found that the door opened into a small, pleasant room, like a sitting-room or reception room.

‘It is not a closet,’ he said, ‘but also it is not an entrance into Mr. Madison’s bedroom.’

‘Why isn’t it?’ asked Fenn, coming nearer.

‘Because this is a spring bolt. See, you can push back the bolt and open the door, but on the other side there is no latch or knob or anything to take hold of. You can open this door from this side, but, if closed it bolts itself and it cannot be opened from the other side at all. So it is of no use as a means of access to our sealed room. Do you mind, Doctor Fenn and Doctor Bascom, if I take a look at the body?’

‘Of course not,’ Fenn said; ‘you have every right to do so.’

Fleming Stone did not wait for a response from the village doctor but turned his attention to the dead man. If he could find a trace of anything that pointed to homicide, he would be very much interested in the question of the sealed room, but if Harley Madison had not been killed, then the closed windows and the locked doors had little interest for the detective. Yet though his practised eye studied every condition of the dead man, he found no hint of ill-treatment and no sign of any wound. Therefore, he concluded the cause of death was some internal ailment, unsuspected even by the patient himself. That was outside his province.

‘I’m sorry,’ he said, ‘that I have been of so little use. But since you feel fairly sure that the autopsy will disclose a physical reason for this death, it doesn’t seem like a mystery—at any rate, not the sort of mystery I can undertake to solve; so I may as well go downstairs again.’

‘Just a minute, Mr. Stone,’ Doctor Bascom said, ‘supposing the result of the autopsy is nothing at all. Suppose it shows nothing wrong with the organs or with the brain, what then?’

‘Isn’t the brain an organ?’ Stone inquired, smiling.

‘Yes, but I mean the abdominal organs. Could a bit of over-eating or over-drinking last night have caused a sort of acute congestion that would cause a stroke of apoplexy?’

‘That we must learn from the autopsy,’ Fenn reiterated. ‘But I believe the man had a brainstorm of some kind.’

‘Did you, Doctor Bascom, say something about cerebral thrombosis?’ Stone asked, looking closely at the dead face.

‘Yes, sir. I did and I still think the face shows that appearance.’

‘I think so, too,’ said Fleming Stone.

Just then there was a quick tap at the door, and without waiting for a response, Cornelia Madison came in. She looked anxious but not excited. She paused by her brother’s bedside, and stood looking down at him for a moment, her face sad, and full of affection. Then she went straight to Fleming Stone, and said:

‘May I trouble you a moment, Mr. Stone?’

‘You cannot be a trouble to me, Miss Madison; what can I do for you?’

‘Do you want us to go away?’ asked Doctor Fenn, politely.

‘Oh, no, no; it is nothing private.’

But Doctor Bascom said he must go, his patients were waiting for him. He left the arranging of the autopsy in the hands of the Examiner, and went away.

‘Mr. Stone,’ Miss Cornelia said, ‘the Madison pearls are missing. They are very valuable, and it would seem they must have been stolen. But I cannot think any one in the house would take them, yet, they are not to be found.’

‘You want me to help find them, Miss Madison?’

‘Oh, yes, yes, indeed.’



‘Where were they seen last?’

‘Mr. Stone, we have had a lady visiting here for a short time. She is Miss Yvette Verne—’

‘The Film Star!’

‘Yes. She is a very lovely girl, and last night my brother announced their engagement.’

‘Yvette Verne and Harley Madison to marry?’

‘Yes—so they hoped. Then, this morning Harley is found dead. Miss Verne told me she must run down to New York, as she had some important matters to attend to, and, too, she wanted to fetch some black gowns to wear while here.’

‘She is staying on with you?’

‘I don’t know. She will be back soon, I think. Last night, after the announcement of the engagement, I brought her the Madison pearls. They are historic, and I told her I would give them to her for a wedding present. I hung them round her neck, and said she might not keep them then, but must return them to me, and on her wedding day she would have them for her very own.’

‘And now we cannot find them. I have looked and my friend Mrs. Boyce has looked, but we cannot find them. I don’t want to tell the servants, just yet, so, I wondered if you could help me out.’

‘I’ll gladly try to. Will you go downstairs, and I will follow you very shortly. I want another word with Doctor Fenn, while I have the opportunity.’

After Cornelia was gone, Stone took up the subject of Madison’s death.

‘What made Doctor Bascom say cerebral thrombosis?’ he inquired.

‘I don’t know, I’m sure,’ Fenn replied. ‘I suppose he thought Madison showed some symptom that suggested it.’

‘Then he ought to have told us. I believe that a sort of cerebral thrombosis is the reason for this death.’

‘A sort of—why, there’s only one sort, and that comes without warning, and is almost always fatal. Why do you think Harley had an attack of that?’

‘Because of the results. I say, Fenn, mind if I make an experiment?’

‘Only a more thorough examination.’ Fenn looked amazed and not very pleased, but he made no objection.

## **Chapter 13**

STONE WENT over to the bed, and taking the head of the dead man in his hands, moved it a very little so that the back of the neck was fully exposed. Taking from his pocket a tiny flashlight, he examined the flesh just at the line of haircut. He discovered a tiny spot, an almost imperceptible indentation of the flesh. He showed it to Fenn, saying, ‘Have you instruments here?’

‘Yes, I have. What is that?’

‘The weapon that killed Harley Madison. What you see is the end of a very slender blade or dart, which was driven into the medulla oblongata, and produced cerebral haemorrhage. The natural in-drawing tendency of the flesh has nearly drawn it in out of sight. Can you get it, with pincers or something?’

‘I’ll have a try at it.’

Doctor Fenn, by dint of some slight incisions, managed to grasp the end of the dart with his pincers and drew it out. It was a metal pin, seemingly about as big as a small awl blade, and was the color of nickel or silver.

‘A diabolical weapon!’ exclaimed the medical examiner. ‘The stab from this dart had the effect of a stroke of apoplexy. I’ll hand it to you, Stone; if you hadn’t been here I should have missed it! And old Bascom never would have found it. I doubt if we’d noticed it at the post mortem.’

‘Oh, of course you would. Now there’s the weapon, we must find the criminal.’

‘Too easy. A film star comes here, gets herself engaged to the old man, has the family pearls given to her, or has lent them to her. She doesn’t want the old man, but she does want the pearls, so she lights out for New York, and, naturally, takes the pearls with her, and I think Miss Madison has seen the last of the pearls and the star.’

‘I don’t see it that way. From some hints I picked up, I think both of those young cousins are in love with the girl, and one of them might have been willing to put Uncle out of the way, in hope of getting the lady.’

‘That’s up your alley. I don’t envy you the job. Have you forgotten the hermetically sealed room?’

‘There’s always a way in. I’ve been up against many kinds of unenterable rooms, but I always found a way in.’

‘Think it was some member of the family, then?’

‘Not yet. I’m leaning toward the Village Fathers. They seem more likely game than this aristocratic family.’

‘We’d better go down and tell them what we’ve found.’ Fenn looked a little sheepish. ‘What you found, I mean. But—’

‘Oh, say you found it. It’s no great honor to me.’

‘All right, and I ought to have found it anyway.’

‘Does it presuppose a criminal with a fund of medical knowledge?’

‘Not quite that,’ Fenn said, ‘but a knowledge of anatomy would be necessary.’

They went downstairs, and found the group as they had left them. As gently as possible, Fenn told them of the discovery that had been made and the inevitable conclusion that Harley Madison had been killed while he slept. A stunned silence followed the news, and then Craig went over and sat by the aunt.

‘Aunt Cornelia,’ he said, ‘this awful blow falls the hardest upon you. I want you to know that my life is dedicated to yours, and I shall watch over you as carefully as Uncle Harley did.’

Cornelia clasped his hand, and said, in firm, clear tones: ‘This crime shall be avenged, Mr. Stone, will you take the case?’

When Assistant District Attorney Sutton arrived at Silver Hill, Wilkins showed him into a reception room.

‘I would like to see Miss Madison, if convenient,’ Sutton said. ‘And also Doctor Fenn, if he is still here.’ Fenn came first, and welcomed his colleague.

‘Widespread case,’ he said, in low tones. ‘And ramifications and minor mysteries—in fact, baffling.’

Cornelia came then, and Fenn introduced Sutton and the three sat down.

‘We must waste no time,’ Sutton said. ‘Miss Madison, do you feel equal to the ordeal of my preliminary questioning, or would you prefer not to be present, and send one or both of your nephews?’

‘No,’ Cornelia told him, ‘my personal feelings are not to be considered in the work we have before us. My grief and sorrow at my loss, only time, can help; but I want above all things, justice, and if you can find the murderer of my brother and bring him to justice, I shall feel that I have done my duty.’

‘I understand you have Mr. Stone with you. He will be a powerful assistant.’

‘What do you do first, Mr. Sutton? I am entirely unversed in these matters.’

‘I think first of all I should like to call your family and make some general inquiries, and after that, question this one or that one alone.’

‘Very well, then we must go to a larger room. I suppose you would first find out how anybody could get into my brother’s room. I know this house so well, you see, and I know nobody could get in when his hall door was locked.’

‘A sealed room used to be a great mystery, Miss Madison, but I think Mr. Stone will tell you that they usually give up their secrets to him. You have guests?’

‘Only one, at this moment. Three left this morning?’

‘They should not have been allowed to go!’

‘I knew no reason to detain them. You cannot possibly suspect any of the family or guests—or my servants!’

‘It is too soon to suspect anybody yet. Let us get the people together.’

They went to the living-room, where they found Fleming Stone and the two Madison men, also Everett Ames. Anita was there, too, and Miss Madison said: ‘I have another house guest, Miss Yvette Verne. But she has gone to New York on some errand and will be back later.’

‘Looking toward a possible motive,’ Sutton began, ‘can any of you suggest some one who would have gained financially by Mr. Madison’s death?’

As no one else spoke, Ames answered this question.

‘On the contrary, Mr. Sutton, Last night before he died, Mr. Madison destroyed his will, meaning to make a new one this morning. Unless his lawyer has a valid will, of some past date, Mr. Madison died intestate. This, I may say, must remove suspicion from the men in the village, who were unfriendly towards him, but for personal reasons.’

‘Those men must be taken into consideration, of course. But did they know that Mr. Madison had destroyed his will? Might they not have thought that his death would result in their getting a large sum of money at once?’

‘That’s so. They couldn’t have known about his tearing up his will last night. But that doesn’t let them out, for, as I was Mr. Madison’s confidential secretary, I know that one or two of them had serious ill-feeling against him, for some reasons outside of money matters.’

‘Those things will be taken up in due course. I want a brief account of last evening’s doings. Perhaps you will give it to me, Mrs. Boyce?’

‘Me!’ Anita fluttered her pretty hands and looked distracted. ‘Oh, I don’t believe I can.’

‘Try, anyway.’

‘Oh, well—all right.’ Anita preened and smiled, until Cornelia wanted to spank her. ‘Well, you see, we were all in this room—this very room, and Harley—poor, dear Harley!’ she paused to dab at her eyes with a large chiffon handkerchief, ‘Harley, Mr. Madison, you know, stood up, and told us he was engaged to Miss Verne—’

‘Begin farther back,’ Sutton, interrupted, looking annoyed. ‘Who were in the party?’

‘Why, all of us; Miss Madison, and Craig and Tom, and Mr. Ames. They all live here. Then the guests were Mr. and Mrs. George Lee and Mr. Gifford Hale, and Miss Verne, the film star, and me—that’s all.’

‘And then Mr. Madison announced his engagement?’

‘Yes; and we were all so surprised! I mean, most of us were. Maybe some knew it before. But me you could have knocked me down with a feather! Well, it was lovely; everybody was so pleased and glad, and Miss Madison went and brought the Madison pearl necklace and hung it round Yvette’s neck, and we drank their health, and we danced, and everything!’

‘And what time did you go up to bed?’

‘I haven’t the least idea. I went up when the Lees did.’

‘Who can tell me at about what time the party broke up?’

‘I guess I can,’ offered Craig. ‘It wasn’t so very late. About one o’clock Aunt Cornelia said Yvette was getting tired, and she was going to take her to bed. So they went upstairs then, and soon after, I remember Laura Lee said they would go, and she and her husband followed. Us fellows trailed along after that, and Uncle Harley was the last one. I said good-night to him, and left him finishing a cigar. He was sitting in that big easy chair, and looked as happy as could be. I thought maybe he wanted to think things over, so I didn’t stay and talk, but went along to bed.’

‘Do you know what time your uncle went upstairs?’

‘I do. His room is next to mine, and I heard him in there, not much later. He didn’t stay down very long, but as to the time, I’ve no idea.’

‘Say Miss Madison went upstairs at one o’clock, then do you think all the others would have been up by half-past one?’

‘Why, yes, I should say so. Maybe a bit later, but by a quarter to two, anyhow.’

‘These things are of utmost importance. Now, will each of you say exactly what you did on going upstairs, Miss Madison?’

‘I went up with Miss Verne,’ Cornelia said, ‘and we paused a moment before she opened the door. I was telling her how glad I was that my brother was so happy, and she looked so lovely, I hated to leave her. I kissed her good-night, and went to my own room. I went right to bed and right to sleep, for what with the excitement and all, I was very tired.’

‘You didn’t hear your brother come up?’

‘Oh, no. His room is at the other end of the house.’

Sutton spoke to Craig. ‘You are older, Mr. Madison, than your cousin, are you not?’

‘Yes, three years older.’

‘Did you hear any noise in the night?’

‘Not a sound. I sleep very soundly, and too, this old house is well built, and the walls and floors are so thick, sounds are seldom heard. Is it known at what time my uncle was—attacked?’

‘The doctors say, between three and four o’clock this morning. But that is not a positive statement.’

‘I heard no sounds of any sort, until I awoke this morning.’

‘Mr. Sheldon?’

Tom Sheldon’s story was almost the same as Craig’s. His room was beyond Craig’s, and he too, slept soundly through the small hours. Sutton did not put these questions to Anita. He was sure if she knew anything about the circumstances, she would broadcast the knowledge, without being requested.

## **Chapter 14**

SUTTON next called on Everett Ames.

‘As to last evening, Mr. Ames,’ he began, ‘you went upstairs about the time Mr. Madison and Mr. Sheldon did?’

‘Yes, I walked up with Tom, but we didn’t stop in the hall. We went to our rooms at once. My room is on the other side of the hall, it’s a long cross-hall, and I got to bed as quickly as I could, for I knew I’d have a lot of work to do to-day, letters to be written, and plans to be made, for I knew Mr. Madison was going to

make a new will, and then there was the whole matter of the village improvement, and what was going to happen to that. As it is, I have plenty of unfinished work and if you can excuse me?’

‘Yes, yes, go along, Mr. Ames. If I want you further I’ll let you know. Now I’d like to see the man who first saw Mr. Madison, this morning.’

Elkanah was summoned, and close behind him, walked Hetty, his wife. She half expected to be sent away, but Sutton made no objection to her presence. The pair sat down stiffly, in two straight chairs. Sutton addressed Elkanah first, saying: ‘When did you last see Mr. Madison alive?’

Elkanah stared. The question was so different from what he had expected, it fair took his breath away. He opened his mouth two or three limes, but shut it each time, without a sound. Nonchalantly, Hetty answered for him.

‘He’s kinda dumb sir,’ she said, apologetically; ‘he seen Mr. Madison last, when he was serving refreshments in here, sir, right after Mr. Madison having told he was betokened to the stage lady.’

‘Miss Verne?’

‘Yes, sir. They had champagne and them extra fancy sangwidges, which that Wilkins is a dabster at makin’ if there ever was one!’

‘Thank you, Mrs. Garson. Be quiet, now, while I talk to your husband.’

Hetty was nobody’s fool, and she realized she had spoken out of turn. Her cheeks reddened, she stared at one face after another, until Cornelia caught her eye. Then Cornelia shook her head, with a special shake that Hetty well understood, and immediately obeyed.

‘Now, Mr. Garson, why did you get into Mr. Madison’s room by means of a ladder? Was there no way to get in otherwise?’

‘Not a chance, sir. I’ve lived here many years, and I know all about the doors and windows, sir. That I do. But Mr. Madison had a mortal fear of burglars. He locked himself in his room. So I clumb the ladder, sir. And when I see him lyin’ so quiet like in his bed, at ha’ past eight, I was sure somethin’ was the matter with him. I only thought he was sick or the like o’ that, but never before had he left his door locked against his morning coffee. Well, as there was no other way in, I cut a hole in the winder, near to the fastening, and I reached in and turned the catch.’

‘What did you cut the window with? Your jack-knife?’

‘No, sir, a glass-cutter, and things.’

‘How is it you were so spry getting in the window?’

Elkanah was unmoved by Sutton’s insinuation. He gazed at him, calmly, and said, ‘Why, I just know that since Mr. Madison’s hall door was locked, there was no other way to get in his room, ’cept through a winder, which I done.’

‘Then what did you do, when you got inside?’

‘I looked at him good, and I saw he was dead.’

‘Did you touch him?’

‘I laid my hand on his hand, and it was icy cold.’

‘And then?’

‘Oh, then I told my wife to tell Miss Madison, and she would give orders.’

‘Elkanah, you say that nobody could get into Mr. Madison’s room by any doors? It had to be by breaking a window?’

‘I do say so, sir.’

‘Then how did the murderer get in?’

‘There’s no answer to that, sir, except that it was a miracle.’

‘Are the outside doors to the house all locked at night?’

‘Tight as a drum, sir. I look after that myself. Wilkins, he goes around and locks everything, doors and winders, but I traipse after him, makin’ sure he does it all proper.’

‘You did this last night?’

‘I sure did. Mr. Madison was the last one up, and after he went up, I flew around, me and Wilkins, and locked everything that would lock.’

‘Then it would be difficult for anyone to get into the house at all?’

‘Impossible, sir. Some of the house is air-conditioned and some ain’t. Mr. Madison, he wouldn’t have it in his room, he liked his air ripened on the trees.’

‘Then, it would be more difficult for a marauder from outside to get into Mr. Madison’s room, than for some one who lives in the house?’

‘If you put it that way, sir. The outsider would have to bust an outside door down, and then bust into Mr. Madison’s bedroom; the one who lives in the house, would only need to break in Mr. Madison’s bedroom door.’

‘And no doors were forced open?’

Elkanah looked up suddenly, as if about to resent the idle question, but he said only, ‘If they had been ’twould have been reported, sir.’

Sutton turned to his listeners.

‘As you can see for yourselves,’ he said, ‘the conditions are very mysterious. We have an unenterable house and an unenterable room. Yet somebody got into that room and killed its occupant while he slept. This intruder must have been one already in the house, or some one who managed to get inside. I am not questioning the veracity of this witness, but mistakes do occur at most unexpected times and places, and we must agree it is possible that a door or window might have escaped the attention of these two trusty

attendants. But even so, the marauder would have had to get into the room of Mr. Madison, so that I may say, there is little to choose between the probability of an outsider and one who slept under this roof.'

An uneasy rustling and moving about proved the audience ill-pleased at this statement.

Craig spoke: 'I cannot think, Mr. Sutton, that you are imagining my uncle's murder could be the deed of any of us in the family, as such an implication is unthinkable to any one. And if you are suggesting the servants, I want to put in a word for them. They are a trustworthy lot, most of them having been here for years and years. Not one of them has ever had a thought of disloyalty or a feeling of rancor toward any member of the family. This I can swear to, and I know, my aunt, Miss Madison, will corroborate my words.'

'I do,' Cornelia said; 'it is impossible to suspect the servants, and no one in his senses could imagine any member of the family harboring an evil thought against Harley Madison, who loved and cared for us all. It seems to me a maniac must be responsible for our tragedy, and one who was diabolically clever enough to manage a way to get into the house.'

Fleming Stone volunteered a question.

'Miss Madison, are you sure there is no secret passage to your brother's room?'

'I am positive, Mr. Stone, that there is not. My father built this house, and my brother has added many rooms to it. We are all interested in architecture. Craig is making it his life work, and I always followed my brother's suggestions about this house, and sometimes improved upon them. We worked together in all ways. So you see, if he had added any such feature as a secret panel, I should have known of it.'

'No trap door, or some such ordinary appliance?'

'No,' Cornelia said.

'I'm sure, too,' Craig said. 'Of course, studying the subject, I naturally have an interest in the plans of my own home, and I have the plans of this house, both with and without additions, so I may say I know every inch of it by heart.'

'Could Mr. Madison have given a key to the house to some friend of his, in connection with their village plans?'

'No,' said Everett Ames, who had returned to listen to the inquiry. 'Had he done such a thing, I should have known it. I was not only Mr. Madison's confidential secretary, but he depended on me to remember things for him, to remind him of engagements and to see to it that he kept his promises and carried out his plans. This does not mean that Mr. Madison's mind was anything but alert and keen as ever. But it saved him care and bother for me to jog his memory now and then. He was a remarkable man. His intellect was of the finest, his understanding was limitless, and his judgment always wise and sound. But he was in rather hot water with these village men, and yet, it all came about, because of their ingratitude to their great benefactor, and because of petty jealousies and bickerings among themselves. These things were bad enough, but of late, they have shown ill-feeling toward Mr. Madison, and have even expressed threats against him. That is why, I think, Mr. Madison's death lies at the hands of one of these belligerent minded men.'

'It may be so,' Sutton declared, 'for, granting the evil-minded man from the village got into the house, in some way, he still had to enter the bedroom, which puts his case level with that of an inmate of the house. Could it be that Mr. Madison gave this person a key to the house door, and also a key to his bedroom?'



Cornelia looked both offended and scornful.

‘It is absurd to imagine any such goings on the part of my brother,’ she said. ‘Harley was one of the most conventional of men. We sometimes thought him too formal. He would never receive a caller in his bedroom, and wearing pyjamas! He was not that sort of man. If he had given a key to some village man, and the man had come here, Harley would have received him downstairs, with decorum and courtesy.’

‘That’s all true.’ Tom Sheldon put in. ‘Uncle was not at all eccentric. Nor was he a man who would give a key to his house to anybody on earth except his own family.’

‘I surmised that,’ Sutton said, ‘and I am glad to have it in words. But somebody did get in his room, and did come away again, leaving this room locked, with an old-fashioned key. Is there a duplicate key?’

‘No, they ain’t!’ Elkanah intruded. ‘Mister Madison was mighty fond of that key. It’s an antic, and Mr. Madison had a great time gettin’ a lock made that he could use it in. No, sir. they ain’t no duplecate, and he never lent that key to anybody.’

## **Chapter 15**

‘I AM INTERESTED in these Village Fathers, who seem to take their paternity in a strange way,’ Stone said. ‘I should like to talk with some of them, but I suppose that would not be an easy matter to arrange.’

‘I don’t see why not,’ Craig said; ‘I’ll take you to see them, when you like.’

‘Thank you, we’ll see about it,’ and Stone looked thoughtful.

‘Too bad,’ Sutton was saying, ‘You let your guests go away this morning. They should have been kept here, for questioning.’

‘They don’t know anything,’ Sheldon declared. ‘Gifford Hale was a stranger practically, and George and Laura Lee are old friends. And one of the others, who left this morning, is returning now.’

Yvette Verne’s smart little car came up the avenue from the gate, Craig hurried to the front, door. He met the girl on the porch, and grasped her hands.

‘What have you done to yourself?’ he cried. ‘Do you have to wear such awful black black? It changes you entirely.’

‘It isn’t that that changes me, Craig. I’ve done my hair differently, it’s what they call up, and I have to be in the fashion, you know; Are they holding an inquest?’

‘No. Come along in.’

‘Are there policemen and all that?’

‘Not where we are. But there are some in the house. Never mind that. How sweet you look. I think I like your hair that way, though it changes you. Yvette, can you take it? Being questioned and all that?’

‘Why, yes, of course. Though I don’t know anything to tell them. I didn’t kill Harley.’

‘Of course not. But the Medical Examiner is a keen one. I mean, he’ll ask you all sorts of questions, trying to trip you up, you know. But whatever you do, don’t hesitate and stammer, or try to think. Just speak up quick and bright. Tell the exact truth.’

‘You don’t mean they suspect, me of killing my fiancé! Nonsense! I mean it’s nonsense for you to talk as you do. I don’t believe I do want to go in there.’

‘You’ll have to. Come on, put up a brave front.’

‘I think you’re out of your head! Come on, then, take me in.’

They went in the living-room, where the inquiry was being held. Cornelia greeted her, and told her she must take her place with the family, by reason of her betrothal to Harley.

She introduced Stone and Sutton, and then took the girl to sit beside her.

‘I want to tell you,’ Yvette said. ‘Will you all call me Avis, please? You see, I am deeply interested in that strange science called Numerology. And I had word from them this morning that I must use the name Avis instead of Yvette. I can’t explain it all now, and I’m sorry to have interrupted you.’

‘That’s all right, Miss Verne,’ Sutton said.

But with all the willingness in the world, she could give Sutton little information. She told of meeting Craig at a party in New York, and accepting his invitation for a week-end house party. She told of coming to Silver Hill, and said that she, and Harley Madison felt attracted to one another from the very first. That their affection grew rapidly, and when he told her that it was love at first sight with him, she confessed that it was with her, too, and they became engaged. It was announced the night before, and then in the morning she learned that Mr. Madison was dead. She had an important engagement in the city with her producer, and she had to go in to see about it. It was all right now, and she could stay at Silver Hill as long as she was needed for inquiry or assistance of any sort, and then she would go away.

Fleming Stone remembered having seen her at the cocktail party. Here, Stone asked her where she had put the Madison pearls for safety last night.

‘Why, I put them in the jewel case, the one that stands on the small table by the window.’

‘They are not there,’ Cornelia said.

‘Then someone has taken them,’ Avis said, with spirit. ‘I meant to tell you, as I left, Miss Cornelia, that they were there and for you to get them and put them away. I know nothing further about them.’

She tried to speak calmly, but her voice trembled. She felt already accused of theft, and added to the tragedy of Harley’s death, it seemed too much to bear. She rose and went quickly upstairs to her own room. Avis, as she preferred to be called, sat by her window and looked out across the lawns, to the woods and the hills beyond.

A tap at her door, and she opened it to admit Cornelia.

‘I want a little talk with you,’ Miss Madison said, taking the chair Avis offered. ‘And I wish you wouldn’t wear that all black dress. It isn’t becoming to you at all, and it is so doleful looking.’

‘I’ll change it, certainly.’

‘What’s all this about your name? Is it a new cult you’re talking about?’

‘Not a cult, just a fad. And I don’t think its numerology exactly, but some word like that. If your name is out of harmony with your soul theme, you ought to change it. They, the society, tell you what name to use.’

‘For what result?’

‘Oh, for your general betterment and happier living. I’ll send for their book for you, if you want it.’

‘Yes, do. I like new fads. Now; about the pearls. You can’t have left them here in your room; since they are not here now. You must have taken them with you, and lost them or—left them in New York.’

‘Do you mean I have stolen them?’ Avis did not raise her voice, but resentment and rising wrath were expressed in her face.

‘I shall not think so, if you give the necklace to me at once. It is not in the jewel case. Where is it?’

‘I do not know. You lent me the necklace to wear last evening. It was a kindly thought, and I should have given it back to you before I slept. But I forgot to do so, and when I took it off, here in my room, I thought I would take it to you then. But I disliked to disturb you, so I left it till morning. This morning I overslept a little, and had only time to get off to New York for my appointment.’

‘What was your appointment?’

Avis raised her brows a little. ‘To meet my manager, who wanted to tell me of a new picture he has in mind to produce.’

‘And you ran off giving no thought to the Madison pearls! I’m sorry that I have to feel a slight doubt—but the servants here are absolutely above suspicion. I hate to think ill of you, but—’ Cornelia broke down and dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief.

‘Don’t do that!’ cried Avis; ‘why your eyes are all red and inflamed. Here let me help you.’

She ran to her bathroom, and came back with some healing lotion and some cotton pads. She made the application and was so gentle and sympathetic, that Cornelia forgot her anger and received the ministrations gratefully.

‘Now, Miss Cornelia,’ Avis said, ‘let me tell you once for all, that I have not stolen your pearls, that I have not the slightest idea where they are, but that I shall be glad to help you find them, and if we can’t do that, why not ask Fleming Stone to do so? Surely a detective of his standing could accomplish that. Let’s go and see him about it.’

‘No, I’ll call him to us here.’ Cornelia rang a bell, and gave orders that Mr. Stone come up to Miss Verne’s rooms when at leisure. Soon the detective was with them.

‘I am asking your help, Mr. Stone,’ Avis asked, ‘for I fear I am under suspicion of a theft of which I am entirely innocent.’

‘You are referring to the Madison pearls?’ Stone asked.

‘Yes; this morning, when I went to New York, I left them in that jewel case over there, and I return to find them missing and myself under suspicion of stealing them.’

‘Oh, now, now, Avis, I didn’t say that,’ and Cornelia looked embarrassed.

‘Then what did you say?’

‘I said you might have mislaid them. You might have thought, you left them there, when really, you put them in some other box or drawer.’

Fleming Stone put his hand in his pocket and brought out a handful of white, softly brilliant pearls.

‘Could these be the ones?’ he said, smiling.

‘Oh, yes!’ Cornelia held out her hands for them.

‘Where did you find them?’

‘You ought to have known. Where would you expect them to be, if not in their rightful place? Where were they often, not in your possession, but with your full consent, in another’s?’

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ Cornelia said, looking really puzzled.

‘Well, Miss Madison, I found the Madison necklace hanging around the neck of your cook, Mrs. Quinn, as she was working over the fire in your kitchen!’

‘Now, how did you ever think of that!’ Cornelia exclaimed.

‘I didn’t. One of the detectives from the Homicide Bureau—the house is full of them—came to me and said the cook was wearing magnificent pearls under her dress. I went to investigate and found the Quinn person, a foreigner of some sort. She couldn’t understand me at first, but when I saw the pearls, only partly concealed by her bodice, she beamed with smiles, took them right off, and handed them over.’

‘Yes, she talks very little English. Avis, dear, I am sorry if I was rude to you, but you must forgive me. I am under a great stress.’

‘Yes, I know you are, Miss Cornelia, but I don’t quite understand. Did Mrs. Quinn take the pearls from here?’

‘I suppose so,’ Cornelia said, carelessly, ‘she picks them up anywhere.’

‘And wears them?’

‘Oh, yes; I want her to.’

Stone was blankly amazed. ‘Why do you want her to wear your jewels, Miss Madison?’ Stone asked.

‘Oh, I thought you knew that. Why, you see, pearls lose their luster and go dull and lifeless, unless they are much of the time in a very warm place. So, Mrs. Quinn wears my pearls under her dress a good deal of the time—enough to keep them in proper condition. She is always in the kitchen, and often standing over

the stove, and the pearls respond to the heat, and keep their beautiful sheen. It is understood she is to take them any morning after I have worn them the night before.'

'And you forgot that the cook might have them?' Avis asked.

'Yes, I did,' and Cornelia looked apologetic.

'Lock up the pearls, Miss Madison,' Stone, advised, 'and then take me if you will, to your brother's room. That holds a problem that must be solved.'

'Very well; will you come, Avis?'

## **Chapter 16**

DOWNSTAIRS, at Silver Hill, the great hall ran straight through the main building, from front to back, with many rooms on either side. A broad staircase went up at the back of the hall, and branched both ways on a spacious landing. Upstairs, the hall ran the other way, across the wide house.

Harley's room was at the east end of the long row of front rooms, and Cornelia's at the extreme west end. Craig's room was next to his uncle's and Tom Sheldon's next to Cornelia's.

The other front rooms were guest rooms, including the suite always given to Anita, when she came for her visits. Across the hall, the rooms looked out on pleasant scenery, with the Ivy Arbor, Rose Pergolas and the various summer houses or shelters, and a fountain. Miss Verne's rooms were on this north side.

As they crossed the hall, Craig came out of his own rooms, and joined them. They entered Harley's bedroom.

Stone paused to look at the great key that Elkanah, Hetty's husband, had described. It was an antique, without beauty or grace, but suggestive of a strong lock turned by a strong hand. It had no particular interest for the detective, but he thought it would be a most inconvenient thing to lend to a friend in order that he might make a secret entry. And surely that lock, with its curious wards, would open to no other key. Inside, they all stood looking at Harley's bed.

'Who turned down the bed, and laid out Mr. Madison's night clothes?' Stone asked. 'Hetty?'

'No,' Cornelia replied, 'Elkanah. He was Harley's right hand man.'

'On which side did he sleep, do you know?' Stone asked, after a look at the pillows.

'Always on his left side,' Cornelia said.

Stone noticed how easily a man coming in at the hall door, and finding Madison asleep on his left side, and therefore with his back ready to the intruder, could commit his dreadful deed carefully and quickly.

Craig said, with a sudden recollection; 'Do you know, Mr. Stone, I read a book once, a detective story, and the crime was committed in similar fashion.'

'It is not unknown,' said Stone. 'but it is a method seldom used. It is painless and very sure.'

'It is too horrible to think of,' Cornelia said, 'but I am thankful it was not a painful death.'

‘Come, Avis,’ Craig said, ‘let us go out for a few moments of fresh air. We are of no help here, eh, Mr. Stone?’

‘No, run along. Miss Madison, will you stay just a few moments to help me with your knowledge?’

‘Of course. Change your frock, Avis. Put on something less black, please do.’

Avis promised, and went away with Craig.

Fleming Stone was in his element. Many a time he had discovered an entrance to an allegedly unenterable room, and now he had a chance to do it again. So absorbed was he, he almost forgot Cornelia’s presence. There was a door from the hall, the proper and legitimate entrance, there were three windows, two opening on the front and one at the side looking east. All of these were fastened immovably.

‘Shall we close these windows?’ Stone said. ‘The air is cold to-day.’

The body of Harley Madison had been removed at the orders of the Examiner, and had been taken to the morgue for an autopsy. The bed had been made up and the room tidied, and Hetty had put a vase of flowers on the bedside table.

Cornelia sank down in a great easy chair, and let herself relax a little. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘do close the windows, please.’

‘This is a really beautiful room, though not in the modern style of furnishing. It is just as it was when Mrs. Madison was here?’

‘Yes. My brother wanted nothing changed.’

‘You approved of the marriage?’

‘I was very happy about it. For years my prime object in life has been to see my brother happy, and I have done everything I could for him.’

‘Knowing the plans of this house, as you do, tell me if you can conceive of any way the criminal could have got into this room.’

‘There is no way. After my brother locked his door into the hall, nobody could have come in here, by any possibility.’

‘Why are you so sure?’

‘Because I know so well how the house is built. And you know yourself, there is no way an intruder could enter. Not by a window. That proves itself. The hall door is out of the question. Those three doors in the next wall open into a bathroom and two closets. There remains but this door in the same wall as the hall door.’

‘And does that door open into the hall?’

‘Oh, no; It would do so, but the end of the hall was cut off to make a room, as you see.’

Cornelia went to the door and opened it, disclosing an attractive room, like a small sitting-room.

‘This was Harley’s wife’s room, but after her death, he had it made into a pleasant little place to read or write, both for the family and guests.

## **Chapter 17**

CORNELIA LEFT the room quickly, and Stone knew she was greatly disturbed. Had she heard a word against Craig? Was there anything to hear against Craig?’

Cornelia had left the door partly open, and Stone heard, coming along the hall, Hetty’s heavy tread and Hetty’s not unmusical voice.

‘Dear Saviour, when I langwidge,  
and lay me down ter die,  
oh, send a shinin’ angel-el  
to bear me to the sky.’

She came in, her black silk gown relieved by a small white collar and cuffs, and turned to close the hall door behind her. Stone rose and offered a chair, and Hetty seated herself with deferential dignity.

‘You want to ask me things?’

‘Yes, Hetty, I do. You were here, I believe, when Mr. Madison lived here with his wife?’

‘I certainly was, Mr. Stone; and before that, and since that, and I hope to the Lord, I’ll be here a long time yet.’

‘I hope so. Well, then, when you first told Miss Madison of her brother’s death, early this morning, she said, “Who killed him?” ’

‘May his pot never boil,  
May his clock never tick,  
May his hens never lay,  
whoever the rascalion may have been!’

Hetty declared, with a whole hymn of hate flashing from her small, black eyes.

‘But what did Miss Madison mean by her question? Did she have reason to think he was killed?’

‘Seemin’ly—it would seem be. I never thought of that. You see. I knew he was killed, so I’d no call to fright Miss Cornelia to death by tellin’ her, and yet, she seemed to sense it somehow! Queer, ain’t it?’

‘Yes, very queer.’

Something in Stone’s tone, made her look at him sharply, and she sensed a hint of suspicion, though of whom she didn’t know. But she was taking no chances, and she hitched her chair nearer to the detective, and shook one fat forefinger in his face.

‘Pray God I’m wrong,’ she said, in a menacing voice, ‘but if so be you’re meanin’ any slur at that angel o’ light and glory, Miss Cornelia Madison?’

‘Heavens, no, Hetty! No breath, of suspicion could ever touch Miss Madison. Don’t be silly! But you must know that somebody in this house will be suspected, because somebody must have done the fearful deed, and the police are ready and anxious to find someone to suspect. I am not asking you, as to the family, but among the staff is there some under-servant, perhaps, or someone who had a grudge against Mr. Madison, who might have brought about his death? Don’t answer too quickly.’

‘Death and the terrors of the grave,  
Stood ’round me with their dismal shade.’

‘Don’t sing now, Hetty. Answer the question I asked, won’t you Hetty?’

‘As to someone in the lot of us, being out of sorts against Mr. Madison, and being so wicked as to kill him? Well, Mr. Stone, there is one, I feel I must mention. He’s an under-gardener, and I can’t see how he coulda got in the house, or in Mr. Madison’s room, but I do say that he had hate and murder in his mind.’

‘What is the man’s name?’

‘He’s an I-talian. Michael Baretta his name is. And he’s bad as they come.’

‘Why did Mr. Madison keep such a scamp on his payroll?’

‘One o’ his charity experiments. He was always for helpin’ lame dogs over stiles, and if a chap came to him with a hard luck story, Mr. Madison, he’d order Wilkins to find a job for him and keep him a while on trial.

‘Most they always ran away with anything they could steal, but once in a while they turned out good. But this here Baretta, he’s bad.’

‘Yes, I know. I’ll see Wilkins about him. Now, tell me more about this queer door with the bolt. Is it used much?’

‘Mostly never, sir. When it was Mrs. Madison’s bedroom, there wasn’t any such heathenish dingus to open and shut it with. It had a Christian knob and lock on it.’

‘Why was it changed?’

‘After Miss Florence died, that’s what we loved to call Mrs. Madison, she was so dear and sweet, Mr. Madison was pestered by people comin’ into his room unintentional like. You see, Miss Florence’s room was made into a regular little settin’ room, complete with writin’ desk and radio and all. Often, the visitors would set there, and like as not, they’d open the door, unmeaning like, and go right into Mr. Madison’s room.’

‘Why didn’t he just put an ordinary lock on it?’

‘It pleased him to have it fixed so he could open it whenever he liked, but other folks couldn’t drop in on him. He’s quite a one for sittin’ in his own room, sir. Well, he had the other side of the door, the sittin’ room side, all painted perty to match the fixin’s in there, and, there was no knob or door handle or latch or anything whatsoever in that room. Then this side, he had a spring bolt put on, and that was what kept it shut. You see, sir, it’s jest like the little spring bolt on a wall cupboard, or a closet door. You can work it from one side, but not the other.’

‘What use did Mr. Madison make of it?’



‘Truth to tell, he didn’t use it very much. Mostly, in summer times. Of a hot night, he’d leave that door open, so the breeze from that great big window could blow round him, yet not direct on him, cause that gave him larynjitters.’

‘Didn’t the door sometimes blow shut, with a bang?’

‘Oh, no, cause it has a spring. Come and see.’

Hetty rose and went to the door, and Stone followed. Sure enough, at the back edge of the door was a slender strong spring, as long, nearly, as the door itself. This was adjustable in strength, so that the door could be made to shut slowly or rapidly at will.

‘Mr. Madison was fond of mechanical appliances, I judge,’ Stone said.

‘Gadget was his middle name,’ Hetty said.

‘That’s what I thought, Hetty. That’s why I think there must be some way of getting into this room, that we don’t any of us know of. There must be! Mr. Madison’s death could not possibly be a suicide, so it was murder. The murderer had to get in this room, and did get in this room—All right, Hetty, and thank you for your help. And don’t repeat a word of our conversation to-day. Promise?’

‘Yes, Mr. Stone, I promise.’

The next morning was given over to a session with the lawyer. Richard Kellogg had had charge of Harley Madison’s legal matters for many years, and the relationship between the two men was none too cordial. For frequently the client insisted on some procedure that the man of law deemed utterly foolish or even stupid. Sometimes Kellogg would voice his opinions with promptness and emphasis, but this always led to such a long and painful discussion, which was sure to end up in Madison’s favor, that of late the lawyer had merely obeyed orders, no matter how much he disapproved of them. The sole reason for this was that he wanted to retain his position as adviser to the millionaire, and feared a dismissal if he disregarded too insistently.

He came to Silver Hill, resolved to make a good impression on the family, for he had strong hopes that he might continue his services to Madison’s heirs. In the study, were gathered Miss Madison and the two nephews, and Everett Ames. The talk was all of the disposal of Harley Madison’s estate.

‘I’ll say he acted like a lunatic!’ stormed Kellogg. ‘To tear up his will before another was drawn! And, crazy fool that he was, he always kept his signed will here in his office, and left only a copy with me. Never was a man so headstrong and so lacking in judgment and business sense—’

Cornelia spoke quietly, but with emphasis. ‘Mr. Kellogg, you seem to forget yourself. You must not speak that way of the dead, and under this roof you shall not speak like that of Harley Madison. Change your manner of talk at once, or leave this house.’

‘I’m sorry, Miss Madison, and I won’t offend again. It is only my zeal in your interests that makes me so troubled about these things. But we will proceed to business. Mr. Madison died intestate, as we all know. Therefore, his estate must be disposed of according to law. This, I may say at once, will give Miss Madison one-third of her brother’s estate, and Mr. Craig Madison and Mr. Tom Sheldon, one-third each. This as you see, makes no provision for the household staff, for any charities or for the Village Improvement Project, in which the late Mr. Madison was so deeply interested.

‘It also annuls several bequests to friends, which Mr. Madison had devised in all his previous wills, including Mr. Ames here, to whom a generous legacy was left in the torn up will.’

‘My brother’s estate ran to the value of millions, I think,’ Cornelia said, watching the lawyer’s face.

‘Yes, Miss Madison, ten million at least, perhaps more. It is impossible to tell, offhand.’

‘Then there will be plenty for all of us. I will attend to the cancelled legacies you mention, and I will assume that there was also a sum left to you, in recognition of your long service.’

‘I did not speak with that in mind,’ lied Kellogg, ‘and, of course, what the heirs see fit to do with the fortune is not my business. I hope you will be inclined to retain my services in the management of the necessary legal processes, and I shall serve you to the best of my ability.’

‘Speaking for myself,’ Craig announced, ‘I’m sorry if I disappoint you, Mr. Kellogg, but I expect to put my affairs in the hands of a friend of mine, who is a New York lawyer, of good standing.’

## **Chapter 18**

‘I AM NOT yet prepared to state my plans,’ Cornelia said to Kellogg in her authoritative way, ‘but I will say that I propose to follow the terms of my brother’s latest will, in regard to his friends and his employees. If the other heirs see fit to join me in this decision, well and good. If not, I shall assume these payments myself. The maintenance of the household is also a matter for consultation among myself and my two nephews. So, I think, Mr. Kellogg, we will ask you to wind up the estate as speedily as may be. Now, we must consider the question of the Village Improvement plans. I understand that death cancels all contracts, and at any rate I know that my brother is not actually indebted to the Committee. He remembered them largely in his will, but since the will is not in existence, the bequest cannot stand. But I want legal advice regarding any dealings that may be necessary between the estate and the village men who are concerned. Will you, Mr. Kellogg, see about such points and report to Mr. Ames, who will inform me.’

‘Certainly, Miss Madison.’

‘Thank you. To-day is Wednesday. The funeral services of my brother will take place on Friday. After that I shall expect you to begin legal proceedings as soon as may be. I will ask to be excused now.’

Cornelia rose and walked toward the door, which Craig sprang to open. As he sat down again, he said, in explanation, not in apology:

‘My aunt is greatly prostrated by this shock, and in an endeavour to be grave and dignified, she is, unconsciously, a little severe. I, too, will leave you, now, as I think there is no immediate work to be done. Call upon me when you choose, Kellogg, for information or advice, and when convenient, bring us a list of my uncle’s principal assets. I want to feel that I know something about what is now, in, part, my own money. I say, is any one of us the head of the house? I mean, is Miss Madison, by reason of her years, the head, or are we fellows, because we are of the sterner sex, or are we all free and equal?’

‘The last, I think. At least, the legal disposition of the fortune carries with it no priority of claims.’

‘All right, I’m satisfied, in any case.’

Craig went in search of Fleming Stone, and the two started on a tour of the village.

‘What is your plan of approach?’ Craig asked. ‘Just go to a house and ask is the good man at home? Then what?’

‘That doesn’t sound very diplomatic to me,’ Stone returned. ‘Would it be better, perhaps, to attack one at his place of business, and make our call seem casual?’

‘Maybe so. How about Henry Potter, the butcher? He’s the worst of the lot, I believe, and I like to get the worst over first.’

‘Where is he?’

‘Just across the green. He’s not a gentleman.’

‘We must remember that he’s one of a crowd who have just had their hopes blighted, and likely, their tempers roused. He may be in an inflammable mood, or he may be philosophical about it. We must act as the situation demands.’

They went into the butcher’s shop.

As the beefy form of Potter, clad in immaculate white linen approached them, Stone said, genially: ‘What a gem of a butcher shop! I could eat a steak off of your chopping-block.’

‘Nothing easier, sir. Any time you say, come in, and I’ll set before you a porterhouse such as you never saw before! Now, Mr. Stone, what are you here for? Oh, yes, I know you. You’re here to learn who killed Harley Madison, Found out yet?’

‘No, I haven’t. But knowing more about this village plan than anybody else, as I think you do, I hoped you could give me a hint which way to look.’

‘You talk pretty smooth, but I reckon you mean, did I do the man in and will I give myself away to you if you keep a sharp watchout.’

This rather startled Stone, for it was exactly what was in his mind.

‘You’ve a quick brain,’ he said. ‘Well, here’s the case; either you did kill Mr. Madison or you didn’t. If you did, you’ll not give yourself away; if you didn’t, I think you’re public-spirited enough to want the murderer found, and if you can help, you will.’

The butcher looked at him and his little gimlet eyes were shrewder than ever.

‘I’d like to talk to you, Mr. Stone,’ he said, ‘but not before young Madison. I’ve nothing against the boy; he’s a good chap, and I had no hand in the killing of his uncle, but I’d rather he’d step outside for a bit, and you come into my little office.’

Craig nodded, and went over and sat on a seat on the green. He looked round the ill-kept grass and shrubbery, and realised anew what a thankless job his uncle had embarked on. Small wonder his uncle had failed to make friends with the men. They were, many of them, ignorant and greedy.

The butcher had been polite, in his way, but Craig remembered that before his uncle died Henry Potter had snarled at him whenever occasion offered, which, however, was not often. But he had better things to think of, and his thoughts reverted to his changed conditions. He was now a rich man, a millionaire, to say

the least. He could do just as he pleased with his money, and if he chose to marry he could do so. And he had chosen, but it was a secret as yet.

Meantime, Henry Potter, who was a shrewd man, was telling Fleming Stone about the village project.

‘You see,’ he said, ‘we’d only had a few meetings, and none of ’em regular and correct in behaviour. And, sir, there’s where Harley Madison had his chance and he muffed it.’

‘And what was this fine chance?’

‘Why, he set upon everything we said. Whatsumever we might propose, he’d veto it. Yes, sir! Now, that ain’t no way to run a committee. You know, yourself, Mr. Stone. Everything we said he said the topsyturvy of it. You know, sir, if you want to make friends, you’ve got to agree with them. Maybe not every minit, but generally speaking. Leastwise, you don’t get friends by jumping on all the improvements they suggest.’

‘Perhaps the improvements they suggested, were not so good as the ones Mr. Madison had in mind.’

‘You mean, he thought they weren’t. We didn’t think so.’

‘And one of you went so far as to kill him for that reason?’

‘No, sir. Not so. But he went on to say that we had no knowledge of good taste, no sense of refinement. He said we only just wanted to flaunt our names to the public gaze!’

‘And was that true? I’ve noticed people mostly take offence at insults when they are true.’

‘You’re a deep one, Mr. Stone. Well, I suppose it was true, in a way. But Mr. Madison he treated us like we was scum of the earth, and it didn’t set right on some of ’em.’

Stone rose to go. ‘I thank you,’ he said, ‘for the information you’ve given me. I hoped for something definite, but of course what you don’t know, you can’t tell.’

‘Who says I don’t know somethin’ definite?’

Stone sat down again. ‘If you do, Mr. Potter, out with it. I’m a detective, trying to fasten a crime where it belongs. I have a hunch that you want to see justice done also. But I’m a bit hurried, so if you’ve anything to tell me, tell it, but be quick about it!’

Stone sized up the man’s vanity, urged him on by his own haste and Henry Potter responded nobly.

‘Well, it’s only that I heard a man say two-three times he’d like to put an end to Harley Madison.’

‘He’d like to! That’s nothing to work on. Did he go no farther than that?’

‘He did. I heard him say that he’d stood all he was goin to, and Madison better look out for his skin.’

‘Only talk,’ Stone looked greatly, disappointed. ‘And, too, Mr. Potter, that murder was done in a locked room. I’ve searched the room myself, and there’s no way that I can find by which a man could get in it from the outside.’

‘Well, sir, the murder was done, wasn’t it? Then somebody did get in from the outside, eh? You don’t think people in the house—’

‘Oh, lord, no! No member of the Madison family or servants can be suspected.’

‘How come you’re so almighty sure?’

‘Because I’m on the job. I’ve talked with the people and I know. I am fortunate to be considered a clever detective, and I earned that reputation by careful work. When I say a room cannot be entered, it cannot be.’

‘Yet that hired man of theirs got into it.’

‘Ah, yes, with a ladder.’

‘All right. How about our murderer using a ladder?’

The sly twinkle in Potter’s eye told Stone that this was not random talk.

‘Go on, Potter,’ he said, ‘you’ve gone too far to stop. Could a man bring a ladder to that house, put it up to a window, which he couldn’t get in—but suppose he could—why wouldn’t he be seen?’

‘Was Elkanah Garson seen?’

Stone looked at the other man sharply.

‘Did you see this man?’ he asked.

‘I did.’

‘Carrying a ladder?’

‘Yes.’

‘Going toward Silver Hill?’

‘Yes; at two o’clock in the morning.’

‘What is this man’s name?’

‘Job Hendricks.’

Stone felt as though he had received an electric shock.

‘Is he the man who said he meant to kill Madison?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘How did he get in the room?’

‘I don’t know, for certain, but I think when he got to the top of the window, where it was open, he could reach in and touch the patent catch, or maybe with a stick.’

‘Don’t mention this to anyone else, Henry Potter.’

‘No, Mr. Stone.’

Fleming Stone crossed the street and collected Craig from the rickety bench on which he sat.

‘It’s disgraceful,’ Craig exclaimed. ‘Look at that bench, just dropping to pieces from old age and bad usage. You can see how fine Uncle’s plans were. A small layout of money would put this green in order. And the streets and roads and shade trees and all that goes to make a decent village, could have been done for a reasonable sum, if the men had worked together and not been so greedy and so anxious to feather their own nests. Sometimes, I think I’ll take it up where Uncle left off, and then I realise what a mess I’d find myself in. I’m not very patient, and I can’t stand underhand work; and anyway, these village people don’t deserve to have things done for them, when they don’t do anything for themselves. I’ve decided to give them a good sum of money as a sort of memorial gift from Uncle Harley. But I doubt if I’ll stay on here. A lot depends on Aunt Cornelia, but she’s an amiable old dear, and I’m sure we can arrange things. Did you get any hints from the butcher man?’

‘He spun a yarn, which seemed to me a bit fishy, but there may be something in it. Craig, your uncle was somewhat of a reader, I thought. I didn’t find books in his room. Two or three, on tables, but no bookcase.’

‘That’s because some time ago, Uncle Harley had a lot of trouble with his eyes, and the oculists said he must use them as little as possible, and on no account to read in bed. So Uncle had his bookcase put in that little sitting room, and gave up reading in bed. That sitting-room, you know, is a space cut off the end of the long hall. It has a great triple window, like the one in the front of the hall.’

‘Craig, you know Elkanah, Hetty’s husband, cut the window to get his hand in to turn the catch. Why didn’t he go up high enough to put his hand in over the top of the sash? It is fastened open, I think, about eight inches from the top.’

‘Oh, I don’t believe he could work it that way. It would take a chap with a long, thin arm. I think Elk was pretty clever, to take his tools up with him.’

## **Chapter 19**

‘THERE ISN’T A CLUE,’ Stone said to Craig as they walked back to the Madison house. ‘The police have done fine work. A well trained crew. Each had his own work to do. and he did it faithfully. But with no results. No finger-prints that amounted to anything. No broken cuff link, no tobacco ash. I wonder if Sherlock Holmes ever had to make bricks without a single straw—’

‘I do think you’re up against it,’ Craig said, sympathetically. ‘What do you do when you’re entirely stumped?’

‘Begin all over again. How long will Miss Verne remain?’

‘Poor child, they won’t let her go. They’re holding her, not as a witness, but because she was here at the time.’

‘It must be a strange experience for her, to meet a man, become engaged to him, and have him murdered, all within a week!’

‘Yes. She is very brave, but I don’t see why she can’t be allowed to go home. She could come in from New York, any time she was wanted.’

‘You’ll have to ask the police about that. Assistant District Attorney Sutton is a very just man; perhaps he’d let her go, if she asked him. How different she is, since the tragedy.’

‘Naturally; the shock nearly made her ill.’

‘She doesn’t look ill, exactly, but different, not so much of the joie de vivre, not so much glamor.’

‘What girl wouldn’t show grief if her fiancé was murdered?’

‘But she looks like another girl.’

‘Oh, that’s the way she does her hair now. Its the new fashion, and you know a girl of the screen has to be up to the very latest in fashions.’

‘She’s a charming personality and I have great sympathy for her. What was that story about her going out to meet a man on the lawn at three in the morning?’

‘Aren’t you getting very curious, Mr. Stone? What has that to do with finding my uncle’s murderer?’

‘Watch your step, Craig. You are more transparent than you think. Don’t you know that to evade a question is to seem unwilling to answer it.’

‘Apparently you know all about that episode. But Miss Verne did not go out to meet that man. It was someone else, in her coat and hat, and it was meant, either as a very crude practical joke, or an attempt to get the girl into some real trouble.’

‘Do you know who did it?’

‘I am pretty sure, but I have not yet proved it. I don’t like to bring up such a matter with Uncle’s death being investigated. Aunt Cornelia has enough trouble without adding to it about that Ivy Arbor business.’

‘I fear Miss Madison will have many additions to her troubles in the near future.’

‘Do you mean that?’ Craig looked greatly disturbed. ‘What kind of troubles? Can I do anything to ward them off?’

‘I’m afraid not. But if I find I can use your help, I will let you know.’

‘All right, Mr. Stone. And now what can you deduce from this grilling you have put over on me?’

‘That you are madly in love with Miss Verne, that you expect to marry her after the excitement and publicity have blown over. That you were nearly frantic when you learned that your uncle had stolen your girl, and that now you don’t care very much whether the assassin is found or not. You admired and respected your uncle, but your head and heart are so full of Miss Verne and her charms that you forget all else.’

Craig stared at the speaker.

‘Where the devil did you get all that? Did I tell it to you?’

‘Unconsciously, yes. That is, most of it. The rest I deducted.’

‘You’re a deuce of a deducer! It is part right and part wrong, and you’ll have to deduce for yourself which part is which.’

They had reached the house, and as they were about to go in, Craig paused a moment, and said; ‘You don’t have to tell what you learned from me, do you, Mr. Stone?’

‘No, Craig; not at present, anyhow. But some day soon, I want you to be frank with me.’

And they went in the house and took their separate ways. Stone went in search of Everett Ames. He found him in the study, his desk spread out with papers, and Ames himself looking tired and a little bewildered.

‘I say, Stone,’ the secretary looked up from his work, ‘I can’t do this sum. I know my limitations, and while I’m the best secretary in captivity, I can never get through with this backwash of stuff. Mr. Madison was a systematic and careful man, as a rule, but unimportant papers, he often left to take care of themselves.’

‘Pitch ’em out. Why worry with the unimportant ones?’

‘But they’re all mixed together, And it isn’t only that. Also, there are stocks and securities that would seem to be lapsed or discontinued or something, but I daren’t throw them away, for they may be of value. Of course, Miss Madison can’t help me in these things, and the boys know rather less than their aunt. I’d like to get a professional, a certified accountant or somebody like that, and have him set me straight.’

‘Just the thing! Do that by all means. It’s due to yourself; you can’t be expected to do two men’s work. They’ll willingly pay for it. There isn’t a mean hair in any Madison head.’

‘I know it. I’ll put it up to Miss Cornelia, though; I hate to ask the boys.’

‘I’ll speak to Miss Madison. I know it will be all right. See here, Ames, have you found any real documents or letters about the village complexity? Not just notes or memoranda.’

‘I haven’t found much. I’ve put them all together. Here they are, but nothing of any significance, I’m afraid. I wish we could pin the murder on someone of those disgruntled citizens.’

‘Why?’

‘To remove suspicion from the family. I doubt if you know it, but there’s a strong feeling against Craig.’

‘On what grounds?’

‘Two principally. That he wanted his inheritance without waiting any longer, and that he was mad at his uncle for stealing his girl.’

‘Miss Verne wasn’t Craig’s girl, was she?’



‘They weren’t engaged, but he hoped they would be. It seems Mr. Madison told Craig he wanted Miss Verne for his own, and I thought that was decent of him. And Craig agreed. Mr. Madison told me this himself. Then when the uncle won out, Craig just couldn’t stand for it, and he let his angry passions rise and did for the usurper.’

‘How did he get in that locked room?’

Ames looked at the detective with a comical glance. ‘The only way there was to get in.’

‘And what was that way?’

‘Lord, man! I don’t know any more than you do.’

‘What became of the instrument that killed him?’

‘It’s here, in the safe; the Examiner asked me to put it away in safe keeping, so I did.’

‘Let me see it again.’

‘Sure.’ Ames opened the safe and brought out the deadly weapon. ‘Just a straight piece of metal that looks like steel; about three inches long and sharply pointed at one end,’ he commented.

‘This other end was cut off with a wire-cutter,’ Stone said, musingly. ‘See, it shows that it took two cuts to do it.’

‘Is that of importance?’

‘Probably not; It only indicates that the wire was cut by an experienced hand, or with a dull tool. What is it? or what was it before it was cut?’

‘A knitting needle.’

Stone looked up, surprised. ‘How do you know?’ he said.

‘My mother used to knit a lot. She had every sort of needles. This, she would call a fine one. But she had them still finer. This is not quite as big as the lead in a lead pencil. Mother had some no thicker than a good-sized pin.’

‘Curious weapon to kill a man with.’

‘But a clever one. They say you found it just in time. A little later and it would have been all drawn into the flesh out of sight.’

‘I don’t know how I happened to think of it. Now where would a murdering villain get a knitting needle?’

‘From his mother, or sister, or his next door neighbour.’

‘Don’t be funny. Does anyone in this house, knit?’

‘I never saw Miss Cornelia do such a thing, and the rest of us are men.’

‘A most exasperating case! Nothing to work on!’

‘I thought bizarre clues were the most helpful. Isn’t that bizarre?’

‘No; just odd. Well, put it away; it may be wanted for evidence.’

Stone went to the living-room, and found most of the household gathered there. He sat down by Cornelia, and said, casually: ‘Have you any knitting needles, Miss Madison?’

‘No, not one. I used to knit, in war times, but about then, my eyes began to trouble me, and I gave all my needles away, and all the wools I had left, too. Why, do you want a knitting needle? Hetty will get you some down in the village.’

‘No. I don’t want any. But, I think now, that was a piece of a knitting needle that killed your brother.’

‘Oh, maybe it was!’ Cornelia looked thoughtful. ‘Isn’t that a clue, then?’

‘Perhaps; though not a very definite one. I suppose a man could get a knitting needle if he wanted to.’

‘Yes, of course. Was it a piece broken off of a long needle?’

‘Cut off, more likely. Those things don’t break; they bend.’

‘OH, LISTEN TO THIS!’ cried Anita, who was reading an afternoon paper. She read aloud: ‘Miss Yvette Verne, the famed film star, left the city to-day, en route for Hollywood. Miss Verne is contemplating a new picture, the name of which cannot, as yet, be divulged. Rehearsals will not begin for a fortnight, but the actress wishes to be on the grounds during preparations.’

‘My heavens,’ exclaimed Sheldon, ‘how can you sit there all nice and pretty, when you are at this time en route to Hollywood?’

Yvette laughed gaily though as Anita read the bit of news, her face had looked startled and even frightened. Stone, watching, saw her recover quickly, and force a smile.

‘How silly!’ she said. ‘That’s what I had to go to see about yesterday. The manager had planned for me to start for Hollywood to-day, but when I told him of the circumstances here, of course he said I must wait as long as necessary. And, so sure was he, or rather, the press department, that they had written that notice and released it, before I arrived. I suppose it was too late to get it back, so it had to stand.’

‘How were you to travel?’ Anita said.

‘I don’t know. On a special train, I suppose.’

‘It says here, you went in an airplane.’

‘Nonsense! I never ride in airplanes. I get fearfully airsick, if I do.’

But the girl’s face had turned red, and her lip quivered from sheer nervousness. She managed to laugh, and said,

‘Never believe anything you read about moving picture people! It never is true.’

‘Is that so?’ said Anita.

## **Chapter 20**

IT WAS SATURDAY, the day after Harley Madison’s funeral. All had gone off without accident of any sort, which greatly relieved Cornelia’s mind, and she was now superintending the restoration of the house to its usual condition of order. Hetty appeared before her.

‘Miss Cornelia,’ she said, ‘Wilkins can look after things downstairs, and Elk and me, we’re going to turn out Mr. Madison’s room. We’re goin’ to air it and vacuum it and scrub and shine up everything. I know it’ll be a comfort to you to know that’s done.’

‘Yes, Hetty, do all you’ve said, but speak to District Attorney Sutton about it first. You know how he objects to having anything touched.’

‘I don’t know, but you must ask him, anyway. Or I will.’

‘You do it, Miss Madison, please. I don’t like to.’

Cornelia went in search of the Assistant District Attorney, and told him of the matter. ‘Why, yes, Miss Madison,’ he said, ‘I see no reason why the room shouldn’t be put in order. We investigators may be here some days longer, but I begin to think this crime must go down in history as an unsolved mystery.’

‘You mean you can’t find out who killed my brother!’

‘I fear so. You see, it is what we call a simple crime, and they are the hardest to solve.’

‘What do you mean by a simple crime?’

‘That we have the plain facts of the death and the manner of it, and we have the condition of the securely locked room. And we cannot seem to make them mutually possible.’

‘But I thought Mr. Stone could discover a way into any locked room.’

‘Mr. Stone has not yet given up. He will not accept defeat. But we policemen are guided by strict rules and regulations. If we cannot get nearer to a solution than we are now, we will soon be ordered to shelve the case. That does not mean that it cannot be re-opened, if circumstances require.’

Cornelia looked displeased. Then she said: ‘If you policemen give it up and go away, can Mr. Stone continue his efforts?’

‘Yes, if he chooses; and if you choose to retain him.’

‘I hope it may be found out. I hope you will not give up unless you are ordered to.’

‘Would you not rather stop the inquiry, than to find it pointed to a member of your family?’

‘There can be no such possibility.’

‘I did not accuse a member of your family,’ Sutton said, gently; ‘but to have suspicion directed toward him, however wrong such suspicion may be, must surely be painful for you.’

‘Will you please tell me exactly what you have in mind?’

‘Yes, since you ask, we find that some indications point to Mr. Craig Madison.’

Cornelia sat up very straight, and she said: ‘What you imply is an utter falsehood. No Madison could commit a crime, and my nephew is incapable of disloyalty in thought, word or deed.’

‘Nor did I say he had done any wrong.’ Sutton’s manner was as stern, as her own. ‘I spoke of indications, of motive.’

‘And pray, what motive do you impute to a man to kill his own uncle and benefactor?’

‘Motives are there, Miss Madison. Young Craig is and was madly in love with the girl to whom your brother became engaged. He could scarce bear to see her taken from him by another man. Also, Craig was very much displeased at the idea of Harley Madison giving such enormous sums to the village. And, if his uncle married Miss Verne, the young man must assume that the great fortune he possessed might be denied to the village, but would be willed to her. That evening, therefore, Craig saw taken from him the girl he wanted, and the fortune he had long looked upon as, in good part, his.’

‘I don’t suppose, Mr. Sutton, that anything I can say would show you how wrong you are. If you were saying something less dreadful and less absurd, I might reason with you, but what you say is so far outside of all reason, that I shall not even comment on it.’

She was about to rise, but he said, ‘Wait a moment. I do not ask your comments, but I do ask you to believe what I have told you. For you will hear it from less sympathetic lips than mine, and I am only asking you to be prepared. But for your nephew to be accused, does not mean that he will be convicted, unless the charges are true. If, as you say, there is no possibility of a Madison committing a crime, then you have nothing to fear. Another fact against him, is the solution of the locked room problem. Craig and his uncle were the last ones to go upstairs that night. They did not go up together, but Craig might have been waiting, when his uncle came up, gone to his room with him, perhaps to make a final plea for the lady, and disappointed at refusal, revenged himself?’

‘Stop!’ Cornelia cried. ‘I will listen to no more. I cannot turn you out of the house, because of your authority, but I refuse to speak to you again.’

Cornelia left the room, and Sutton looked after her in admiration. He was not quite ready himself to adopt the theory of Craig’s guilt, but it was plausible. Yet not as he had pictured it to her. For Harley Madison had been in bed and asleep when he was killed, and it would not have been possible for Craig to have killed him on an angry impulse, when he was fully, or even partly dressed, and then have put the dead body into pyjamas and into bed in a quiet, relaxed posture, as Harley had been found. And, granting the supposition, that at any time through the night, Craig might have gained admission, by waking his uncle and asking to be let in, the same argument against the position of the body obtained, and then, strongest point of all, how could Craig, after his deed was done, go out of the room and leave the door locked on the inside? No, unless some definite explanation of that was forthcoming, the case against Craig fell to the ground, in Sutton’s estimation.

Fleming Stone walked over to the village, with the intention of interviewing Job Hendricks, the man Henry Potter, a butcher, said he had seen carrying, a ladder to the Madison home the night of the murder.

As a rich and influential citizen, Mr. Hendricks had a house suitable to his importance. To this domicile Stone betook himself and set about discovering whether or not Mr. Hendricks had murdered his fellow citizen. At first glance, he decided against the theory, for Job was not spry and slender, neither was he a

heavyweight. He received his caller with doubtful civility, and inquired, a little shortly what his business might be.

‘I am investigating the death of Mr. Madison,’ Stone said, ‘I’m in hopes you can help me a little.’

‘By confession or information?’ Hendricks said, meaning to be jocular. But Stone had no mind for levity.

‘As you choose. If you have a confession to make, or information to give, let me have it. Or shall I ask you questions?’

‘Perhaps that would be best,’ Hendricks agreed, already a bit cowed by Stone’s directness.

‘Very well; I take it you were the principal member of the Village Improvement Committee.’

‘Well, I am probably the most important.’

‘Then you can perhaps tell me if the project will be carried on without the assistance of Harley Madison. Or will it be given up?’

‘I cannot state positively, but I have every reason to think it will be carried on. Yet it will be with Mr. Madison’s assistance, for a large amount of money will come to us as a bequest from Mr. Madison.’

‘Then you don’t know that Mr. Madison died intestate?’

‘Oh, no. You’re greatly mistaken. He had told the Village Committee all about the provisions of his will, and I see no harm in telling you that half of his estate is bequeathed to our Committee, to disburse as we see fit; in the interests of a better and more beautiful village.’

‘That was all fine until last Monday. But on Monday evening Mr. Madison tore up his will and burned the pieces. He intended to make a will the next morning, but death stepped in and made it impossible. His fortune will be divided according to law.’

‘It can’t be true! No will! Surely his lawyer has a copy.’

‘An unsigned copy, yes. Of no value whatever. Now, Mr. Hendricks, Mr. Madison was murdered early Tuesday morning. Probably between two and four o’clock. You were seen at two o’clock, walking toward the Madison house, with a long ladder. Can you explain that to me?’

Job Hendricks spoke in louder tones.

‘Explain nothing! I deny it! Me? going over to Madison’s with a ladder! Man, you must be crazy! Get out of here, and never let me see you again, or I may do you injury!’

‘Sit down, Mr. Hendricks. If I go out of here, I shall send a policeman at once, who will be less lenient with you than I am. If you are sure you did not go over toward the Madison house, the night in question, you’ve only to say so, and prove the fact, and that’s that.’

Job sat down. ‘Who said he saw me going? Who made up that black lie against me?’

‘Can you prove it is a lie?’

‘Look here. You must know, a negative proposition can’t always be proved. Let the man who slandered me do the proving. Who is he, the skulking rascal? If I ever get hold of him—’

‘Be quiet, Mr. Hendricks. I am working with the police, and we are finding it difficult to apprehend a criminal. You will be arrested on suspicion if you carry on like this. Calm down now, and talk to me rationally. Tell me this: Do you own a ladder not too heavy to be carried by one man?’

‘Well, suppose I do?’

‘Now, why did you carry your long ladder along the street at two o’clock last Tuesday morning?’

‘I tell you I didn’t! Let me face the man that said so!’

‘Don’t be rash. He is as positive as you are. Suppose you deny this thing to the police, and suppose the other man affirms it. Which one of you will the police believe? The other man, of course.’

‘Why would they?’

‘Because he merely says he saw you, and that is a probable statement; whereas, you say you were not there, and that sounds like a defence and is likely to cause suspicion of your veracity.’

## **Chapter 21**

‘JUST YOU tell me who said he saw me,’ Hendricks said.

‘Mr. Hendricks, take my advice; give up this idea of fighting the man who saw you,’ Stone replied. ‘You were walking along with your ladder at two o’clock. For such an act, you have either an innocent explanation, which would free you of all suspicion, or—you had an errand in view, which you will not own up to, unless forced. I am not trying to force you. I shall be glad if you can give a reasonable explanation. But if you do not, an officer will be here very soon, and you will find yourself in hot water. Come on, now, out with it!’

Job Hendricks looked at the detective.

‘Well, I did go over toward the Madison place, at the time you say. I did take my ladder, it’s strong, but light. But I did not go with the intent of killing Harley Madison! I had no weapon with me, I had no intent of wrong, I wanted to see Madison alone. I assumed he would be in bed and the house all locked up. I meant to climb up and tap on his window, and he would let me in. But I didn’t go to the house at all. The ladder grew heavy, and, too, I thought it was a fool’s errand, that time o’ night, so I turned around and went back home.’

‘Was that how it was?’ said Fleming Stone.

Fleming Stone did not believe Job Hendricks’ story of why he went to see Harley Madison at two o’clock in the morning. He believed in the ladder episode, but he felt sure Hendricks had a wicked design than a mere neighbourly chat.

He went on to the office of Hiram Riley, the astute lawyer, who attended to the legal affairs of New Plymouth’s elite.

‘I wish you’d tell me, Mr. Riley,’ Stone began, ‘how deeply Mr. Madison was involved in the affairs of the Village Improvement Committee.’

‘Legally involved, at the moment, not at all. But at his death the Committee stood to receive a bequest from Mr. Harley Madison’s estate.’

‘You have not, then, been informed that Mr. Madison died intestate.’

‘No, nor do I believe that. He told me frankly about the different wills he made, one after the other, every one increasing the legacy to the village. Why, that was the idol of his life, this little village and the flourishing town he intended to make of it. He was really dotty on the subject.’

‘I know that, but it didn’t prevent him from tearing and burning his only existing will, and he died before he could draw another.’

‘Can you give me more details?’ Stone complied, and soon Mr. Riley was in possession of the awful facts that would, it seemed to him, wipe out the Committee and deprive its members of certain emoluments which they had come to look upon as their own. Riley’s hard, blue eyes, grew more and more troubled as Stone talked.

‘I understand Madison was murdered,’ Riley said, after a pause.

‘Yes, on the eve of a great happiness. He had just announced his engagement to Miss Verne, of motion picture fame.’

‘Yes, I know. Who killed him?’

‘That’s what I am trying to clear up. Could you suspect any one connected with the Village plans, who might feel in haste to get the big legacy?’

‘Are you asking which members of the committee hated him?’

‘I hadn’t intended to put it like that, but I will. Can you tell me?’

‘Of course I can, but why should I?’

‘In the interests of justice, and to keep yourself entirely clear of any suspicion of being an accessory.’

Riley looked very thoughtful.

‘If I tell you of his enemies, will you promise to keep my name out of it?’

‘As far as I can.’

‘Well, it’s common belief that Job Hendricks and Potter, the butcher, and Clarence Mason would willingly see Madison dead, for they’ve often said so, or as good as.’

‘I’ve met Potter and Hendricks, but Mason, who is he?’

‘He’s an oil Baron, or that’s what he likes to be called. He and Harley Madison never could see things alike. Whatever one thought, the other made it his business to think differently. But, look here, Mr. Stone, how did anybody kill Harley Madison? I understand it was done in a room that nobody could get into.’

‘That’s the mystery. It was done in a room nobody could get into. But I know how to get a door unlocked, that had been locked on the other side and the key left in.’

‘How?’

‘Two ways. One is a small gadget called a oustiti, which is now made in so many clever designs, that nearly every door will fall open at its touch. The exception is one of these old, complicated back-number locks, such as Mr. Madison chose to have on the door of his bedroom. The peculiar formation of that lock and key will not respond to the use of the oustiti. And the old dodge of turning the key by use of strong pliers will not work, if the end of the key does not come through on the other side of the door, which in this case it doesn’t. But I shall master it yet, of that I am sure.’

‘What do you call the thing? Wiss—what?’

‘Oustiti, French, is the name of a small agile monkey. Sometimes it is called the wistit. The name was given to this small tool, because of its quick and clever manipulations of its task.’

‘You spoke of another way in.’

‘The other way I mentioned is really a way out. You see, the intruder at the Madison house had to get in and out both. A way out, leaving the door locked behind you, is to stick a pencil with a string tied to it, through the handle of the key, and as you go out, carry the string through the door with you. Once outside and the door latched, pull steadily on the string and the pencil will turn the key. Then pull the string through the door, and run away.’

‘Where’s the pencil?’

‘Oh, that stays inside on the floor. But it’s such a little snubby old thing that nobody notices it—The way crime tears on, the whole population must be taught how to meet it.’

Fleming Stone had drifted into this conversation that he might study the man he was with. He came to the conclusion that Riley was not the murderer, but, that he was a shrewd, wily lawyer, who was not overscrupulous in his ways and means. ‘I suppose,’ the detective said, ‘you were the lawyer for the corporation?’

‘Would have been, if it had become a corporation, which was what we were planning. And I would have made a good thing of it. When it got fairly, going, there would have been differences of opinion, and consequent libel suits and all that, and I would have been kept busy.’

‘Yes, you’ve lost a snug berth,’ Stone sympathised. ‘You’re sure the rest of you won’t go on?’

‘How can we, without the Madison money? Do the other men know what you’ve told me?’

‘Potter and Hendricks know it, and it will soon be public knowledge. Now, look here, Mr. Riley, somebody murdered Harley Madison. Could, you suspect anyone of the committee men, and if so, which one?’



‘It might be said that loyalty to the others ought to seal my lips, and all that. But where is there any reason for my loyalty? What is there for me to be loyal to? The committee is not in any way a real organisation, it was merely a preliminary meeting or two to get us started. We meant to organise at the next meeting and get incorporated and all that. I would have looked after all that business, and should have earned thereby, and justly, a tidy sum. I am real put out about it all, and whoever killed Madison did us all in.’

‘But himself as well as the others. Remember, he did not know that Madison would die intestate. You seem fairly certain, that some member of your crowd did this thing, now, what do you assume to be the motive?’

‘Just this:

‘It was rumored that Mr. Madison was in love with the actress who was visiting at his home. We began to see him taking unto himself a bride, who would, perhaps, turn his thoughts from his beloved village, and like as not, take him to New York to live. They might travel abroad and in their pleasure and new interests, he would forget all about the little village he loved so well, and we would see or hear of him no more.’

‘Did someone make a remark or drop a hint if Madison died before his marriage, and also, before he had drawn a new will in his lady’s favor, it would be a mighty good thing for the village committee men?’

## **Chapter 22**

FLEMING STONE went back to Silver Hill, not greatly elated by anything he had learned in the village. He was fighting against a most unwelcome feeling of failures. The case was not one to be looked at as a whole. It had so many by-products and side lines that he couldn’t see the forest for the trees.

Going upstairs to his room, he saw Hetty superintending the cleaning of Madison’s room. Stone, interested, stepped inside. He searched everywhere, with his eyes, but saw no item of furniture or ornament that he had not studied before to no avail.

He turned to Hetty. ‘The bookcase now in the next room used to be here, didn’t it?’ he asked.

‘Yes, sir. It stood right here, where the shifferneer is now.’

‘And when it was moved the books were changed. Where are the old books that used to be in the bookcase when it was in this room?’

‘Up in the attic, Mr. Stone.’

‘I want to look at them. How do I get up there?’

‘There’s a little staircase in the ell, that goes up to the very room you want. Wait, I’ll go with you and show you the way. I’ve gotta go up there anyway. Miss Madison, she wants me to put this pink glass vase up there. She thinks it’s too old-fashioned. Here’s the room, sir, and here’s the books that was took off Mr. Harley’s bookcase when it was moved.’

A shelf of books claimed Stone’s attention, and he stooped down to look them over. The room was a sort of lumber room, and was full of discarded furniture and pictures and old-fashioned ornaments.

Stone delved into the books and Hetty went back to her work. His eyes brightened as he discovered some old detective stories. He kept on until he found the one he had hoped for. An old book, published in one of the earliest years of the century. Its name was *The Mystery of Carstairs Court*. Stone smiled as he remembered how the words crime or murder were not allowed in book titles then. He riffled the pages until he found the passage he wanted. Yes, just as he had remembered; the victim in the book, was killed in precisely the same way that Harley Madison had been killed. Craig had referred to the book.

Did that incriminate Craig, or did it clear him from suspicion? Surely, had he been responsible for Harley Madison's unusual, almost unique death, he would not have mentioned a source book. Stone took the volume with him and went downstairs and into his own room.

Acting on a sudden impulse, Stone left his room and crossed the hall to Harley Madison's room again.

Hetty was still there, putting the finishing touches to the now immaculate room.

'Looks nice, don't it, Mr. Stone?' she said, always avid for justly earned praise.

'It does, Hetty; it sure does. Will anyone use the room now?'

'I don't think so. But Miss Madison, she ain't thinkin' of such matters now. She's worried to death, and I know what ails her.'

'What is it?'

'She's in mortal terror, fearin' Mr. Craig may be suspected of killin' his uncle.'

'What makes her think that?'

'I don't know for sure, but I think that District Attorney Sutton, he said some little thing that hinted, sorta, at Craig. You know he's the apple of her eye.'

'More than Sheldon?'

'Well, yes. She thinks she treats those boys just alike, and seemin'ly she does. But I can see lots of little ways she has, that tell me she cares most for Craig. Not that she means to be partial. She don't know herself, that she favours Craig so. Mr. Tom, he sees it, but he's such a dear chap, he don't take no offence.'

'You cleaned this room just now, Hetty. Tell me, did you find any little thing that seemed to be?'

'Clueses!' exclaimed Hetty. 'Do you know, Mr. Stone, I was lookin' for 'em all the time!'

'And did you?' Stone was looking at Hetty; and he could read plainly her sudden change of thought. She quite evidently had found something, and was about to tell him of it, when some impulse told her not to. There was a pause, and then she said, hesitantly: 'N—no, sir; nothing at all.'

'Hetty, you're an awful liar,' Stone said, casually.

'Why, Mr. Stone! Whatever do you mean?'

‘Yes, you are. You enjoy lying, for its own sake. Look at the lies you’re always telling about your brother-in-law.’

‘What do you mean by that?’ Hetty looked honestly surprised. ‘I don’t get you,’ she said simply. ‘Mr. Stone, I never told a lie about my brother-in-law!’

‘Well, then he’s a very strange human being. A short time ago, you told me your brother-in-law died when he was a baby. Also, I have heard you tell that he died of streptococcus, and at another time of heart trouble. And very recently you told me he was murdered in cold blood. Those stories can’t all be true, Hetty.’

‘Well, they are, Mr. Stone, every one of ’em.’

‘Explain yourself.’

‘Certainly, sir. You see I am one of a fam’ly of seven—all girls. My sisters are all married, and whatever I said, happened to my brother-in-law, did happen to one of my sister’s husbands.’

‘Hetty, you’re a wonder! And what about the brother-in-law who died when he was a baby? He hadn’t married one of your sisters then?’

‘Oh, that was my husband’s brother. Elkanah had four brothers, they bein’ of course, my brother-in-law. And Elk’s brother, who dies when he was a baby, you may say. I s’pose, that he wasn’t my brother-in-law, dead or alive.’

‘All right, Hetty; I’m glad you have relieved my mind about that matter. I thought you were inventing tales.’

‘Not me! I’m a born truth-teller.’

‘Oh, you are, are you? Then why did you lie just now, and say you didn’t find any little clue in this room, when you know you did?’

Hetty turned red, and fingered her apron with nervous fingers, which twitched involuntarily. She made several attempts to speak, and then said, brokenly:

‘It was such a silly thing. I’m sure it didn’t mean anything.’

‘What is it?’ Stone spoke kindly, and Hetty plucked up spirit. ‘All right, then, I’ll tell you—I’ll show you.’

She crossed the room, and came back with a small vase, which she turned over on the table and a cigarette stub fell out. Stone looked so disappointed, that Hetty tried to defend herself.

‘I thought cigarette stubs were the best and importantest best clueses of all. They are in story books.’

‘This is a Zuleika cigarette. Who smokes that kind?’

‘Well you know. That Darling of Satan, Mrs. Boyce.’

‘You mustn’t call her that, Hetty. You found the stub in this vase?’

‘Yes, sir. I cleaned the vase, and then I put the stub back, thinkin’ it might interest you.’

‘It shows that Mrs. Boyce was probably in this room one day, and that she was smoking, and that she carelessly threw the stub of her cigarette in the nearest receptacle.’

‘Doesn’t it prove Mrs. Boyce came in here in the night and killed Mr. Madison with a knitting needle?’

‘I think not. You see, if she did do that terrible deed, she would hardly be smoking while she did it. You don’t think her guilty, do you Hetty?’

‘I don’t know, Mr. Stone. It could be.’

‘But what would be her motive? I thought she liked Mr. Madison.’

‘That she did! She liked him so much she couldn’t abear to see that Hollywood runagate snatch him away from her.

‘But Mr. Madison had no notion of marrying Miss Boyce.’

‘He hadn’t—yet. But the lady was working hard to bring him to her feet, and she thought she was about to succeed.’

‘How do you know all this?’

‘Us women sense these things, when men can’t suspicion them at all.’

‘Well, then, that’s all you found in your cleaning of the room, that might be indicative?’

‘That—that’s all, sir.’

‘I don’t believe you, Hetty; I still think you are concealing something. I’ve no more time to talk to you now, but think it over, and make up your mind to bring me the thing you found.’

Hetty’s white face and trembling hands, made Stone feel sure he was right, and that Hetty would soon confess her deceit.

‘Remember,’ he said, ‘if you are concealing a clue, you are compounding a felony.’

‘My sakes, Mr. Stone, what does that mean?’

‘It means you’ll be arrested and tried and convicted and put in jail!’

‘There’s worse things than jail,’ said Hetty, and Stone realized that her secret, whatever it might be, was of real importance. But he left her for he was sure she would tell him nothing more just then.

A drive was planned for the afternoon. Cornelia said there must be some little diversion for Avis, or Yvette’s assumed name, or she would drift into melancholy.

In fact there was more likelihood of Cornelia doing the drifting, for she was really becoming ill from the excitement, the suspense and the awfulness of the situation. She had stated her intense desire to find the

criminal, but the baffling search, resulting in nothing, was wearing on her nerves, and she told Sutton that she was almost willing for him to give up and have the case declared impossible of solution.

As a matter of fact, he was of the same opinion, but he couldn't bear to acknowledge himself beaten, while Fleming Stone still declared he would solve the mystery.

'A locked room,' Stone said, 'I must find that out! Any other puzzle I might despair of, but there must be a way into that locked room, and I must find it.'

Cornelia said they would take a long drive, for dinner stop at a little inn she liked, and come home by moonlight. Her principal thought was the pleasure of her guests and her nephews, but she herself was glad to get away from the house for a while. Indoors, she felt a gloom settling down over her, that might never be lifted. She hoped that fresh air and sunlight would dispel the shadows and lighten her spirits a little.

## **Chapter 23**

CORNELIA MISSED her brother in so many ways. The mystery of Harley's death, the horror of it and the awful publicity it created were bad enough, but they could be borne better than this acute loneliness caused by his absence. Bravely, she laid aside her own feelings, and made herself entertaining and even amusing while out driving with Yvette and the others.

Stone and Assistant District Attorney Sutton sat down in the office to have a talk over the case. The room was large and held all Madison's business papers and, letters, while at the other end, easy chairs and bookcases proclaimed it a study.

'Has it ever struck you,' Sutton began, 'that we seem to have left Everett Ames out of consideration?'

'As first murderer?'

'Yes. He can be said to have motive—'

'Hold hard, there, Sutton. Ames has no motive except a possible legacy from his employer, because of long and faithful service. And, he knew he would not receive that, for Mr. Madison tore up and burned his will in Ames' presence.'

'I know. But I think, and I rather guess Ames thinks that the three heirs will see to it that he gets some recognition for his good works, and he might have decided to hurry matters along.'

'I admit a possibility. But it was a mighty uncertain motive, for the surviving Madisons' might not feel disposed to give him more than a decent honorarium. Also, how did he get in the room?'

'If anyone asks me that question again, I shall fly the coop! For your information, I will say frankly that don't know how he got in, nor how anybody else got in. Nor, may I add, do you.'

'Quite right, but I am going to find out.'

'And then you're going to tell me. Well, do be quick about it.'

'I shall try to be. And, by the way, I think I have a new idea. A sudden inspiration. What do we want to find out?'

‘How the murderer got into and out of Harley Madison’s room, finding and leaving the door locked.’

‘Now, consider—’

But there was no considering done, for Elkanah, Hetty’s husband, came into the room, and with terror in his voice, he said: ‘Oh, please, Mr. Stone, please come and look at Hetty. She is dying. I’m sure she is! Come, come!’

‘What is the matter with her?’ asked Sutton, trying to calm down the frantic man.

‘Must I tell you?’ Elkanah wrung his hands and looked somehow ashamed.

‘Of course, you must,’ Stone said; ‘what ails Hetty?’

‘Well, then,’ the wretched man groaned, ‘she is—she is—drunk!’

‘Nonsense! Hetty drunk? Impossible! Come on, both of you!’

Stone started and then stopped so that Elkanah might show them the way to Hetty’s room. They found her, stretched on her bed, in a stupor. As they watched, she half waked, and cried out in thick, mumbled tones—‘Only a hairpin! Just one little, little hairpin! Oh, my God!’

Then she slept again. Then woke, babbling.

‘A coffin,’ she moaned. ‘A blue coffin!’

Gathered round the bed were all the women servants of the house, and back against the wall were several of the men. Hetty woke again, and began to scream.

Fleming Stone took the helm. ‘Clear out of here, all of you,’ he ordered; ‘except, the ones I name. You are Jenny, aren’t you? Miss Madison’s maid?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘You seem cool and clearheaded. Stay by Hetty. Wilkins get a doctor. Any doctor. Is there one in the village?’

‘Yes, sir; Doctor Bascom.’

‘Get him, then, the quickest way you can. Elkanah, you go to some other room and stay till I come to you. But first, all of you, does any one know what Hetty has been drinking or where she got it?’

‘It’s my afternoon out,’ Wilkins said, ‘and I was getting dressed to go out, when I heard some one in my pantry, and I went in there and found Hetty coming out, stumbling and falling about. What she had taken, I don’t know, but perhaps I can find out by looking over the bottles. She never did such a thing before!’

Hetty continued much the same. She would sleep heavily, and then wake, and groan in agony, and then give a piercing scream, and collapse back on the pillow. Jenny was deft and helpful, but she could do little for the sufferer. Bascom was in New York, so Wilkins had to fetch Dr. Willis from a neighbouring town, and before they arrived, Hetty had gone into a coma, from which, many of them felt, she would never awaken.

Nor did she.

When the strange doctor came, Hetty Garson was dead.

Elkanah, wide-eyed and staring, wailed in distress: 'I could smell it on her, that strong! Oh; the disgrace!'

Doctor Willis made a brief examination of the body, asked a few questions, and then telegraphed for the Medical Examiner. Fenn, much surprised at being called again to Silver Hill, came, at once.

'This woman did not die from the effects of alcohol,' he said. 'She was poisoned.'

'Not drunk?' quavered Elkanah's thin voice. 'My Hetty never drank spirits. But why would she take poison? I don't understand.'

Fenn was shocked at the frightened, trembling man before him.

'We don't know that she did take it of her own will, Garson,' he said. 'Somebody may have given it to her, by mistake or—purposely.'

'No, sir! Nobody ever killed my Hetty a-purpose. If poison killed her, then she took it herself—thinkin' it was some proper medicine.'

'That may have been the case,' Fenn agreed, 'but anyway, Elkanah, don't think for a moment that your wife was intoxicated.'

'But I smelled her breath terrible strong.'

'It may be she felt ill and took a swallow of something to relieve it, but no more. How happens that she was lying down?'

'She said to me she felt mighty tired after cleanin' the room Mr. Madison died in. I said, 'You go take a nap and get rested up,' and she said she'd do that.'

'Did she seem all right, then?'

'Y-yes, but I imagined I smelled brandy or somethin' like it.'

'About what time was that, Garson?'

'Musta been 'bout ha'past two; I should judge.'

'And when did you see her next?'

'Long about ha'past five, I was down in the workshop mending a chair leg, and Wilkins came after me and said to hurry upstairs. So I did, and there was Hetty, out of her head, and groanin' and mumblin' like she was crazy. I tried to quiet her, but she only cried and moaned. Then, of a sudden, she started a string o' talk, as it might be a mad woman! Yappin' about a hairpin, a little teeny weeny hairpin.'

'An' invisible hairpin?' said Fenn.

'Invisible to her, anyway. She kep' pokin' in her hair to find it.'

‘Did she find it?’ asked, Stone, suddenly interested. ‘

‘No, sir. There wasn’t no hairpin, you see, it was jest her muddled brain, thinkin’ there was.’

‘We can do nothing until after an autopsy. Mr. Garson, we must take your wife’s body away for a post mortem examination.’

Fenn then called the hospital, and Stone was left alone with Willis ‘I’m a detective,’ Stone said, ‘and I’d like to look for that little hairpin, if you don’t mind.’

‘A clue?’

‘It might turn out to be that.’

Already Stone was gently turning Hetty’s head, and extracting many hairpins. When he felt sure he had them all, he looked over the lot. He found many that were alike, medium sized shell-pins, and one tiny one, of the ordinary type, black, with little ripples in the prongs. He laid the shell ones on the dresser, and showing Willis the little wire one, said that he should keep it, and Willis must be a witness.

‘Witness to what?’

‘Only to the fact, that I found this hairpin in the dead woman’s hair.’

‘I’ll do that, of course. Is she a servant?’

‘She was the housekeeper. Sort of upper servant, She was an odd character.’

‘Odd enough to account for her suicide?’

‘You think it was a suicide?’

‘Looks like it to me. Who would want to poison her?’

‘I can’t deduce or suspect anybody. But still less can I think Hetty poisoned herself. She’d have no reason to do so.’

‘You can’t tell what secret reasons she may have had.’

‘It doesn’t make sense. She was a happy soul, she had everything she wanted. She adored her husband, and he loved her. They had little tiffs now and then, but mostly in fun. How often a second murder follows the first. I consider this the second murder.’

‘And you think the woman’s death is a follow-up?’

‘I must try to find out. I think she knew she was poisoned, and she knew who did it. But that’s only surmise.’

‘There’s an actress staying here, isn’t there? A film star?’

‘Miss Verne, yes. A charming girl.’



‘I’m told she inherits the old man’s money.’

‘You were misinformed. Mr. Madison died intestate.’

‘He did! Who gets the fortune, then?’

‘That will be settled by law. It has not been attended to yet.’

Thinking the doctor a bit too inquisitive, Stone went back to the study. But Willis followed him.

‘I say,’ the doctor began, ‘do you know what poison she took?’

‘I think so, don’t you?’

‘No, I don’t. What was it?’

‘Corrosive sublimate, I’d say.’

‘Now why would you guess that?’

‘I didn’t guess it, I deduced it. You see, I make my living by deducing. I gathered it from some things that were said. You ought to have known, yourself.’

‘I suppose I ought to go home,’ Willis said, regretfully. ‘Do you think I might send a bill?’

‘Of course. Just send it to the Harley Estate, and it will be paid, I’m sure. Good day, then, if you’re going.’

Stone offered a cordial hand, and the doctor unwillingly left.

The detective sat for a long time, thinking deeply. This new development seemed to him to make the problem more complicated. Subject to opposing evidence, Stone believed that a second murder was almost always the work of the same hand as the first. But that put the men from the village out of the running. For if one of them had put an end to the life of Harley Madison, he surely could have no object in killing one of his victim’s servants. Unless Hetty had, by some chance known of his guilt.

## **Chapter 24**

TRY AS he might, Stone could not come to the conclusion that a man from the village killed Harley Madison. It was hard enough to guess how a member of the family got into the locked room, but harder still to imagine an intruder from outside.

If Madison had been killed by some one in the house, and if Hetty knew who it was, that might explain Hetty’s death. But in that case, the murderer must have been one of the servants. Most plausibly, Wilkins or Elkanah. Never mind how they could get into the room, they had a better chance at it, than some one of those men in the village. And they would have been seen by somebody. Even Job Hendricks’ attempt to get to Silver Hill was seen.

But Stone could not think of Elkanah killing his wife. Wilkins, then? It was all idle speculation. He had no evidence, no scrap of reason to attribute crime to those two- faithful workers. What could they get out of it? Doubtless it was known, in the servants’ hall that Mr. Madison had torn up and burned his will. How then, could they hope to benefit by his death?

The picnic party coming home about ten o'clock, roused him from his reverie, and he went to greet them.

'Sit down, Miss Madison,' Stone said, as Rosie took Cornelia's hat and wrap. 'I have ill news for you.'

'Tell me at once,' Cornelia said, sinking into the chair he offered.

'Hetty is dead,' he said. 'She died late this afternoon. We think she was poisoned.'

'What did she eat?' asked Cornelia; 'do you mean ptomaines? I've told them to be careful about canned things I never know what Mrs. Quinn will work off on them, when I'm not here. Where is Elkanah?'

'He's gone off by himself, somewhere. I, sent for Doctor Bascom, but he couldn't come, so Doctor Willis came. He said Hetty was poisoned, and called Fenn, the Medical Examiner. They took her to the hospital for an autopsy.'

Cornelia began to look bewildered.

'I'm so sorry for you,' Yvette said, sitting beside her, and putting her arm round the shaking shoulders.

'Thank you dear; but I'm all right. Give me a moment, to recover. It's another blow. Hetty meant so much to me.'

'You need a bracer, Aunt Corny,' Tom said; 'Wilkins, bring in a tray of drinks. Mr. Stone, was Hetty ill long?'

'A couple of hours. But she was unconscious most of the time.'

'Was she rambling,' Cornelia asked.

'Yes. She babbled words that made no sense. We will get the report from Doctor Fenn soon.'

'What did she eat, Wilkins?' Miss Madison continued.

'We had canned salmon—if so be it might have been that,' Wilkins replied.

'Green apple pie with ice cream on it,' Rosie added. 'But Hetty was took sick before supper. She didn't eat any of the things we did.'

'I wish someone could tell me the thing as it happened,' Cornelia said. 'Call Elkanah to me.'

'I think I know more of the details than anyone else, Miss Madison,' Stone said, quietly. 'Elkanah is so beside himself with grief, he can't talk coherently. He came to me with the news that Hetty was ill, or, rather he said she was intoxicated.'

'Hetty! Intoxicated?' cried Miss Cornelia; 'Never, in the world!'

'No, the doctors said she was not. But she was very ill.'

'Poor Hetty. How do you explain it. Mr. Stone?'

‘I can’t say, as yet. The autopsy may tell the whole story. Why don’t you ladies go to your rooms and rest a while. I will let you know when the reports come.’

‘Yes, come Cornelia.’ Anita took her arm. The two went up the stairs and Avis (this was Yvette’s assumed name) turned to Craig. ‘I’d like to walk on the terrace a few minutes,’ she said. ‘The night air will calm my nerves.’

‘Poor dear,’ Craig said, as he rose, ‘this is a house of horrors for you.’ He led her out on the terrace.

‘For us all,’ Tom Sheldon declared.

‘Have you reason to think, Mr. Stone, that Hetty was murdered?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, my vote is for old Job Hendricks,’ Tom stated. ‘I know about his starting out with a ladder, and turning back, and all that, but, to my mind, he’s the best suspect so far.’

‘Hendricks could have had a motive, something like this,’ Everett Ames suggested. ‘Say he did kill Mr. Madison; and say Hetty saw him, either coming or going; he might have wanted her out of the way.’

‘But he couldn’t have come over here this afternoon, and given her poison!’ Tom exclaimed.

‘No, but he could have had a pal among the Madison servants. Say, Rosie, or some other pretty maid was his sweetheart; he could make her be his accomplice.’

‘Job Hendricks isn’t likely to have a sweetheart among the Madison staff,’ Stone said, ‘Yet, if someone of the village people is responsible for Hetty’s death, it apparently would have to be done by some accomplice in this house.’

The telephone rang then, and Stone answered it. It was Fenn, and he told the detective that Mrs. Garson had died from a dose of bichloride of mercury, which, as Stone knew, was another name for corrosive sublimate. Fenn said, further, that, a rather large dose had been taken, and he hoped that Mr. Stone would get busy at once, endeavouring to find the criminal, for it seemed to him unlikely that Hetty had taken it of her own accord.

Stone passed the word on to the others, and Avis and Craig came in from the terrace. Avis volunteered to go and take the message to Miss Madison as she felt sure she could do it more gently than a man could.

The next day was Sunday, but that did not deter Assistant District Attorney Sutton from ordering everybody into the living-room at ten o’clock.

Earlier than that Fleming Stone had sought out Aggie. They walked along the paths of the kitchen garden, and Stone was impressed anew by the girl’s quick intelligence.

‘I am going to ask you to help me, Aggie,’ he said, ‘and I am sure that your quick wits will let you do my errand without letting anyone see you, or know what you are up to.’

‘Yes, indeed, Mr. Stone, I can be very slick.’

‘You are parlor maid, I know, but couldn’t you go in the rooms of the family and guests without being noticed?’

‘Yes, sir, I can now; I couldn’t if Hetty was here.’

‘It is in Hetty’s interest that I am asking you to do what I want. You heard her talking about a little hairpin?’

‘Oh, yes. She was loony, you know.’

‘Well, here is a hairpin.’ He showed Aggie the hairpin he had himself taken from Hetty’s hair. ‘I want you to go in all the rooms in the house that are occupied by women. I mean the family and the guests and the servants. Look carefully on the dressers or toilette tables, and see if you can find hairpins exactly like this one.’

‘Most everybody wears those,’ Aggie said, looking doubtful.

‘Yes, but they’re not all exactly alike. Some are plain and straight, some have a little ripple, and they are not always the same color. If you find any that are just like this one, bring me one of them, and be sure to remember which room it came from. Watch for a chance to do some fine detective work; Can do?’

‘Oh, yes, sir.’ Stone then went to the room where Sutton had already begun his inquiry. He was questioning Cornelia.

‘When did you last see Mrs. Garson?’ he asked.

‘Shortly before I went to dress to go on the motor ride. It was about two o’clock, I think, and Hetty came to me, to report that she had finished the cleaning of my brother’s room, and asked me to go with her to see how nice it looked. I went with her, and, as always, her work was done to perfection. I told her so, and we had a few sad words about how we should all miss the master. She began to cry and I regretted I had spoken of our sorrow. I then told her that she looked tired, and that she must go and lie down for a while.’

‘She obeyed your instructions, Miss Madison, for I’m told that she lay down to rest about half-past two. She talked with several of the servants, and then she slept soundly. The report of the autopsy states that she had been drugged. Was she in the habit of taking any sedative?’

‘Oh, no!’ Cornelia said, ‘not to my knowledge.’

‘I feel, Miss Madison, there is no doubt but that Mrs. Garson was poisoned, and it is probable that the murderer drugged her first.’

‘But that would mean his being with her for some time, wouldn’t it? And why would anybody kill her? It is unbelievable!’

‘We are trying our best to find out the criminal. You don’t know of anyone of the servants, who might have an enmity towards her?’

‘No—no, indeed. Unless—that Italian, Baretti. He is an undergardener, and I have never liked his looks. I don’t really know a thing against him, but he has a vicious face, it seems to me.’

‘Does anyone else know anything about this man?’ Sutton asked.

‘I know this,’ Ames answered, ‘Mr. Madison was about to discharge him.’

‘For what reason?’

‘He is quarrelsome, and he grumbles for higher wages, and none of the servants like him.’

‘The matter shall be looked into. My difficulty now is to find how and where the poison was given to Mrs. Garson. After leaving Miss Madison, she had a talk with her husband. They were in their own bedroom. Then—tell it yourself, Mr. Garson.’

Elkanah drew a deep sigh.

‘We had a talk and then I said I must get to my work. I went out through the side kitchen door, and Hetty stayed behind talking with Mrs. Quinn, the cook. And Mrs. Quinn, she says Hetty said she was going to take a nap, and that’s the last she saw of her.’

## **Chapter 25**

AFTER QUESTIONING Elkanah, Hetty’s husband, who could shed no light on her murder, Assistant District Attorney Sutton said: ‘It’s all very mysterious. I can’t see how any stranger could get in without being seen, and that throws it back on somebody in the house which seems equally impossible. You may go, Mr. Garson.’

Gladly Elkanah left the room, and Fleming Stone quietly rose and followed him to his room, which was on the ground floor.

‘Just a minute,’ he said, pleasantly. ‘Tell me one thing, will you please.’

Garson wasn’t very cordial, but he said: ‘All right, sir. Sit down.’ They sat down, and Stone said:

‘You were cleaning Mr. Madison’s room with Hetty, yesterday, weren’t you?’

‘Yes, sir. We always does that kinda work together.’

‘And did you notice Hetty pick up any little thing and put it in her pocket?’

‘Like a clue, you mean, about Mr. Madison’s death? Why, no, and beside, Hetty didn’t have no pocket. Women don’t, nowadays.’

‘She didn’t find anything then? I know she meant to look.’

‘Not that I know of, she didn’t. Unless—’

‘Tell me.’

‘Well, it was when we was takin’ the bed down, it’s a great big heavy thing like a Noah’s Ark. The mattress was all off, and the springs too, and Hetty stepped right over the side piece and picked up somethin’ from the middle of the floor. I mean the floor under the bed.’

‘What was it?’

‘I dunno. I meant to ask her, but I forgot it.’

‘What did she do with it?’

‘By gum! She stuck it in her hair! Mighta been that little teeny hairpin she was makin’ such a fuss about?’

‘A hairpin? Under Mr Madison’s bed? Well, that could be. A chambermaid, making the bed could have dropped it, and then it was kicked under.’

‘It coulda been that way. Mrs. Boyce sometimes sat there of an afternoon, and Miss Verne—she mighta gone in.’

‘Yes, that’s true.’

‘What bothered Hetty about it, she thought the sweepin’ had been done careless. My stars, Mr. Stone, I don’t know what I’m goin’ to do without her.’

‘I know. I’m very sorry for you, old man; you and Hetty were a model couple.’

‘Who do you s’pose done it; Mr. Stone?’

‘That’s a hard question. But I’m trying my best to find the answer. If you hear anything you think important, let me know.’

‘I will, sir; I sure will.’

Stone went away, in search of Aggie, who he hoped might have some news for him. He found her looking for him and he took her into a small room and asked what she had found out.

‘Nothing, I’m afraid,’ she said. ‘I’ve been in all the ladies’ rooms and I can’t match the hairpin, up anywhere, Miss Verne’s, they’re kinda bronzy, and Mrs. Boyce’s, they’re yellow, like her blonde hair. Miss Cornelia, she didn’t have any of these little ones, only just middling-sized shell ones.’

‘You did well. Have, you had a chance at the servants’ rooms?’

‘Yes, sir. I didn’t find any just like this. Every time I’d think I had it, they would be longer or shorter or different somehow. I can’t do any more, sir.’

Aggie, looked distressed at her failure, but Stone said: ‘You did very nicely indeed. If there weren’t any around you couldn’t find them. I may call on you for help again.’

Delighted, Aggie promised not to mention the matter to anyone, and went her way. Stone sat thinking. After all, the hairpin was a silly sort of clue. A hairpin didn’t mean a murderer. He couldn’t imagine a woman doing such a deed. But he felt glad to know the hairpin did not belong to any of the household. Of course, the reason it made such an impression on Hetty was that she was shocked to find the every-day cleaners had neglected to dust under the bed.

He returned to the living-room. The lawyer, Kellogg had arrived, and he was explaining how the estate would be divided. Sutton, apparently, was not objecting to this interruption, and he doubtless thought that some information on the subject or inheritance might be helpful in placing the guilt.

‘The apportionment by law is very simple,’ Kellogg stated. ‘It is merely a division of the whole estate into three parts, one part going to Miss Madison, one part to Mr. Craig Madison, and one part to Mr. Thomas Sheldon. That is all the settlement directs. Any gifts to charities, employees, to the village or to friends, must be made by the legatees from their several shares. In connection with this, I will say for Miss

Verne's benefit, that there is no provision for any money to be paid to her. If the legatees wish to, they can apportion to her such amounts as they see fit.'

Miss Verne stared at the speaker. She turned very white, and said, scathingly: 'I fail to see why you should say that, Mr. Kellogg, and I resent it greatly!'

'You may resent it, Miss Verne, but you cannot truthfully say you don't know why I say it, at this time.'

'I most certainly do not know, and I call for an explanation.'

'The explanation is simply this. You called at my office in New York, yesterday morning, and asked me what were the prospects of your receiving any money from the Madison estate. I told you I would be over here soon and would give all details of the legal settlement of the estate. It will be a long process, and there is much to be done in the way of appraisal and valuation, but the fact remains there will be no bequests or legacies.'

'I am not interested in the settlement of Mr. Madison's estate. But I want to state clearly to you all that I did not go to Mr. Kellogg's office in the city, yesterday morning, or at any other time.'

Kellogg's eyebrows went up to a surprising height, and he spoke in a clear, cold voice.

'Much as I regret to contradict a lady, I must tell you all, that Miss Verne certainly did come to see me, on the errand I have told you of. I attended to her call personally, and I assert her presence. She was wearing the gown she has on now, and a black coat lined with white and a black hat, with a bit of white in the trimming. She gave her name as Yvette Verne.'

All eyes were on Avis (Yvette's assumed name). She looked the picture of consternation and despair. Though shocked at the idea of the girl's mercenary errand, Cornelia could not doubt Kellogg's detailed account. But her kind heart went out to the girl her brother had loved, and she motioned for Avis to come over and sit by her.

But Craig, who sat at Avis' side, held her hand and would not let her go. Twice the girl started to speak, but could not. She seemed even more distracted than the occasion called, for. She was shown up as mercenary and grasping, but that was not a crime. Yet had she been accused of murder she could not have been more heart-stricken and unnerved. She gave Craig a piteous glance, and, understanding, they both rose and he led her from the room. They went to the study, and Craig closed and locked the door. He took her in his arms and soothed her tenderly, and said:

'You must give up, Avis darling, you can't go on.'

'I can't give up, Craig. I must go on—anyway until the divorce is settled.'

'You must tell Cornelia, then. It is her right.'

'I will do that. She is very kind and dear.'

There was a knock at the door, and opening it, Craig saw the Sergeant, who usually kept in the background.

'Mr. Sutton bid me to tell you, that you must return to the inquiry,' he said.

'Both of us?' asked Craig. 'Can't Miss Verne go to her room?'

‘My orders are to bring you both back.’

MONDAY MORNING SUTTON began his session at 10 o’clock. He had adjourned the inquiry the day before, in order to get further information. He told of his investigation of the case against Baretti, the undergardener.

‘Nothing to it,’ he declared. ‘The man is hot-blooded, with no brains and no reason. He felt he was not getting high enough wages, simply because, Nelson, the head gardener, got more than he did. I had heard he had threatened to kill Mr. Madison. I asked Nelson about this, and he told me Baretti did say it, but he had also threatened to kill every other man on the place, including Mr. Madison’s two nephews. Nelson said such threats meant nothing; it was merely Baretti’s habit of speech.’

‘Yes, he’s like that,’ Craig observed; ‘one day I picked some of his pet flowers—he was experimenting on them, I believe—and he flew into a rage, and vowed he would kill me. At least, I think he did, but as his speech was a mixture of Italian and broken English, I could not swear to his intent. However, I can’t think he possibly could get into my uncle’s room and kill him.’

‘No, he couldn’t,’ agreed Cornelia. ‘Baretti has never been in the house, except in the kitchen quarters for his meals. He lives in one of the outside servants’ lodges.’

‘I think we can leave Baretti out of it,’ Sutton went on. ‘I advise, Miss Madison, that you give him a suitable amount of money and send him away.’

‘I shall be glad to do so,’ Cornelia said.

Sutton asked a few more questions, which seemed to Fleming Stone somewhat meaningless, and suggested to him that the man was working up to a climax.

‘I have the reports from the Fingerprint Department, and I may say that this book I hold here, is the one mentioned by Mr. Craig Madison as being a mystery story, in which a murder was committed in precisely the same way that Harley Madison was killed. The finger-print people report various prints through the book, but many more of Mr. Craig Madison’s than those of anyone else. Moreover, they find that the pages in the book descriptive of the peculiar method used, are more full of Mr. Madison’s prints than any other pages, which proves that he devoted much time and study to the subject.

‘I hold, therefore, that we are justified in accusing Mr. Craig Madison of his uncle’s murder.’

At first, Craig stared at the speaker blindly, and then his face reddened, and with difficulty he refrained from angry words. Cornelia, too, seemed about to speak but hesitated as she looked at Craig. It was Fleming Stone who spoke first.

‘I think,’ he said, ‘that your reasoning is wrong, Mr. Sutton. To my way of thinking, if Craig Madison were the criminal in this case, he would never have told of a book that gave instructions in this manner of murder, nor would he have left in existence the said book that could be brought in evidence against him. Those two points suggest to me, that Craig Madison could not have killed his uncle.’

‘We look at the matter from different angles, Mr. Stone,’ Sutton returned. ‘As you must know, all criminals are apt to overlook the evidence existing, and I think, that Mr. Madison’s reference to the book that told, how to commit this very clever murder, was an act of bravado on his part.’

## **Chapter 26**



‘THAT IS MERELY your surmise, Mr. Sutton, which, I contend is founded on insufficient data. When this very clever murder was discovered, it was entirely natural that Craig should remember the same occurrence in a detective story he had once read. But, had he been the murderer, it is inconceivable that he should have mentioned the story, and told of his memory of it! Any disinterested person will agree to that. I hold that you are trying to fasten this crime where it does not belong, because you have no surer suspect in mind.’

‘But the evidence of the numerous finger-prints on that page of the book, is not all I have to base my decision on, by any means.’

‘Please tell us of your further knowledge, then.’

‘The main elements of a murder mystery are motive, means and opportunity. Mr. Madison possessed these almost exclusively. As to motive, his uncle had won from him the girl he loved. That, as we all know, is one of the most usual motives for murder. The means, according to his own statement, he had read in a book, which gave full details of the method. Opportunity, I hold that he alone, or nearly so, possessed.’

‘And what was this mysterious and exclusive opportunity?’

‘A simple matter. Craig went upstairs that night, shortly before his uncle did. He waited until Mr. Madison came upstairs, and then joined him in the hall and went to his room with him, or perhaps waited until his uncle was inside his bedroom, and then tapped lightly at the door. His uncle would, of course, let him in, and then Craig had the field to himself.’

Stone looked at the speaker a little quizzically.

‘Then you assume,’ he said, ‘that Craig sat there and waited, while his uncle undressed, got into bed, and fell into a peaceful sleep. That the young man then murdered him in the fashion he had learned from his book and calmly went his way.’

‘Something of the kind,’ Sutton said, striving to hide his chagrin at Stone’s ironic summing up. ‘It would not be incredible that Mr. Harley Madison should retire while his nephew sat in the room. Also, remember that Mr. Madison had been drugged before he was killed. That was reported after the autopsy. He was therefore, unusually sleepy, and scarce knew what he was doing. It was, of course, the murderer who drugged him, and who else had opportunity, except Craig?’

‘Your argument is entirely your own fabrication,’ Stone said, quietly enough, but with a glint in his eye that egged Sutton to further accusations. ‘And, as we have agreed, the probabilities are that whoever killed Mr. Madison, is also the murderer of Mrs. Garson.’

‘With what motive?’ Stone asked.

‘With the usual motive for the second murder. Hetty must have seen Craig go into his uncle’s room, or come out of it, or must have discovered his connection with the crime, in some other way. She doubtless told him what she knew, and he had to silence her tongue forever.’

Then Craig spoke: ‘There is no word of truth in anything you have said, Mr. Sutton. You have tried to pin my uncle’s murder on me, and now you are accusing me of killing Hetty. Why, I was thirty miles away from here when she died!’

‘I know that. But you poisoned her before you started on the drive. Bichloride of mercury is not an immediate poison, not even a speedy one. You gave it to her in some way, before you left, and you also

administered a drug, which would lessen the pain, but would not interfere with its deadly effect. Come, Mr. Craig Madison, confess. You murdered your uncle and an old family servant. Your guilt is known, it is proved, and I assure you it is to your advantage to make full confession. Accept my advice, and tell your story now.'

'Do nothing of the sort, Craig,' Fleming Stone said. 'This case is in my care, Mr. Sutton, and I have a right to advise my clients as I see fit. I hold that you have made statements that are open to question, that you have no evidence for what you have called facts. I think your great desire to inculcate this young man has led you to enlarge and exaggerate possibilities into facts.'

'If it is your intention to arrest Mr. Madison, I cannot stop you, but I do ask you to reflect on the consequences to yourself, if you have chosen the wrong man. For the first time—'

Sutton seemed to sense the situation. All could see his sudden change of demeanor, and his realisation that he might be making a mistake. He strove hard to preserve his independent manner, and said, in a condescending way: 'You have not changed my opinions at all, Mr. Stone, but I am willing to adjourn until I can get some further evidence, which I will have no trouble in doing, I assure you.'

'Mr. Craig Madison must be kept under, surveillance, and within twenty four hours, I shall have the facts that I know well where to obtain.'

Stone made no reply to this and, the session being over, all went their various ways. Stone to his own room, and refused admittance to anyone.

He had been sincere in his criticism of Sutton's statements, but he was not sure the authorities would agree with him. Then impatient to be learning something, Stone went in search of Craig. In Craig's room he found the three Madisons in conclave. They welcomed Stone and he sat down among them.

Cornelia seemed sad and upset. Craig looked hopeless and broken-hearted. Tom Sheldon, wide-awake and frankly curious, hoped Stone would tell them what to do next.

Stone said: 'What's this story of Kellogg's about Miss Verne going to his office in New York when she was here at Silver Hill?'

'Mistake on the lawyer's part,' Craig said, speaking, carelessly. 'Maybe Kellogg wasn't there and his office boy reported a wrong name or something. Anyway, we know that she was here at that time, so why bother about Kellogg?'

'Tell me about the picnic on Saturday,' Stone said.

'It was a very nice picnic,' Cornelia told him. 'I felt it would be a good thing for us all to have a little outing.'

'You all went in one car?'

'No,' Tom said; 'Craig and Yvette, or Avis as she calls herself, went by themselves in the Roadster, and the rest of us went in the big car. They dawdled, but we spun ahead and had almost eaten up the food when they arrived.'

'Nothing of the sort, Tom.' Craig smiled at his cousin. 'Never believe that chap, Mr. Stone; he makes up stories for the fun of it.'

‘But you were late, Craig,’ Cornelia said; ‘of course, there was lots of food, and I wanted you to have a nice drive with Avis, so it was all right!’

Stone smiled at Craig, and said: ‘Did you and Miss Verne stay in the car all the way?’

‘Why, yes. What do you mean?’

‘Neither of you left the car?’

‘We did not, and I’ll ask you to explain yourself.’

‘I will. Wilkins told me an odd story. He says that after you had all gone on the picnic Saturday afternoon, less than a half-hour after you started, Miss Verne came back, came in the house, went up to her own room, stayed there fifteen or twenty minutes, and then came down and went away again!’

‘What of it?’

‘Nothing of it, if you can explain why she came here.’

‘Some errand of her own. Forgotten her lipstick or something.’

‘You brought her back here then, after you had started for the picnic?’

‘Yes, of course—dammit, I can’t tell you.’

‘There is a secret of some sort about Miss Verne?’ Stone said.

‘Yes,’ Craig spoke firmly, ‘but it is not my secret—I cannot tell it to you.’

‘Whose secret is it, then?’

‘Her own—Miss Verne’s.’

Cornelia said: ‘Go and get her, Craig. Bring her here to speak for herself.’

‘No,’ said Stone, ‘you go, Tom. Bring Miss Verne here, please. Say we all want her.’

Tom left, only to return, saying Miss Verne could not be found. Nobody knew where she was.

Craig jumped to his feet.

‘I must find her!’ he cried. ‘She is mine! We are engaged! If any harm has come to her—’

‘Sit down, Craig,’ Stone commanded. ‘Sutton won’t let you go off the place, and he will overhear your telephoning. Let me hunt for her.’

‘You can’t! You don’t know where she is. I do.’

Cornelia rose. Her face was full of love and pity as she looked at Craig, who was clenching his hands.

‘I will find her,’ she said, and left the room, gently closing the door after her.

‘Dear Aunt Cornelia,’ said Craig, ‘she’d lay down her life for us two boys, but she can’t find Avis. No one can find her except myself, and I’m not sure that I can.’

‘Do you never feel,’ asked Stone, ‘that you’d like to tell us the secret, the mystery that seems to hang round Miss Verne? We know her well enough to be certain it is nothing to her detriment, and it might help materially in our endeavours to get at the truth.’

‘Very cleverly put, Mr. Stone,’ Craig said, ‘but you don’t catch me out that way. I do know something about Miss Verne, that I am under a solemn vow not to tell, but I assure you, on my honor, that it has not the slightest bearing on any matters connected with this house or its people. She has gone away because of that secret, and until I know where she is, I am powerless to help her. But I shall find her.’

He got up and marched out of the room. Stone had been wanting an opportunity to talk to Sheldon alone, so he remained. The two men sat silent for a moment, and then Tom said, a little brokenly:

‘Mr. Stone, suppose it was Craig!’

Stone would have given much to know how far this speech was sincere, and he set himself to find out.

‘I’m beginning to have some grave suspicions,’ he said, ‘but I can’t tell them. If you know anything definite, you tell me.’

‘I don’t know anything definite, and I want to state clearly, that I do not suspect Craig of Uncle Harley’s death. Let that be understood.’

## **Chapter 27**

‘I DON’T want to, and I won’t suspect,’ his cousin Tom said to Stone. ‘We three Madisons may be said to have gained financially by Uncle Harley’s death, but that proves nothing. We are not mercenary and we have a strong family affection.’

‘I know that, Tom; and I know, too, that your uncle was most generous, even lavish in his allowances to you boys, and to his sister as well.’

‘I’ll thank you, sir, to leave my aunt’s name out of this conversation. She is a saint on earth, if there ever was one, and I will not have her mentioned in my presence in any connection with my uncle’s murder!’

‘Don’t be a fool, Tom,’ Stone spoke sternly. ‘No individual’s name is sacred, nor does the mention of it imply the least shade of suspicion. Miss Madison is one of three people who profited financially by your uncle’s death, and when I say I exonerate all three of you from any breath of suspicion, in my own mind, I naturally include your aunt.’

‘But though I would no more suspect her of crime than I would suspect myself, there is no reason I should avoid the mention of her name.’

‘Of course not, Mr. Stone, and I ask pardon from my quick speech. I know Aunt Cornelia felt no resentment at Uncle’s engagement, for she loves Yvette, as we called her then.’

‘Now, can you voice as strongly your entire faith in Craig’s innocence?’

The pause before the reply was so slight that Stone would not have noticed it had he not been on the alert for such a sign. Tom said:

‘I have the same faith in Craig’s complete innocence that I have in Aunt Cornelia’s and my own. I admit there seems to be evidence against Craig, but is it sound evidence?’

‘I hope the evidence against Craig—the seeming evidence—can be shaken.’

‘I think the worst thing against him is his telling about that book in which the victim was killed just as Uncle Harley was killed.’

‘Think again, Tom. To my mind, that is a strong point in Craig’s favor. Had he just killed a man by that method, he would have cut his tongue out before he would have mentioned that book.’

‘But his finger-prints were found all over the page.’

‘What of it? He read the story, he was interested in the new or unusual method of murder. Doubtless he turned back to the descriptive pages, to check up the final disclosures of the story. You know how that is yourself.’

Tom’s face showed a less anxious expression.

‘Yes, I do. Good for you, Mr. Stone. Truly, I didn’t—I couldn’t think Craig did such a thing, but that book made an impression on me I couldn’t shake off. You have removed it and I’m glad.’

‘Then, of course,’ Stone went on, ‘suspicion of Craig is roused by the fact that he is now so devoted to Avis. It seems odd, that a girl, whose engagement to your uncle was announced, on Monday night, should, after his tragic death, become engaged to another man in less than a week.’

‘She didn’t do that.’

‘What do you mean?’

Tom looked up, helplessly. ‘I don’t know what I mean, Mr. Stone, but I know Miss Verne, didn’t do that.’

‘Miss Verne is a strange young woman, Tom.’

‘Yes, she is. Why did she come back here, when she and Craig were on their way to the picnic?’

‘Are you sure she did?’

‘Why, yes; Wilkins saw her, and Craig admits bringing her here, and waiting for her, while she went up to her room.’

‘She does do odd things,’ Stone said. ‘That lawyer, Kellogg, says she went to see him at his office, and Avis declares she didn’t.’

‘That’s just it,’ and Tom sighed deeply.

‘I wish I felt as sure of her integrity as I do of Craig’s.’

‘But Craig has every faith in her?’

‘Yes, Mr. Stone,’ Tom interrupted, ‘and I can’t understand it. In every other matter, Craig has clear judgment, and fine, shrewd insight. I suppose she has bamboozled him out of his right mind.’

‘No, Tom, that isn’t it. Here it is: Craig knows something about her that we don’t know. Something that would straighten out all this mystery. Find out what that is, and we will know the truth.’

Stone left then, to look for Sutton. The inquiry was adjourned for the day, and Sutton was glad to see the detective.

‘Most exasperating case I ever was up against!’ Sutton said. ‘I don’t know which way to look!’

‘Either or both. You think they are the same, don’t you?’

‘Generally are. I can think of no reason for killing poor old Hetty, except that she knew who killed Harley Madison. That would be motive enough. Anybody in the house at the time had opportunity; and the means—have you looked about to see where the mercury could be bought?’

‘Tried the drugstore in the village, but there was a new clerk there, and he said there’d been a fire in the office before he came, and he understood the sales records were all burned up.’

‘Know where Miss Verne is?’

‘Haven’t a notion.’

‘She can’t be found.’

‘Ridden off on a broomstick, then. She’s a mystery maid, if ever there was one!’

‘Oh, I don’t know. She’s very well behaved, when she’s here in person.’

‘I hope she doesn’t come back. She messes up things generally.’

‘How’s this for a theory? When Craig and Miss Verne came back to the house, after they’d started for the picnic, maybe she ran up to her room, and so caught Wilkins’ attention, but Craig went to Hetty’s room and gave her the poison.’

Sutton stared. ‘Because he had murdered his uncle, and had learned that Hetty knew it?’

‘Don’t be absurd, Stone! Why would Miss Verne succeed so magnificently in her great attempt at bagging a millionaire husband, and then destroy her great good fortune by her rash act?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Stone, who had asked the question solely to find out Sutton’s view on the subject of Avis. ‘I’m going in to New York now.’

In the little car that Cornelia had placed at his disposal, Stone was driven to New York. On the way, he was annoyed to find that his ideas all referred to the Madison murder, when he knew he should be digging into the details of the second murder. But the facts of Hetty’s death were so plain and positive, the only question to be answered was, who did it?

In the Harley Madison case, there were innumerable queries as to how it was done, why, when, by whom, and the answer to each of these was as yet, wrapped in mystery. And too, if he solved either, he had the solution of the other. He rejected any thought of the three Madison heirs.

To his way of thinking, a man of Craig's real worth and fine character could not do the deed, and he was banking on his true reading of the young man's character. Stone knew, for Craig had seen fit to tell him, that uncle and nephew had discussed the situation, and when Craig discovered that Harley Madison wanted to marry Yvette, he had waived any claim he might feel he had, in favour of the older man. They had agreed, Craig told him, that it should be a fair field and no favour, and he stated, with a simplicity that smacked of truth, that he had never again said anything to the girl, but the merest commonplace.

To be sure, when Harley Madison was no more, the two young people fell together as if magnet drawn, and at the present time they were quite evidently engaged, though no announcement had been made. Avis's sudden disappearance caused Stone no great surprise. He assumed she had gone to New York, and would return in due time, or explain her further absence.

He admired the girl, but she had no glamor for him. He thought her a sweet, simple nature, different from actresses or screen stars he had met before. He could not and would not connect her with the murder, nor could any sane person do so. If she went to Silver Hill with the intent of winning the millionaire for her husband, she had brilliantly achieved her end and had certainly no reason to squash her perfect success.

As to clues, which he was still old-fashioned enough to welcome, there were few, indeed. The little hairpin was ridiculous. From it could only be deduced that the sweeping of the room had been done without the diligence that digs out corners and dusts under beds.

The detective story had seemed to Stone at first, a real clue. But there were finger-prints of many readers that were named and doubtless many others unknown to the investigators. The servants probably had access to the books in the old storeroom. But Stone had the book with him and proposed to put it to a further test, of which he had a slight hope. He went first to the house of a friend, who was a chemist, and soon they were discussing bichloride of mercury.

Doctor Jennings gave all the information asked for, and then Stone wanted to see the poison.

'Sure,' said the expert chemist, 'right here to hand.'

He opened a case and brought out some small objects which he threw on the table. They were a trifle less than three-quarters of an inch long, and were shaped like tiny coffins. The old-fashioned coffin, that is; narrow at top and bottom. The little things seemed made of clay or stone, and were a pale grayish blue. On one side was a design of a skull and crossbones, and on the reverse, the word poison in capital letters, not, however, very legible.

It chanced that Stone had never seen them before, and he fingered them with evident delight. Jennings laughed at his childish interest, but grew serious when he listened to Stone's story.

'Why, no. I don't think any one could go into any drug store and buy them,' Jennings said.

'Are they old? Do they deteriorate with age?'

'Not much. They keep a long time.'

'Well,' Stone said, 'there's one thing sure; this is what Hetty meant when she said, 'a funny little blue coffin.'

‘Without doubt,’ agreed Jennings. And then he gave Stone the information he asked about the character and action of the poison in question.

## **Chapter 28**

FROM THE OFFICE of Doctor Jennings, a chemist, Stone went to see another of his expert friends. Guy Prentiss was considered by those who knew, the greatest authority on special finger-print work in the country. An old friend of Fleming Stone, he was glad to see him again.

‘Can you identify finger-prints when they are not there?’ Stone asked.

‘You mean apparently not there?’

‘Yes, I suppose that’s what I mean. But I am sure they must be there, and I hope you can find them.’

‘On what surface?’

‘The pages of a book. Here it is.’

Stone handed over the old detective story he had found in the attic at Silver Hill. Prentice riffled the pages, touching only their edges, and said: ‘There are enough prints, I should say, to include most of your acquaintances. The book has been read often, and not always by people with immaculately clean fingers.’

‘I want to find the prints of a certain individual, and the finger-print men of the Homicide Squad, haven’t reported them. I don’t know much about dactyloscopy, but I know sometimes the prints are latent, and experts can dig them out, when the police are balked. What I want may require information they do not possess. Can the prints I want be latent? Or isn’t that the right term?’

‘Yes, that’s all right. Iodine fumes seem to be indicated for the development. How long can you give me?’

‘All the time that you must have, but no more. I am on a most baffling case, and if you find the prints I want, it may settle the whole question.’

‘But, Stone, this book shows many separate prints, so, how can I know when I get your right ones?’

‘Oh, of course, I looked out for that,’ and the detective drew an envelope from his pocket. ‘I have marked the set I am interested in—see, there it is. If by any process you can find those prints scattered through the book, but especially on these numbered pages,’ he handed over a list of figures, ‘then my quest is ended and I have found my murderer.’

‘Sure?’

‘Sure as shooting. But my theories may be all wrong, and his fingerprints may not be in the book at all. But I want to know. When do you think you can tell me?’

‘After you leave me, I’ll go right at it, and I’ll stick to it till I know for certain, what you ask.’

‘I shall probably be done with the case in a few days, and then I’ll come in for a real session.’

‘As you say. I think I may be able to give you results to-night.’



Stone went away, feeling that he had done all he could in this particular matter, and putting away all further thought of it.

He then turned his attention to his next errand—not an altogether pleasing one. He went to the city office of the Moving Picture Corporation which, filmed the plays in which Yvette Verne starred. After some delay, Stone found himself in a private office with one Grimsby, a member of the firm.

‘May I ask a few questions about Yvette Verne?’ Stone said.

‘Of course. What can I tell you?’

‘Is Miss Verne with you now?’

‘What do you mean, with us? She is still under our management, but she is not working on a picture just now. She is on vacation at present.’

‘Where is she at the moment?’

‘Have you the right to inquire?’

‘I hold that I have.’

‘Well, I can only say that she is on her way to Hollywood. You see, she is very busy getting her divorce.’

Fleming Stone nearly fell off his chair. He had no wish to inform this uninterested auditor that he had no idea Yvette Verne had ever possessed a husband. He suddenly remembered that Craig knew Yvette’s secret—or Avis’.

He would go back to Silver Hill and make Craig tell all. He would say that he knew about the pending divorce and he felt entitled to a full explanation. He would say further, that he could have learned all the truth from Mr. Grimsby, but that he scorned to do so, preferring to learn it from Craig. After that, he would be guided, as to his demeanor by the response Craig made to his request.

Stone rose without haste, and said: ‘I thank you, sir, for this audience. Good afternoon.’

On his way back, Stone pondered deeply on the amazing mystery of Yvette Verne. He couldn’t make it out. Did she let herself become engaged to Harley Madison when she already was married? Did she mean to procure a divorce in time to enable her to marry Madison? In such case, she most certainly had no hand in the killing of the man. Did her husband, in a jealous rage, come to Silver Hill that night, get in somehow, and kill Madison himself? Each theory sounded more absurd than the one before.

Determinedly, Stone put the subject from him until he could confer with Craig. He forced his mind to dwell upon what he considered the prime factor in the case. How could anyone get into and out of that locked room? Well of course, there was the door with the spring bolt to get out of, but how to get in?’

In a flash of inspiration, he said, almost aloud: ‘Mightn’t have to get in; might already be in!’

This idea was not entirely new: they had mentioned Craig hiding in the coat closet, or somebody crouching behind the big davenport. But it took new hold on Stone’s imagination and he dallied with it, to no real purpose, but as a definite possibility. He reached the Madison house at cocktail hour, and joined the group in the living-room. They were discussing Hetty’s funeral, which would be held the next day. Owing to the position of trust and honor the woman had held, Cornelia decreed that the services should be

held in the house, as Harley Madison's had been. Her two nephews agreed, and the arrangements were completed. Cornelia decreed that it should be a proper and befitting funeral, and she missed Hetty sadly, in looking after the details.

The evening dragged. Craig was like a ship without a rudder, in the absence of Avis, and Cornelia had not made good her promise to find the girl. Fleming Stone had about concluded to take Craig aside and talk it over with him, when Sutton came, full of excitement and sure of a new quarry.

'I've found the murderer,' he cried.

'Be more quiet,' Craig said, sharply. 'Remember Miss Madison is present.'

'Yes, well?' said Sutton, unawed, 'I rather guess she'll be glad to learn it's none of the family. That right, Miss Madison?'

'Tell your story, Mr. Sutton,' Cornelia said, in her kindly way. 'Who is your suspect?'

'Not a suspect ma'am, the criminal! Yes, just that.'

'Go on,' Stone said, showing a trifle of impatience, 'who is he?'

'Hendricks, of course! Job Hendricks. Don't you remember, Potter saw him coming over here with a long ladder? Well, he did—I've found the ladder.'

'Go easy, Sutton,' Stone advised. 'Mr. Hendricks was questioned about that ladder a good while ago. It seems he was coming over here to make a friendly call on Mr. Madison, and chose the ladder way in.'

'A friendly call? Huh! Well, he's the man, all the same.'

'How do you know?' asked Stone; 'has he confessed?'

'Same as! He's run away! Disappearance means guilt, every time!'

'Well, you can't arrest him, if he's run away.'

'Oh, come now, Mr. Stone, you're miffed because you didn't nail him when you had a chance. Own up, now.'

'Hold hard, there, Sutton,' Stone smiled. 'I left the village people to you, you know. I wouldn't interfere with your arrests. And too, I wouldn't arrest Job Hendricks, if he was the last man on earth.'

'You wouldn't! Why not?'

'Because he didn't kill Mr. Madison.'

'Who did, then?'

'I don't know; but since you seem so deeply interested, I'll tell you that I shall know very soon, and that's no idle promise.'

‘I hope you will, Mr. Stone,’ Cornelia said, her pathetic voice arousing sympathy in all who heard it. Even Sutton was affected, and he rose to go, saying: ‘I won’t stay longer, Miss Madison; I hope I haven’t offended you by this unexpected call.’

‘Oh, no, Mr. Sutton; I am quite ready to meet any emergencies. But don’t arrest that poor Mr. Hendricks, unless you are very sure of his guilt, I don’t see how he could get into my brother’s room.’

With a brief good night, Sutton went away. Craig took the initiative and asked Stone, on the way upstairs, to stop in his room a minute. So the detective went in with him, and Craig burst into a storm of questions.

‘I had a hunch you went to New York to-day to find out about Avis. Did you?’

‘What do you mean? To find out about Avis?’

‘Everything. You have called her mysterious. Didn’t you go to someone to help you solve the mystery?’

‘I’ll tell you frankly, I wanted to do that—ask for the solution of the mystery, I mean—but, well, I disliked to ask a stranger, and I thought I’d rather ask you.’

He stopped, to note Craig’s reaction to this speech. But there was none. Young Madison just stared at him and waited.

Stone went on; ‘I am sure what we call mystery is no mystery to you. If there is anything to be explained about Miss Verne, you know all about it; and that is as it should be. But it would be kinder to your aunt, and helpful to me, if you would tell us what it’s all about.’

‘I wish I could—’ Craig began, and stopped.

‘Because of a promise?’

‘Because of another’s promise. And, I say, Stone, upon the honor of a Madison, there is nothing in the mystery, as you call it, about Miss Verne, that had the very slightest bearing on the death of my uncle.’

‘Then why?’

‘Oh, there are lots of other reasons. You see—’

‘I can’t see things, unless you tell me,’ Stone said, after waiting for Craig to complete his speech. ‘Answer this, then: Do you think it a proper—a decent thing—for a girl to be engaged to a man, and within a week of his death, become engaged to his nephew?’

Craig looked very grave, even solemn, as he replied: ‘It is all right in our case, Mr. Stone. You do not understand.’

‘Tell me, then, so that I can understand.’

‘I will tell you when Avis comes back here. If she never comes, I shall never tell you—nor anyone else.’

## **Chapter 29**

IT WAS TUESDAY morning. The funeral services for Hetty Garson were to be held at 11 o'clock, and, shortly before that hour the family and most of the servants were in their places. Many people came, some from friendly feelings toward the family, and some from curiosity, hoping to learn something about the tragedies that had come to the dwellers at Silver Hill.

Late the night before, Stone had received the report from Guy Prentiss about the latent finger-prints on the pages of the detective's story, and to the detective's deep regret, it was just what he had expected.

At the opening of the service, Stone sat in a chair near the hall door, and during the first prayer, he slipped silently from the room, and went to the servants' sitting room. As most of the staff were paying their last respects to Hetty, there was no one around except a few necessary caretakers, and one big, husky man, to whom Stone beckoned. Jim Green he was, and Stone went with him to the basement rooms. Everything was in the same perfect order that marked the whole house, and knowing what was wanted, Green led the detective to a small room, containing piled up boxes and barrels.

'This here bar'l is the one you want,' he said, 'it holds the dump of the waste baskets.'

'Kept separate from other rubbish?' Stone asked.

'Yes, sir. Miss Madison, she has everything just so, and it's my place to watch out that nothing goes wrong. This barrel will be emptied into the big incinerator Thursday. Now what do you want I should do?'

'I want to look through the barrel, to find something that was thrown into a waste basket, probably, on Sunday, day before yesterday. How do, we go about it?'

'Sunday, you say? Well, what you want oughter be 'bout a third of the way down. Let's see about it.'

The big man upended the barrel, and scattered the contents over the floor, until perhaps a third of the bulk was out.

'Seen it yet?' he asked; as Stone scanned the papers.

'No—it may be a sort of bundle, or a box. Shake out a few more.'

Green became interested, and let some more papers fall out of the barrel.

'Hold off,' said Stone and picked up a small bundle wrapped in white tissue paper. He partially opened it, and nodded his head slowly.

'This is what I want,' he said, and Green wondered that he showed no satisfaction at his success.

'Clear it all up again.' Stone directed, 'and here's something for your trouble.'

'Thank you, sir,' the handy man said, and Stone went away upstairs. He went to his room, locked the door and opened the parcel. It was wound in successive swathings of tissue paper, which Stone scrutinized with a thought of fingerprints.

'But I need no finger-print evidence to know who put this lot in the waste-basket,' he told himself. He marvelled at the efficient housekeeping that resulted in the perfect order and arrangement of the basement rooms, and realized the proficiency of the well-trained staff.

He returned to the seat he had left, in time to hear the last of the service. When it was over, Cornelia hurried away to her own room, and the assembly dispersed. Stone saw Craig and Avis go into a small reception room, quite evidently for a conference. He hastened his steps and went in with them.

‘I remember your promise, Craig,’ he said, ‘to tell me the truth about Miss Verne, if she returned. I must hold you to that promise for your sake and hers, as well as in the interests of truth and justice. Will you tell me now what has seemed so mysterious to me ever since I have been in this house?’

But Avis replied. ‘I will tell you, Mr. Stone. It is my place to do so, and I want you to know, and to forgive.’

‘I shall be glad to hear your story, Miss Verne.’

Stone remembered Grimsby’s statement that Miss Verne had gone to Hollywood to see about her divorce, which was apparently pending. He could not quite see how Avis was going to explain this, unless there was an imposture somewhere.

‘Have you no idea of the truth, Mr. Stone?’ she began.

‘I am forced to the conclusion that there are two Miss Vernes.’

‘Then I will tell you,’ the girl went on. ‘You remember the day of a cocktail party at Mrs. Crosby’s?’

‘Yes, I saw you there.’

‘You did. And I daresay you thought I was Yvette Verne, as others did. But I am not. Yvette Verne is a beautiful and clever Film Actress, I am her stand-in. That means I represent her in her work, when occasion requires. Every film star has a double, an understudy, but in the profession, called a stand-in. The stand-in, is, of course, chosen because of a strong likeness to the principal; and this likeness is wherever possible, made stronger. Also, the stand-in studies the attitudes, the gestures, the voice of the principal, and often it is difficult to tell them apart.

‘I have so modelled myself on Yvette Verne, that when we are not together, I am mistaken for her. This suits Yvette, because she depends on me to do errands or accept invitations that she dislikes.’

‘And you do as you’re told?’ asked Stone.

‘Most gladly. I adore Yvette. I would do anything for her. So, when at the Crosby party I met Craig, and he invited me to come here for a week-end, I was happy to say yes. But when I told Yvette about it, she was so anxious to come here herself, that, she coaxed me into letting her come, and I stayed at home.’

‘Then you were not engaged to Harley Madison?’

‘No, Mr. Stone. I never saw Harley Madison—alive. You see, it was this way. I always do as Yvette wishes. So she came here on the invitation that was given to me; she stayed a few days, won the heart of Mr. Madison and stood by his side when he announced his engagement to her.’

‘But—’ Stone began.

‘Let me finish, please. They were engaged, and that very night, he was killed. When Yvette learned this, the next morning, she had no thought but to get away from here. She foresaw the inquiry, the police investigation and all that, and while no shadow of suspicion could rest on her, she wanted to get away

from it all. She came right to our home in New York, and begged me to come back here as Yvette. I said I could not convince the family here that I was the girl Mr. Madison had loved. But she said I must, and that if I put up my hair and wore plain black, the deception would not be noted. I had no choice, but to do her bidding. So I came back as Yvette. No question was raised, but Craig realized that I was the girl he had met at Amy Crosby's. I finally told him the whole story. I am willing to tell it to anyone now.

'I went to New York yesterday to tell Yvette that I would carry on this deceit no longer.'

'She has gone to Hollywood;' said Stone. 'She is getting a divorce,'

'Yes,' Avis said, 'but she has just learned that her very wicked husband's alive. She did not know he was when she became engaged to Mr. Madison.'

Avis looked at Stone.

'I will not trouble you more now, Avis,' Stone said, gently. 'I am glad to learn the truth and we will confer further some other time. But I hope you will tell it, in part, at least, this afternoon. Sutton is coming to have what he thinks will be a final interview. He is having Job Hendricks carefully watched, and is hoping to wring a confession from him to-day.'

'He will want me there?' Avis asked.

'Oh, yes; as material, witness. I advise you to tell the truth about Yvette Verne.'

'I think she will tell,' Craig said. 'Naturally, she is under great nervous strain. I shall take care of her. We are going to tell Aunt Cornelia when she feels like seeing us.'

'Don't trouble the poor lady too soon. She is almost prostrated with grief and apprehension.'

Stone asked one more question.

'Avis, the resemblance, between you two girls is wonderful. Are you related?'

'I am Yvette's half-sister,' was the reply.

Stone went into the study and called Sutton on the telephone. He told him guardedly, that he had discovered the criminal, and he advised him not to have Hendricks at the session that afternoon. He said he could have him shadowed, but if he definitely accused him of the crime, he would be making the mistake of his life. Sutton reluctantly agreed to take his advice, and said good-bye rather shortly.

AND SO, when the inquiry was resumed, there was none present save the family and their guests and servants. Sutton called on Avis to tell again her reasons for coming back to the house after she had started with Craig for the motor drive. But before the girl could reply, Stone interrupted.

'Miss Verne has a statement to make,' he said, 'and I will ask Mr. Sutton to delay his query until after she has told her story. For one has a definite and decided bearing on the other.'

Avis then told the story of Yvette, her half-sister, and herself, and their separate appearances at Silver Hill.

Sutton listened, amazed.

‘So, you see,’ Avis concluded, ‘I am so devoted to Yvette, that I do anything and everything she wants me to. I did not come back here Saturday afternoon, when Wilkins thought he saw me—that was Yvette. She came in and went up to my room to get some papers she wanted. But I let it pass that it was I, for I didn’t know then what Yvette wanted me to do.’

‘But, Mr. Madison,’ Sutton said to Craig, ‘you declared that you brought Miss Verne back here and waited while she entered the house and came out again.’

‘Yes,’ Craig answered, ‘that was an untruth. But Avis had said it and I knew she had some good reason for uttering an untruth, and I backed her up. As I always expect to do.’

‘These points are interesting,’ Stone observed, ‘but we are now about to consider a more serious business. That is, the identity of the murderer of two members of the household.’

Cornelia, seeming not to hear him, looked past him, at Avis. ‘Then you are not the girl my brother loved?’ she said.

‘No, Miss Madison. That was Yvette. She left here the morning after the announcement, as soon as she heard of Mr. Madison’s death. She came to our home in New York, and made me come back here in her place. She said, in black clothes, and with my hair done up, I would surely be taken for her.’

## **Chapter 30**

‘WHY DID YVETTE want to go away?’ Cornelia asked Avis.

‘She was frightened at the thoughts of an inquest and policemen.’

‘Then did Yvette or did she not go out to the ivy arbor that morning at three o’clock?’

‘She did not. It was I in the ivy arbor, and with me was Dick Mosby, a friend. I had to come to bring Yvette some important papers, and she had told me to stick them in the vines of the arbor and she would get them next day. I did all that, and as I had on a coat and hat just like hers, Hetty mistook me for her. We always have duplicate clothes.’

‘Your story continues to be of absorbing interest, Miss Verne,’ Stone said, ‘but I ask your attention in another direction. I have been engaged to discover the murderer of Mr. Madison. I have made the discovery. I can state that the criminal is now with us, in this group, and I trust we may hear a confession. Will the one who killed Mr. Madison tell us so?’

There was a long, ghastly pause. Sutton looked steadily at Craig.

But Craig’s countenance showed no sign of guilt.

‘I am speaking to the murderer,’ Stone went on, and his tone was sympathetic. ‘Please tell your secret yourself, or—I shall be obliged to do so.’

There was still no response.

‘Since we are not to be told,’ Stone said, ‘I shall have to state my findings and thus reveal to you the awful truth. My knowledge of it came to me by two insignificant clues. One of these was the detective story, you have all heard of, which contains an account of the method by which Mr. Harley Madison was killed.’

All eyes turned to Craig. All recalled that he had mentioned that book as soon as he heard of the method of his uncle's death. They knew that he had remembered that death in the story book, and they assumed the rest. Avis had no such thoughts and she sat, with her hand in Craig's, and wondered who the criminal really was.

'Many finger-prints on that book's pages were identified,' Stone went on. 'But there were many more, which are what is called latent, that do not show and can be discovered only by a skilled use of certain chemicals. This test has been made, and prints that must surely be those of the murderer have been brought out.'

'Whose are they?' asked Tom.

'Unless the criminal will speak, I shall tell you in a moment. There was another clue. When Hetty cleaned Mr. Madison's room, she found under the bed a tiny hairpin. This she looked upon as a clue, and carried it at once to Miss Madison. Now, this, it is undeniable, might have been the tiny little hairpin that Hetty babbled about on her dying bed. Do you think, so Miss Madison?'

'It may have been,' Cornelia said, her voice low and awed. 'After Hetty cleaned my brother's room, last Saturday morning, she brought me a hairpin, a little one and said she had found it under the bed. She argued that it had dropped from the hair of the murderer. But I couldn't believe that a woman would commit murder. I don't know where the hairpin came from—I don't wear that kind myself.'

'Miss Madison,' and Stone's voice was not gentle now, 'cease that perjury. You are the murderer of your brother, your finger-prints are on the pages of the old book that tell how to commit that terrible crime, yours is the hand that thrust the broken knitting needle into your brother's very brain! And it was from your hair that the tiny hairpin fell, as you waited the moment for your dreadful deed! What have you to say?'

Cornelia Madison almost collapsed. Her lips trembled, and then, straightening up, she said:

'You are wrong; Mr. Stone! You are so anxious to find a victim that you pick out an innocent woman! How could I get into my brother's locked room? I went upstairs long before he did. I went right to my room, and to bed.'

'No, Miss Madison, you did not. You went to your own room, and asked Jenny to take off your evening gown and give you a negligee. She did so and you dismissed her. Then, you went to your brother's room. He had not come upstairs yet, and you lay down and rolled under the bed and stayed there, well hidden by the deep valance. That is why your hairpin was found on the floor under your brother's bed.'

'I don't wear those little hairpins! I don't own any!'

'You don't now, but you did, then. After you heard of Hetty's delirious words about a little hairpin, you knew what she meant.'

'And late Saturday night, after Hetty was dead, you gathered up all your hairpins, made them up in a parcel, wrapped in tissue paper, and where did you put them?'

Cornelia made no response but a low, frightened gurgle, and Stone went inexorably on:

'You went down in the basement with the parcel. Down to the room where the rubbish is put, which is to be burned in the incinerator. And—listen all—in with the hairpins, which I have here,' he opened a paper



parcel, 'there is also, the upper part of the knitting needle, of which the lower part was put to such diabolical use.'

He held up a silver-colored wire, with a round flat top. The women all recognised it and shuddered, the men looked and wondered.

'You somehow managed to get a knitting needle cut in two. You took the sharp end, and you waited under the bed, until you could tell by your brother's breathing that he was asleep, and then you crawled out—you had already drugged him, so there would be no interference with your diabolical plan. You accomplished it, and then you left the room by way of the door with the spring bolt.'

Cornelia fell back in her chair, limp.

'And since you seem to have no intention of making a confession,' Stone went on, inexorably, 'I will state, for you, that you also brought about the death of Hetty Garson.'

'No, no!' moaned Cornelia, covering her eyes with her hands.

'It is all known to me. While cleaning the room, Saturday morning, Hetty found the little hairpin under the bed. Your plan of concealing yourself in the room was a stroke of genius. But Hetty, finding the hairpin, surmised the truth. She was very intuitive, uncannily so, and she took the hairpin to you, and told you her suspicions. You put her off but you knew that she would carry the thing further, and so, right then and there, you gave her a drink of Scotch, telling her she needed a bracer. In the liquor was a dose of bichloride of mercury, which acts slowly but very surely.

'Then, you went off on the motor drive, and returned to find Hetty dead—by your own hand.'

'Yes; and you knew further investigations would be made, and, in a frenzy of fear, you collected all your little hairpins, and added the incriminating piece of the knitting needle, which you still possessed, and late at night, you crept down the basement stairs and threw the parcel in the rubbish barrel.'

'But I didn't kill Harley—I didn't!' Her voice rose to a shriek.

'Attempt no denial,' Stone went on, 'the proofs are too strong. Your finger-prints on the book were so light they were unobtainable by usual methods. But modern science knows a way, and they were shown to be thick over the pages about the method you used.

'But I am not certain of your motive. It was not money, you are far from mercenary; it was not jealousy, you were sincere in desiring your brother's happiness; it was not to be rid of him, you truly and deeply loved him. I don't get it.'

'Then I will tell you.' Cornelia Madison sat bold upright, and showed all her old-time spirit and bravery. 'Ten years ago my brother's wife died. At that time I was deeply in love with a man who was devoted to me. He hadn't yet asked me to marry him, but I knew he was about to do so.

'But my brother came to me, and in his desperate grief and sorrow at the loss of his wife, he was unthinking of anyone's good but his own. He asked me to come and keep house for him, and to promise him that I would never leave him, but always remain with him.

'I agreed to do so, if I might marry my friend, who I knew was about to ask me, and he would live with us, too. My brother flew into a passion, called me selfish and heartless, and said he would go away forever from such an unnatural, faithless sister.

‘I knew he was almost beside himself or he wouldn’t talk like that, and in a weak moment, I said I would keep house for him, and I would not marry the man I loved. Mr. Hemingway, that was his name, did ask me, and beg and coax me to leave my selfish brother and marry him. But I said no, and I remained with Harley. I never saw my lover again.

‘But I did my duty by my brother. I learned, as the years passed to care for him and make him happy. I looked after him in every way. I gave up my life to him, for I loved him dearly, and I was happy in making him content. But I took upon me a vow. I solemnly swore that if ever the time should come when Harley was about to marry, I should kill him. He should never know the happiness he had denied me. For long years, there was no sign of his marrying and I rejoiced that I had stood by him, though many sad times I mourned for my lost love.

‘When Harley announced his engagement, I did do all as Mr. Stone had described it. I planned it out long before and I was ready. Had I not lost that hairpin, the crime could never have been pinned on me.’

With a swift and dexterous motion, Cornelia put something into her mouth, and though Stone sensed in a second what she was doing, he could not reach her in time to stop her gesture. She had taken a tablet of prussic acid, and in a few moments was where they could never reach her again.

Craig took Avis by the arm and led her outside to the brisk, cold autumn air.

‘Do not grieve,’ he said. ‘It is far better so. Aunt Cornelia could not have lived on, with that awful secret corroding her soul. Let us think of her only as she was when at her best. And soon we will go away from here, and never come back.’

Fleming Stone joined them as they leaned against the verandah rail.

‘Do not be sorrowful,’ he said, ‘you will some day realize it is a case for gladness.’

And in silence the three watched the sun set. Leaving the two young people, Stone walked down the garden paths. He had been sincere when he said it was a case for gladness, meaning Cornelia’s death.

He had dreaded to think of that proud, stately woman going through arrest, imprisonment, trial, conviction, and punishment, all of which must have been her fate. He realized, better than most, what a vow meant to that strong, forthright spirit, and he was glad she was beyond further earthly punishment.

Strange, he mused, what fine people there are in this world, how much all do, or try to do, to stop or stem this rushing torrent of crime, and, yet, in spite of all our well-meant efforts, Crime Tears On!

**THE END**

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