

Also available in Large Print

by Agatha Christie:

The A.B.C. Murders

The Body in the Library

The Boomerang Clue

Crooked House

Evil Under the Sun

Miss Marple: The Complete Short Stories

A Murder is Announced

Peril at End House

The Secret Adversary

Three Blind Mice and Other Stories

The Witness for the Prosecution

TOHRRD5 ZERO

Boston/

1988

Copyright 1941, by Agatha Christie Limited.

Copyright renewed 1971, 1972 by Agatha Christie Limited.

All rights reserved.

Published in Large Print by arrangement with

Dodd, Mead & Co., Inc.

G.K. Hall Large Print Book Series.

Set in 18 pt Plantin.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Christie, Agatha, 18901976.

Towards zero / Agatha Christie.

p. cm.---(G.K. Hall large print book series) ISBN 0-8161-4611-X (lg. print) ISBN 0-8161-4612-8 (pb)

1. Large type books. I. Title.

[PR6005.H66T65

1988]

823'.912--dc19

8811926

Contents

Prologue

"Open the Door and Here Are the
People"

Snow White and Rose Red

A Fine Italian Hand...

Zero Hour

8 TO

170

289

Prologue

November 19th

The group round the fireplace was nearly all composed of lawyers or those who had an interest in the law. There was Martindale, the solicitor; Rufus Lord, K.C.; young Daniels, who had made a name for himself in the Carstairs case; a sprinkling of other barristers Mr. Justice Cleaver, Lewis of Lewis and Trench and old Mr. Treves. Mr. Treves was close on eighty, a very ripe and experienced eighty. He was a member of a famous firm of solicitors, and the most famous member of that firm. He had settled innumerable delicate cases out of court, he was said to know more of backstairs history than any man in England and he was a

specialist on criminology.

Unthinking people said Mr. Treves ought
to write his memoirs. Mr. Treves knew bet-ter.
He knew that he knew too much.

Though he had lone retired from active

practice, there was no man in England whose
opinion was so respected by the members of
his own fraternity. Whenever his thin, pre-cise,
little voice was raised there was always
a respectful silence.

The conversation now was on the subject
of a much talked of case which had finished
that day at the Old Bailey. It was a murder
case and the prisoner had been acquitted.
The present company was busy trying the
case over again and making technical criti-cisms.

The prosecution had made a mistake in
relying on one of its witnesses old Depleach
ought to have realized what an opening he
was giving to the defense. Young Arthur

had made the most of that servant girl's evidence. Bentmore, in his summing up, had very rightly put the matter in its correct perspective, but the mischief was done by then the jury had believed the girl. Juries were funny--you never knew what they'd swallow and what they wouldn't but let them once get a thing into their heads and no one was ever going to get it out again. They believed that the girl was speaking the truth about the crowbar and that was that. The medical evidence had been a bit above their heads. All those long terms and scientific jargon damned bad witnesses, these scientific johnnies always hemmed and hawed and couldn't say yes or no to a plain question always "under certain circumstances that might take place" and so on!

They talked themselves out, little by little, and as the remarks became more spasmodic and disjointed, a general feeling grew of something lacking. One head after another turned in the direction of Mr. Treves. For

Mr. Treves had as yet contributed nothing to the discussion. Gradually it became apparent that the company were waiting for a final word from their most respected colleague.

Mr. Treves, leaning back in his chair, was absentmindedly polishing his glasses. Something in the silence made him look up sharply.

"Eh?" he said. "What was that? You asked me something?"

Young Lewis spoke:

"We were talking, sir, about the Lamorne case."

He paused expectantly.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Treves. "I was thinking of that."

There was a respectful hush.

"But I'm afraid," said Mr. Treves, still
polishing, "that I was being fanciful. Yes,

fanciful. Result of getting on in years, I sup-pose.

At my age one can claim the privilege
of being fanciful, if one likes."

"Yes, indeed, sir," said young Lewis, but
he looked puzzled.

"I was thinking," said Mr. Treves, "not
so much of the various points of law raised
though they were interesting very interest-ing
if the verdict had gone the other way
there would have been good grounds for
appeal, I rather think but I won't go into
that now. I was thinking, as I say, not of the
points of law but of the well, of the people
in the case."

Everybody looked rather astonished. They
had considered the people in the case only

as regarded their credibility or otherwise as witnesses. None of them had even hazarded a speculation as to whether the prisoner had been guilty or as innocent as the court had pronounced him to be.

"Human beings, you know," said Mr. Treves thoughtfully. "Human beings. All kinds and sorts and sizes and shapes of 'em. Some with brains and a good many more without. They'd come from all over the place, Lancashire, Scotland that restaurant pro-prietor from Italy, and that schoolteacher woman from somewhere out Middle West.

All caught up and enmeshed in the thing and finally all brought together in a court of law in London on a grey November day. Each one contributing his little part. The whole thing culminating in a trial for murder."

He paused and gently beat a delicate tat-too on his knee.

"I like a good detective story," he said.

"But, you know, they begin in the wrong place! They begin with the murder. But the

murder is the end. The story begins long before that years before sometimes with all the causes and events that bring certain

people to a certain place at a certain time on a certain day. Take that little maid servant's evidence if the kitchenmaid hadn't pinched her young man she wouldn't have thrown up her situation in a huff and gone to the Lamornes and been the principal witness for the defense. That Giuseppe Antonelli coming over to exchange with his brother for a month. The brother is as blind as a bat. He wouldn't have seen what Giuseppe's sharp eyes saw. If the constable hadn't been sweet on the cook at No. 48, he wouldn't have been late on his beat... ."

He nodded his head gently.

"All converging towards a given slot.

And then, when the time comes over the top! Zero hour. Yes, all of them converging towards zero... ."

He repeated, "Towards zero... ."

Then he gave a quick little shudder.

"You're cold, sir, come nearer the fire."

"No, no," said Mr. Treves. "Just some-one walking over my grave as they say. Well, well, I must be making my way homewards."

He gave an affable little nod and went slowly and precisdy out of the room.

There was a moment's dubious silence and then Rufus Lord, K.C., remarked that poor old Treves was getting on.

Sir William Cleaver said:

"An acute brain a very acute brain but
anno domini tells in the end."

"Got a groggy heart, too," said Lord.

"May drop down any minute I believe."

"He takes pretty good care of himself,"
said young Lewis.

At that moment Mr. Treves was carefully
stepping into his smooth-running Daimler.
It deposited him at a house in a quiet square.
A solicitous buffer valet helped him off with
his coat. Mr. Treves walked into his library
where a coal fire was burning. His bedroom
lay beyond, for out of consideration for his
heart he never went upstairs.

He sat down in front of the fire and drew
his letters towards him.

His mind was still dwelling on the fancy
he had outlined at the Club.

"Even now," thought Mr. Treves to him-self,
"some drama some murder to be is
in course of preparation. If I were writing
one of these amusing stories of blood and
crime, I should begin now with an elderly
gentleman sitting in front of the fire opening
his letters going, unbeknownst to himself
towards zero. . . ."

He slit open an envelope and gazed down
absently at the sheet he extracted from it.

Suddenly his expression changed. He came
back from romance to reality.

"Dear me," said Mr. Treves. "How ex-tremely
annoying! Really, how very vexing.
After all these years! This will alter all my
plans."

"Open the Door and

Here Are The People"

January 11th

The man in the hospital bed shifted his body slightly and stifled a groan.

The nurse in charge of the ward got up from her table and came down to him. She shifted his pillows and moved him into a more comfortable position.

Andrew MacWhirter only gave a grunt by way of thanks.

He was in a state of seething rebellion and bitterness.

By this time it ought all to have been over. He ought to have been out of it all! Curse that damned ridiculous tree growing out of the cliff! Curse those officious sweethearts who braved the cold of a winter's night to keep a tryst on the cliff edge.

But for them (and the tree!) it would have
been over a plunge into the deep icy water,

h4sf etva,lo rrhnenci then oblivion

the end of a misused, useless, unprofitable
life.

And now where was he? Lying ridicu-lously
in a hospital bed with a broken shoul-der
and with the prospect of being hauled
up in a police court for the crime of trying
to take his own life.

Curse it, it was his own life, wasn't it?

And if he had succeeded in the job, they
would have buried him piously as of un-sound
mind!

Unsound mind, indeed! He'd never been
saner! And to commit suicide was the most
logical and sensible thing that could be done
by a man in his position.

Completely down and out, with his health

permanently affected, with a wife who had left him for another man. Without a job, without affection, without money, health or hope, surely to end it all was the only possible solution?

And now here he was in this ridiculous plight. He would shortly be admonished by a sanctimonious magistrate for doing the common sense thing with a commodity which belonged to him and to him only his life.

He snorted with anger. A wave of fever passed over him.

The nurse was beside him again.

She was young, red-haired, with a kindly, rather vacant face.

"Are you in much pain?"

"No, I'm not."

"I'll give you something to make you
sleep."

"You'll do nothing of the sort."

"But "

"Do you think I can't bear a bit of pain
and sleeplessness?"

She smiled in a gentle, slightly superior
way.

"Doctor said you could have something."

"I don't care what doctor said."

She straightened the covers and set a glass
of lemonade a little nearer to him. He said,
slightly ashamed of himself, "Sorry if I was
rude."

"Oh, that's all right."

It annoyed him that she was so completely
undisturbed by his bad temper. Nothing like

that could penetrate her nurse's armor of
indulgent indifference. He was a patient

not a man.

He said:

"Damned interference all this damned

interference

"

She said reprovingly, "Now, now, that

isn't very nice."

"Nice?" he demanded. "Nice? My God."

She said calmly, "You'll feel better in the
morning."

He swallowed.

"You nurses. You nurses. You're inhuman,
that's what you are!"

"We know what's best for you, you see."

"That's what's so infuriating! About you.

About a hospital. About the world. Continual interference! Knowing what's best for other people. I tried to kill myself. You know that, don't you?"

She nodded.

"Nobody's business but mine whether I threw myself off a bloody cliff or not. I'd finished with life. I was down and out!"

She made a little clicking noise with her tongue. It indicated abstract sympathy. He was a patient. She was soothing him by letting him blow off steam.

"Why shouldn't I kill myself if I want to?" he demanded.

She replied to that quite seriously.

"Because it's wrong."

"Why is it wrong?"

She looked at him doubtfully. She was not disturbed in her own belief, but she was much too inarticulate to explain her reaction.

"Well I mean it's wicked to kill your self. You've got to go on living whether you like it or not.

"Why have you?"

"Well, there are other people to consider,
aren't there?"

"Not in my case. There's not a soul in the
world who'd be the worse for my passing

on.

"Haven't you got any relations? No mother
or sister or anything?"

"No! I had a wife once but she left me

quite right too! She saw I was no good."

"But you've got friends, surely?"

"No, I haven't. I'm not a friendly sort
of man. Look here, nurse, I'll tell you some-thing.

I was a happy sort of chap once. Had
a good job and a good-looking wife. There
was a car accident. My boss was driving the
car and I was in it. He wanted me to say
he was driving under thirty at the time of

the accident. He wasn't. He was driving nearer fifty. Nobody was killed, nothing like that, he just wanted to be in the right for the insurance people. Well, I wouldn't say what he wanted. It was a lie. I don't tell lies."

The nurse said, "Well, I think you were quite right. Quite right."

. "You do, do you? That pigheadedness of mine cost me my job. My boss was sore. He

saw to it that I didn't get another. My wife got fed up seeing me mooch about unable to get anything to do. She went off with a man who had been my friend. He was doing well and going up in the world. I drifted along going steadily down. I took to drinking a bit. That didn't help me to hold down jobs. Finally I came down to hauling strained my inside the doctor told me I'd never be strong again. Well, there wasn't much to live for then. Easiest way, and the cleanest way,

was to go right out. My life was no good to myself or anyone else."

The little nurse murmured, "You don't know that."

He laughed. He was better tempered already. Her naive obstinacy amused him.

"My dear girl, what use am I to anybody?"

She said confusedly, "You don't know. You may be someday "

"Someday? There won't be any someday. Next time I shall make sure."

She shook her head decidedly.

"Oh, no," she said. "You won't kill your-self now."

"Why not?"

"They never do."

He stared at her. "They never do." He was
one of a class of would-be suicides. Ocenine

his mouth to protest energetically, his innate
honesty suddenly stopped him.

Wou/d he do it again? Did he really mean
to do it?

He knew suddenly that he didn't. For no
reason. Perhaps the fight reason was the one
she had given out of her specialized knowl-edge.
Suicides didn't do it again.

All the more .he felt determined to force
an admission from her on the ethical side.

"At any rate I've got a right to do what
I like with my own life."

"No no, you haven't."

"But why not, my dear girl, why?"

She flushed. She said, her fingers playing
with the little gold cross that hung round her
neck:

"You don't understand. God may need
you.

He stared taken aback. He did not want
to upset her childlike faith. He said mock-ingly:

"I suppose that one day I may stop a run-away
horse and save a golden-haired child
from death eh? Is that it?"

She shook her head. She said with vehe-mence
and trying to express what was so
vivid in her mind and so halting on her
tonmle:

"It may be just by being somewhere not
doing anything--just by being at a certain
place at a certain time oh, I can't say what
I mean, but you might just just walk along
a street someday and just by doing that accomplish

something terribly important perhaps

without even knowing what it was."

The red-haired little nurse came from the west coast of Scotland and some of her family had "the sight."

Perhaps, dimly, she saw a picture of a man walking up a road on a night in September and thereby saving a human being from a terrible death

February 14th

There was only one person in the room and the only sound to be heard was the scratching of that person's pen as it traced line after line across the paper.

There was no one to read the words that were being traced. If there had been, they would hardly have believed their eyes. For what was being written was a clear, carefully detailed project for murder.

There are times when a body is conscious of a mind controlling it when it bows obedient to that alien something that controls its actions. There are other times when a mind is conscious of owning and controlling a body and accomplishing its purpose by using that

body.

The figure sitting writing was in the last named state. It was a mind, a cool controlled intelligence. This mind had only one thought and one purpose the destruction of another human being. To the end that his purpose might be accomplished, the scheme was being worked out meticulously on paper. Every eventuality, every possibility was being taken into account. The thing had got to be absolutely foolproof. The scheme, like all good schemes, was not absolutely cut and dried.

There were certain alternative actions at certain points. Moreover, since the mind was intelligent, it realized that there must be intelligent provision left for the unforeseen.

But the main lines were clear and had been the place, the

closely tested. The time, method, the victim! . . .

The figure raised its head.

With its hand,
it picked up the sheets of paper and read
them carefully through. Yes, the thing was
crystal clear.

Across the scientist's face a smile came. It

was a smile that was not quite sane. The
figure drew a deep breath.

As man was made in the image of his

maker, so there was now a terrible travesty
of a creator's joy.

Yes, everything planned everyone's reaction
foretold and allowed for, the good and
evil in everybody played upon and brought

into harmony with one evil design.

There was one thing lacking still

With a smile the writer traced a date
date in September.

Then, with a laugh, the paper was torn in pieces and the pieces carried across the room and put into the heart of the glowing fire. There was no carelessness. Every single piece was consumed and destroyed. The plan was now only existent in the brain of its creator.

March 8th

Superintendent Battle was sitting at the breakfast table. His jaw was set in a truculent fashion and he was reading slowly and carefully a letter that his wife had just tearfully handed to him. There was no expression visible on his face, for his face never did register any expression. It had the aspect of

a face carved out of wood. It was solid and durable and, in some way, impressive. Superintendent Battle had never suggested brilliance; he was, definitely, not a brilliant man, but he had some other quality, difficult to define, that was nevertheless forceful.

"I can't believe it," said Mrs. Battle, sob-bing.

"Sylvia!"

Sylvia was the youngest of Superintendent and Mrs. Battle's five children. She was six-teen and at school near Maidstone.

The letter was from Miss Amphrey, head-mistress of the school in question. It was a clear, kindly and extremely tactful letter. It set out, in black and white, that various small thefts had been puzzling the school authorities for some time, that the matter had been at last cleared up, that Sylvia Battle had confessed and that Miss Amphrey would like to see Mr. and Mrs. Battle at the earliest possible opportunity "to discuss the position."

Superintendent Battle folded up the let-ter, put it in his pocket, and said, "You leave this to me, Mary."

He got up, walked round the table, patted her on the cheek and said, "Don't worry,

clear it will be right."

He went from the room leaving comfort
and reassurance behind him.

That afternoon, in Miss Amphrey's modern
and individualistic drawing room, Superintendent
Battle sat very squarely on his
chair, his large wooden hands on his knees,
confronting Miss Amphrey and managing to
look, far more than usual, every inch a policeman.

Miss Amphrey was a very successful head-mistress.
She had personality a great deal
of personality, she was enlightened and up to
date, and she combined discipline with modern
ideas of self-determination.

Her room was representative of the spirit
of the day. Everything was of a cool oat-meal
color there were big jars of daffodils
and bowls of tulips and hyacinths. One or
two good copies of the antique Greek, two
pieces of advanced modern sculpture, two

Italian primitives on the walls. In the midst of all this, Miss Amphrey herself, dressed in a deep shade of blue, with an eager face suggestive of a conscientious greyhound, and clear blue eyes looking serious through thick lenses.

"The important thing," she was saying in her clear, well-modulated voice, "is that this should be taken the right way. It is the rl

herself we have to think of, Mr. Battle. Sylvia

herself! It is more important most impor-tant that her life should not be crippled in any way. She must not be made to assume a burden of guilt blame must be very very sparingly meted out, if at all. We must arrive at the reason behind these quite trivial pilferings. A sense of inferiority, perhaps? She is not good at games, you know an obscure wish to shine in a different sphere the desire to assert her ego? We must be

very very careful. That is why I wanted to see you alone first to impress upon you to be very, very careful with Sylvia. I repeat again, it's very important to get at what is behind this."

"That, M/ss Amphrey," said Superintendent Battle, "is why I have come down."

His voice was quiet, his face unemotional, his eyes surveyed the schoolmistress appraisingly.

"I have been very gentle with her," said Miss Amphrey.
Battle said laconically, "Good of you,

"You see, I really love and understand these young things."

Battle did not reply directly. He said. "I'd

like to see my girl now, if you don't mind, Miss Amphrey."

With renewed emphasis Miss Amphrey admonished him to be careful to go slow not to antagonize a child just budding into womanhood.

Superintendent Battle showed no signs of impatience. He just looked blank.

She took him at last to her study. They passed one or two girls in the passages. They stood politely to attention but their eyes were full of curiosity. Having ushered Battle into a small room not quite so redolent of personality as the one downstairs, Miss Amphrey withdrew and said she would send Sylvia to him.

Just as she was leaving the room, Battle stopped her.

"One minute, m'am, how did you come to pitch upon Sylvia as the one responsible for these er leakages?"

"My methods, Mr. Battle, were psycho-logical."

Miss Amphrey spoke with dignity.

"Psychological? H'm. What about the evidence,
Miss Amphrey?"

"Yes, yes, I quite understand, Mr. Battle

you would feel that way. Your profession
steps in. But psychology is beginning

to be recognized in criminology. I can assure
you that there is no mistake Sylvia freely

admits the whole thing."

Battle nodded.

"Yes, yes I know that. I was just asking
how you came to pitch upon her to begin

"Well, Mr. Battle, this business of things
being taken out of the girls' lockers was on

the increase. I called the school together and told them the facts. At the same time, I studied their faces unobtrusively. Sylvia's expression struck me at once. It was guilty confused. I knew at that moment who was responsible. I wanted, not to confront her with her guilt, but to get her to admit it herself. I set a little test for her a word association test."

Battle nodded to show he understood.

"And finally the child admitted it all!"

Her father said, "I see."

Miss Amphrey hesitated a minute, then went out.

Battle was standing looking out of the window when the door opened again.

He turned round slowly and looked at his daughter.

Sylvia stood just inside the door which she had closed behind her. She was tall, dark,

angular. Her face was sullen and bore marks
of tears. She said timidly rather than defiantly:

"Well, here I am."

Battle looked at her thoughtfully for a
minute or two. He sighed.

"I should never have sent you to this
place," he said. "That woman's a fool."

Sylvia lost sight of her own problem in
sheer amazement.

"Miss Amphrey? Oh, but she's wonderful!
We all think so."

"H'm," said Battle. "Can't be quite a fool,
then, if she sells the idea of herself as well
as that. All the same, this wasn't the place
for you although I don't know this might
have happened anywhere."

Sylvia twisted her hands together. She
looked down. She said,

"I'm I'm sorry, Father. I really am."

"So you should be," said Battle shortly.

"Come here."

She came slowly and unwillingly across
the room to him. He took her chin in his
great square hand and looked closely into her
face.

"Been through a great deal, haven't you?"
he said gently.

Tears started into her eyes.

Battle said slowly:

"You see, Sylv{a, I've known all along
with you, that there was something. Most
people have got a weakness of some kind or
another. Usually it's plain enough. You can
see when a child's greedy, or bad tempered,

or got a streak of the bully in him. You were

a good child, very quiet very sweet tem-pered
no trouble in any way and some-times
I've worried. Because if there's a flaw
you don't see, sometimes it wrecks the whole

show when the article is tried out."

"Like me!" said Sylvia.

"Yes, like you. You've cracked under
strain and in a damned queer way too. It's
a way, oddly enough, I've never come across
before."

The girl said suddenly and scornfully:

"I should think you'd come across thieves
often enough!"

"Oh, yes I know all about them. And
that's why, my dear--not because I'm your
father (fathers don't know much about their

children) but because I'm a policeman that
I know well enough you're not a thief! You
never took a thing in this place. Thieves are
of two kinds, the kind that yields to sudden
and overwhelming temptation (and that happens
damned seldom--it's amazing that

temptation the ordinary normal honest human
being can withstand), and there's the
kind that just takes what doesn't belong
to them almost as a matter of course. You
don't belong to either

a thief. You're a very

Sylvia began: "But "

He swept on.

"You've admitted it all? Oh, yes, I know
that. There was a saint once went out with
bread for the poor. Husband didn't like it.
Met her and asked what there was in her
basket. She lost her nerve and said it was

roses He tore open her basket and roses it
was a miracle! Now if you'd been Saint
Elizabeth and were out with a basket of roses,
and your husband had come along and asked
you what you'd got, you'd have lost your
nerve and said 'Bread.'"

He paused and then said gently, "That's
how it happened, isn't it?"

There was a longer pause and then the girl
suddenly bent her head.

Battle said:

"Tell me, child. What happened exactly?"

"She had us all up. Made a speech. And
I saw her eyes on me and I knew she thought
it was me! I felt myself getting red and I

type. You're not

unusual type of

saw some of the girls looking at me. It was awful. And then the others began looking at me and whispering in corners. I could see they all thought so. And then the Amp had me up here with some of the others one evening and we played a sort of word game she said words and we gave answers "

Battle gave a disgusted grunt.

"And I could see what it meant and and I sort of got paralyzed. I tried not to give the wrong word I tried to think of things quite outside like squirrels or flow-ers-and

the Amp was there watching me

with eyes like gimlets you know, sort of boring inside one. And after that oh, it got

worse and worse and one day the Amp talked

to me quite kindly and so so understandingly and and I broke down and said I

had done it and oh! Daddy, the relief!"

Battle was stroking his chin.

"I see."

"You do understand?"

"No, Sylvia, I don't understand, because

I'm not made that way. If anyone tried to

make me say I'd done something I hadn't I'd
feel more like giving them a sock on the jaw.
But I see how it came about in your case
and that gimlet-eyed Amp of yours has had
as pret an example of unusual psychology

shoved under her nose as any half baked
exponent of misunderstood theories could

ask for. The thing to do now is to clear up
this mess. Where's Miss Amphrey?"

Miss Amphrey was hovering tactfully near
at hand. Her sympathetic smile froze on her
face as Superintendent Battle said bluntly:

"In justice to my daughter, I must ask

that you call in your local police over this."

"But, Mr. Battle, Sylvia herself"

"Sylvia has never touched a thing that
didn't belong to her in this place."

"I quite understand that, as a father "

"I'm not talking as a father, but as a policeman. Get the police to give you a hand over this. They'll be discreet. You'll find the things hidden away somewhere and the right set of fingerprints on them, I expect. Petty pilferers don't think of wearing gloves. I'm taking my daughter away with me now. If the police find evidence real evidence to connect her with the thefts, I'm prepared for her to appear in court and take what's coming to her, but I'm not afraid."

As he drove out of the gate with Sylvia beside him some five minutes later, he asked, "Who's the girl with fair hair, rather fuzzy, very pink cheeks and a spot on her chin,

blue eyes far apart? I passed her in the passage.

"That sounds like Olive Parsons."

"Ah, well, I shouldn't be surprised if she were the one."

"Did she look frightened?"

"No, looked smug! Calm smug look I've seen in the police court hundreds of times! I'd bet good money she's the thief but you won't find her confessing not much!"

Sylvia said with a sigh, "It's like coming out of a bad dream. Oh, Daddy, I am sorry! Oh, I am sorry! How could I be such a fool, such an utter fool? I do feel awful about it."

"Ah, well," said Superintendent Battle, patting her on the arm with a hand he dis-engaged from the wheel, and uttering one of his pet forms of trite consolation, "don't you worry. These things are sent to try us. Yes, these things are sent to try us. At least, I suppose so. I don't see what else they can be sent for "

April 19th

The sun was pouring down on Nevile
Strange's house at Hindhead.

It was an April day such as usually occurs
at least once in the month, hotter than most
of the June days to follow.

Nevile Strange was coming down the stairs.
He was dressed in white flannels and held
four tennis rackets under his arm.

If a man could have been selected from
amongst other Englishmen as an example
of a lucky man with nothing to wish for,
a Selection Committee might have chosen
Nevile Strange. He was a man well known to
the British public, a first-class tennis player
and all-round sportsman. Though he had
never reached the finals at Wimbledon, he
had lasted several of the opening rounds and

in the mixed doubles had twice reached the semi-finals. He was, perhaps, too much of an all-round athlete to be a champion tennis player. He was scratch at golf, a fine swimmer and had done some good climbs in the Alps. He was thirty-three, had magnificent health, good looks, plenty of money, an extremely beautiful wife whom he had recently married and, to all appearances, no cares or worries.

Nevertheless as Nevile Strange went downstairs this fine morning a shadow went with him. A shadow perceptible, perhaps, to no eyes but his. But he was aware of it. the

thought of it furrowed his brow and made his expression troubled and indecisive.

He crossed the hall, squared his shoulders as though definitely throwing off some burden, passed through the living room and out onto a glass verandah where his wife, Kay, was curled up amongst cushions drinking

orange juice.

Kay Strange was twenty-three and unusu-ally beautiful. She had a slender but subtly voluptuous figure, dark red hair, such a per-fect skin that she used only the slightest of make-up to enhance it, and those dark eyes and brows which so seldom go with red hair

and which are so devastating when they do.

Her husband said lightly:

"Hullo, gorgeous, what's for breakfast?"

Kay replied:

"Horribly bloody-looking kidneys for you and mushrooms and rolls of bacon."

"Sounds all right," said Nevile.

He helped himself to the aforementioned viands and poured out a cup of coffee. There was a companionable silence for some min-utes.

"Oo," said Kay, voluptuously wriggling bare toes with scarlet manicured nails. "Isn't the sun lovely? England's not so bad after

11"

r

They had just come back from the south
of France.

Nevile, after a bare glance at the newspaper
headlines, had turned to the sports
page and merely said "Um..."

Then, proceeding to toast and marmalade,
he put the paper aside and opened his letters.

There were a good many of these but
most of them he tore across and chucked
away. Circulars, advertisements, printed matter.

Kay said:

"I don't like my color scheme in the living
room. Can I have it done over, Nevile?"

"Anything you like, beautiful."

"Peacock blue," said Kay dreamily. "And
ivory satin cushions."

"You'll have to throw in an ape," said

Nevile.

"You can be the ape," said Kay.

Nevile opened another letter.

"Oh, by the way," said Kay. "Shirly has asked us to go to Norway on the yacht at the end of June. Rather sickening we can't."

She looked cautiously sideways at Nevile and added wistfully: "I would love it so."

Something, some cloud, some uncertainty,

· ,,, ! L *--

Kay said rebelliously:

"Have we got to go to dreary old Ca-milla's?"

Nevile frowned.

"Of course we have. Look here, Kay, we've had this out before. Sir Matthew was my guardian. He and Camilla looked after me. Gull's Point is my home, as far as any place is home to me."

"Oh, all right, all right," said Kay. "If we must, we must. After all we get all that

money when she dies, so I suppose we have to suck up a bit."

Nevile said angrily:

"It's not a question of sucking up! She's no control over the money. Sir Matthew left it in trust for her during her lifetime and to come to me and my wife afterwards. It's a question of affection. Why can't you understand that?"

Kay said, after a moment's pause:

"I do understand really. I'm just putting on an act because well, because I know I'm only allowed there on sufferance as it were. They hate me! Yes, they do! Lady Tressilian looks down that long nose of hers at me and Mary Aldin looks over my shoulder when she talks to me. It's all very well for you. You don't see what goes on."

"They always seem to me very polite to

you. You know quite well I wouldn't stand for it if they weren't."

Kay gave him a curious look from under her dark lashes.

"They're polite enough. But they know how to get under my skin all right. I'm the interloper, that's what they feel."

"Well," said Nevile, "after all, I suppose that's natural enough, isn't it?"

His voice had changed slightly. He got up and stood looking out at the view with his back to Kay.

"Oh, yes, I daresay it's natural. They were devoted to Audrey, weren't they?" Her voice shook a little. "Dear, well-bred, cool, color-less Audrey! Camilla's not forgiven me for taking her place."

Nevile did not turn. His voice was life-less, dull. He said: "After all, Camilla's old past seventy. Her generation doesn't really

like divorce, you know. On the whole I think she's accepted the position very well considering how fond she was of Audrey."

His voice changed just a little as he spoke the name.

"They think you treated her badly."

"So I did," said Nevile under his breath, but his wife heard.

"Oh, Nevile don't be so stupid. Just because she chose to make such a frightful

fUSS."

"She didn't make a fuss. made fusses."

"Well, you know what I

Audrey never

mean. Because

she went away and was ill, and went about everywhere looking brokenhearted. That's what I call a fuss! Audrey's not what I call a good loser. From my point of view if a wife can't hold her husband she ought to give him up gracefully! You two had nothing in common. She never played a game and was as anemic and washed up as as a dish rag. No life or go in her! If she really cared about you, she ought to have thought about your happiness first and been glad you were going to be happy with someone more suited to you."

Nevile turned. A faintly sardonic smile played round his lips.

"What a little sportsman! How to play the game in love and matrimony!"

Kay laughed and reddened.

"Well, perhaps I was going a bit far. But at any rate once the thing had happened, there it was. You've got to accept these things!"

Neville said quietly. "Audrey accepted it.

She divorced me so that you and I could marry.

"Yes, I know" Kay hesitated.

Neville said:

"You've never understood Audrey."

"No, I haven't. In a way, Audrey gives me the creeps. I don't know what it is about her. You never know what she's thinking.

.. She's she's a LITTLE frightening."

"Oh! nonsense, Kay."

"Well, she frightens me. Perhaps it's because she's got brains."

"My lovely nitwit!"

;;Kay laughed.

""You always call me that!"

"Because it's what you are!"

They smiled at each other. Nevile came over to her and, bending down, kissed the back of her neck.

"Lovely, lovely Kay," he murmured.

"Very good Kay," said Kay. "Giving up a lovely yachting trip to go and be snubbed by her husband's prim Victorian relations."

Nevile went back and sat down by the table.

"You know," he said, "I don't see why we shouldn't go on that trip with Shirty if

you really want to so much." Kay sat up in astonishment.

"And what about Saltcreek and Gull's Point?"

Nevile said in a rather unnatural voice:

"I don't see why we shouldn't go there early in September."

"Oh, but, Nevile, surely" She stopped.

"We can't go in July and August because of the Tournaments," said Nevile. "But we finish up at St. Lo the last week in August and it would fit in very well if we went on to Saltcreek from there."

"Oh, it would fit in all right beautifully.

But I thought well, she always goes there
for September, doesn't she?"

"Audrey, you mean?"

"Yes, I suppose they could put her off,
but "

"Why should they put her off?."

Kay stared at him dubiously.

"You mean, we'd be there at the same
time? What an extraordinary idea."

Nevile said irritably:

"I don't think it's at all an extraordinary
idea. Lots of people do it nowadays. Why
shouldn't we all be friends together? It makes
things so much simpler. Why, you said so
yourself only the other day."

"I did?"

"Yes. don't you remember? We were

talking about the Howes, and you said it was
the sensible civilized way to look at things,
and that Leonard's new wife and his Ex
were the best of friends."

"Oh, I wouldn't mind, I do think it's

sensible. But well I don't think Audrey

would feel like that about it."

"Nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense. You know, Nevile,

Audrey really was terribly fond of you I

don't

think she'd stand it for a moment."

"You're

quite wrong, Kay. Audrey thinks it

would be quite a good thing."

"Audrey

what do you mean, Audrey thinks?

How do you know what Audrey thinks?"

Nevile

looked slightly embarrassed. He cleared

his throat a little self-consciously.

"As

a matter of fact, I happened to run into

her yesterday when I was up in London."

"You
never told me."

Nevile
said irritably:

"I'm
telling you now. It was absolute chance.
I was walking across the Park and there
she was coming towards me. You wouldn't
want me to nm away from her, would
you?"

"No, of course not," said Kay, stating.

"I we well, we stopped, of course, and
then I t.urned round and walked with her.
I I felt t was the least I could do."

"Go on," said Kay.

"And then we sat down on a couple of
chairs and talked. She was very nice very
nice indeed."

"Delightful for you," said Kay.

"And we got talking, you know, about
one thing and another She was quite
natural and normal and and all that."

"Remarkable!" said Kay.

"And she asked how you were "

"Very kind of her!"

"And we talked about you for a bit.

Really, Kay, she couldn't have been nicer."

"Darling Audrey!"

"And then it sort of came to me you

know how nice it would be if if you two

could be friends if we could all get together.

And it occurred to me that perhaps

we might manage it at Gull's Point this summer.

Sort of place it could happen quite

naturally."

"You thought of that?"

"I well yes, of course. It was all my idea"

"You've never said anything to me about

having any such idea."

"Well, I only happened to think of it just

then."

"I see. Anyway, you suggested it and

Audrey thought it was a marvelous brain

wave?"

For the first time, something in Kay's
manner seemed to penetrate to Neville's con-sciousness.

He said:

"Is anything the matter, gorgeous?"

"Oh, no, nothing! Nothing at all! It didn't
occur to you or Audrey whether I should

think it a marvelous idea?"

Nevile stared at her.

"But, Kay, why on earth should you
mind.>"

Kay bit her lip.

Nevile went on:

"You

said yourself only the other

day "

"Oh, don't go into all that again! I was talking about other people not us."

"But that's partly what made me think of

"More fool me. Not that I believe that."

Neville was looking at her with dismay.

"But, Kay, why should you mind? I mean,

there's nothing for you to mind about!"

"Isn't there?"

"Well, I mean any jealousy or that would be on the other side." He paused, his voice changed. "You see, Kay, you and I treated Audrey damned badly. No, I don't mean that. It was nothing to do with you. I treated her very badly. It's no good just saying I couldn't help myself. I feel that if this could come off I'd feel better about the whole

thing. It would make me a lot happier."

Kay said slowly:

"So you haven't been happy?"

"Darling idiot, what do you mean? Of course I've been happy, radiantly happy.

But "

Kay cut in.

"But that's it! There's always been a but in this house. Some damned creeping shadow

about the place. Audrey's shadow."

Nevile stared at her.

"You mean to say you're jealous of Audrey?" he said.

"I'm not jealous of her. I'm afraid of her.

... Nevile, you don't know what Audrey's like."

"Not know what she's like when I've been married to her for over eight years?"

"You don't know," Kay repeated, "what Audrey is like."

"Preposterous!" said Lady Tressilian. She drew herself up on her pillow and glared fiercely round the room. "Absolutely preposterous! Nevile must be mad."

"It does seem rather odd," said Mary

Lady Tressilian had a striking-looking profile with a slender bridged nose down which, when so inclined, she could look with telling effect. Though she was now over seventy and in frail health, her native vigor of mind was in no way impaired. She had, it is true, long periods of retreat from life and its emotions when she would lie with half-closed eyes, but from these semicomas she would emerge with all her faculties sharpened to the uttermost, and with an incisive tongue. Propped up by pillows in a large bed set

across one corner of her room, she held her court like some French Queen. Mary Aldin, a distant cousin, lived with her. The two women got on together excellently. Mary was thirty-six, but had one of those smooth ageless faces that change little with passing years. She might have been thirty or forty-five. She had a good figure, an air of breeding, and dark hair to which one lock of white across the front gave a touch of individuality. It was at one time a fashion, but Mary's white lock of hair was natural and she had had it since her girlhood.

She looked down now reflectively at Neville Strange's letter which Lady Tressilian had handed to her.

"Yes," she said. "It does seem rather odd."

"You can't tell me," said Lady Tressilian, "that this is Neville's own idea! Somebody's put it into his head. Probably that near wife of his."

"Kay. You think it was Kay's idea?"

"It would be quite like her. New and vulgar! If husbands and wives have to advertise their difficulties in public and have recourse to divorce, then they might at least part decently. The new wife and I the old wife making friends is quite disgusting to my mind. Nobody has any standards nowadays!"

"I suppose it is just the modern way," said Mary.

"It won't happen in my house," said Lady Tressilian. "I consider I've done a all that could

be asked of me having that scarlet-toed creature here at all."

"She is Neville's wife."

"Exactly. Therefore I felt that Matthew would have wished it. He was devoted to the boy and always wanted him to look on this as his home. Since to refuse to receive his wife would have made an open breach, I

gave way and asked her here. I do not like her she's quite the wrong wife for Nevile no background, no roots!"

"She's quite well born," said Mary placatingly.

"Bad stock!" said Lady Tressilian. "Her father, as I've told you, had to resign from all his clubs after the card business. Luckily he died shortly after. And her mother was notorious on the Riviera. What a bringing up for the girl. Nothing but hotel life and that mother! Then she meets Nevile on the tennis courts, makes a dead set at him and never rests until she gets him to leave his wife of whom he was extremely fond and go off with her! I blame her entirely for the whole thing!"

Mary smiled faintly. Lady Tressilian had the old-fashioned characteristic of always blaming the woman and being indulgent towards the man in the case.

less faces that change little with passing years.

She might have been thirty or forty-five. She had a good figure, an air of breeding, and

dark hair to which one lock of white across the front gave a touch of individuality. It was at one time a fashion, but Mary's white lock of hair was natural and she had had it since her girlhood.

She looked down now reflectively at Nevile Strange's letter which Lady Tressilian, had handed to her.

"Yes," she said. "It does seem rather odd."

"You can't tell me," said Lady Tressilian, "that this is Nevile's own idea! Somebody's put it into his head. Probably that new wife of his."

"Kay. You think it was Kay's idea?"

"It would be quite like her. New and vulgar! If husbands and wives have to advertise their difficulties in public and have recourse to divorce, then they might at least part decently. The new wife and the old wife making friends is quite disgusting to my mind. Nobody has any standards nowadays?"

"I suppose it is just the modern way,"

said Mary.

"It won't happen in my house," said Lady

and

she said, "I don't want to see that

creature here at all."

"That's

exactly

what I want. I don't want to be asked of me having that scarlet-toed creature

here at all."

"She is Neville's wife."

"Exactly. Therefore I felt that Matthew

would have wished it. He was devoted to the

boy and always wanted him to look on this

as his home. Since to refuse to receive his

wife would have made an open breach, I

gave way and asked her here. I do not like her she's quite the wrong wife for Neville

no background, no roots!"

"She's quite well born," said Mary placatingly.

"Bad stock!" said Lady Tressilian. "Her

father, as I've told you, had to resign from

all his clubs after the card business. Luckily

he died shortly after. And her mother was

notorious on the Riviera. What a bringing

up for the girl. Nothing but hotel life and

that mother! Then she meets Nevile on the tennis courts, makes a dead set at him and never rests until she gets him to leave his wife of whom he was extremely fond and go off with her! I blame her entirely for the whole thing!"

Mary smiled faintly. Lady Tressilian had the old-fashioned characteristic of always blaming the woman and being indulgent towards the man in the case.

"I suppose, strictly speaking, Nevile was equally to blame," she suggested.

"Nevile was very much to blame," agreed Lady Tressilian. "He had a channing wife who had always been devoted perhaps too devoted to him. Nevertheless, if it hadn't been for that girl's persistence, I am convinced he would have come to his senses.

But she was determined to marry him! Yes, my sympathies are entirely with Audrey. I am very fond of Audrey."

Mary sighed.

"It has all been very difficult," she said.

"Yes, indeed. One is at a loss to know

how to act in such difficult circumstances.

Matthew was fond of Audrey, and so am I, and one cannot deny that she was a very good wife to Nevile though perhaps it is a pity that she could not have shared his amusements more. She was never an athletic girl. The whole business was very distressing. When I was a girl, these things simply did not happen. Men had their affairs, naturally, but they were not allowed to break up married life."

"Well, they happen now," said Mary bluntly.

"Exactly. You have so much common sense, dear. It is of no use recalling bygone

days. These things happen, and girls like Kay Mortimer steal other women's husbands

and nobody thinks the worse of them!"

"Except people like you, Camilla!"

"I don't count. That Kay creature doesn't worry whether I approve of her or not. She's

too busy having a good time. Neville can
bring her here when he comes and I'm even
willing to receive her friends though I do
not much care for that very theatrical-looking
young man who is always hanging round

her what is his name?"

"Ted Latimer?"

"That is it. A friend of her Riviera days
and I should very much like to know how he
manages to live as he does."

"By his wits," suggested Mary.

"One might pardon that. I rather fancy
he lives by his looks. Not a pleasant friend
for Neville's wife! I disliked the way he came
down last summer and stayed at the Easter-head
Bay Hotel while they were here."

Mary looked out of the open window. Lady
Tressilian's house was situated on a steep
cliff overhanging the river Tern. On the other
side of the river was the newly created sum-mer

resort of Easterhead Bay, consisting of a big sandy bathing beach, a cluster of modern bungalows and a large hotel on the headland

looking out to sea. Saltcreek itself was a straggling picturesque fishing village set on the side of a hill. It was old-fashioned, conservative and deeply contemptuous of Easterhead Bay and its summer visitors.

The Easterhead Bay Hotel was nearly exactly opposite Lady Tressilian's house and Mary looked across the narrow strip of water at it now where it stood in its blatant white newness.

"I am glad," said Lady Tressilian, closing her eyes, "that Matthew never saw that vulgar building. The coastline was quite unspoiled in his time."

Sir Matthew and Lady Tressilian had come to Gull's Point thirty years ago. It was ten

years since Sir Matthew, an enthusiastic sail-ing man, had capsized his dinghy and been drowned almost in front of his wife's eyes.

Everybody had expected her to sell Gull's Point and leave Saltcreek but Lady Tressilian had not done so. She had lived on in the house, and her only visible reaction had been to dispose of all the boats and do away with the boathouse. There were no boats available for guests at Gull's Point. They had to walk along to the ferry and hire a boat from one of the rival boatmen there.

Marv said, hesitating a little:

"Shall I write, then, to Nevile and tell him that what he proposes does not fit in with your plans?"

"I certainly shall not dream of interfering with Audrey's visit. She has always come to us in September and I shall not ask her to change her plans."

Mary said, looking down at the letter:

"You did see that Nevile says Audrey

er approves of the idea that she is quite willing to meet Kay?"

"I simply don't believe it," said Lady Tressilian. "Nevile, like all men, believes what he wants to believe!"

Mary persisted:

"He says he has actually spoken to her about it."

"What a very odd thing to do! No perhaps, after all, it isn't!"

Mary looked at her inquiringly.

"Like Henry the Eighth," said Lady Tressilian.

Mary looked puzzled.

Lady Tressilian elaborated her last remark.

"Conscience, you know! Henry was always trying to get Catherine to agree that the divorce was the right thing. Nevile knows that he has behaved badly he wants to feel comfortable about it all. So he has been ttwin

to bully Audrey into saying everything is all right and that she'll ct)me and meet Kay and that she doesn't mind at all."

"I wonder," said/lary slowly.

Lady Tressilian looked at her sharply.

"What's in your mind, my dear?"

"I was wondering" She stopped, then went on: "It seems so unlike Neville--this letter! You don't think that, for some reason, Audrey wants this Valois meeting?"

"Why should she" said Lady Tressilian sharply. "After Neville left her she went to her aunt, Mrs. Royce, at the Rectory, and had a complete breakdown. She was absolutely like a ghost of her former self. Obviously it hit her terribly hard. She's one of those quiet, self-contained people who feel things intensely."

Mary moved uneasily.

"Yes, she is intense. A queer girl in many

ways...

"She suffered a lot. Then

the divorce
went
through and Neville married the girl

and
little by little Audrey began to get
over it. Now she's almost back to
her old self. You can't tell me she
wants to
rake up old memories again?"

Mary
said
with
g

:entle
obstinacy:

The old lady looked at her curiously.
"You're extraordinarily obstinate about
this, Mary. Why? Do you want to have them
here together?"

Mary Aldin flushed.

"No, of course not."

Lady Tressilian said sharply:

"It's not you who have been suggesting all this to Neville?"

"How can you be so absurd?"

"Well, I don't believe for a minute it's really his idea. It's not like Neville." She paused a minute, then her face cleared. "It's the first of May tomorrow, isn't it? Well, on the third Audrey is coming to stay with the Darlingtones at Esbank. It's only twenty miles away. Write and ask her to come over and lunch here."

May 5th

"Mrs. Strange, m'lady."

Audrey Strange came into the big bed-room,
crossed the room to the big bed,
stooped down and kissed the old lady and
sat down in the chair placed ready for her.

"Nice to see you, my dear," said Lady
Tressilian.

"And nice to see you," said Audrey.
There was a quality of intangibility about
Audrey Strange. She was of medium height
with very small hands and feet. Her hair was
ash blonde and there was very little color in
her face. Her eyes were set wide apart and
were a clear, pale grey. Her features were
small and regular, a straight little nose set in
a small oval pale face. With such coloring,
with a face that was pretty but not beautiful,
she had nevertheless a quality about her that
could not be ignored and that drew your
eyes to her again and again. She was a little
like a ghost, but you felt at the same time
that a ghost might be possessed of more
reality than a live human being

She had a singularly lovely voice; soft and clear like a small silver bell.

For some minutes she and the old lady talked of mutual friends and current events.

Then Lady Tressilian said:

"Besides the pleasure of seeing you, my dear, I asked you to come because I've had rather a curious letter from Nevile."

Audrey looked up. Her eyes were wide,

tranquil and calm. She said:

"Oh, yes?"

"He suggests a preposterous suggestion,

here in September. He says he wants you and Kay to be friends and that you yourself think it a good idea."

She waited. Presently Audrey said in her gentle placid voice:

"Is it so preposterous?"

"My dear--do you really want this to happen?"

Audrey was silent again for a minute or two, then she said gently:

"I think, you know, it might be rather a good thing."

"You really want to meet this you want to meet Kay?"

"I do think, Camilla, that it might, simply -

"Simplify things!" Lady Tressilian. repeated the words helplessly.

Audrey spoke very softly.

"Dear Camilla. You have been so good. If Neville wants this "

"A fig for what Neville wants!" said Lady Tressilian robustly. "Do you want it, that's the question?"

A little color came into Audrey's cheeks.

It was the soft delicate glow of a sea shell.

"Yes," she said. "I do want it."

"Xvell," said Lady Tressilian "well.."

"But, of course," said Audrey. "It is entirely your choice. It is your house and "

Lady Tressilian shut her eyes.

"I'm an old woman," she said. "Nothing makes sense any more."

"But of course I'll come some other time Any time will suit me."

"You'll come in September as you always do," snapped Lady Tressilian. "And Nevile and Kay shall come too. I may be old but

I can adapt myself, I suppose, as well as anyone else, to the changing phases of modern life. Not another word, that's settled."

She closed her eyes again. After a minute or two she said, peering through half-shut lids at the young woman sitting beside her:

"Well, got what you want?"

Audrey started.

"Oh, yes, yes. Thank you."

"My dear," said Lady Tressilian, and her voice was deep and concerned, "are you sure this isn't going to hurt you? You were very fond of Nevile, you know. This may reopen old wounds."

Audrey was looking down at her small

gloved hands. One of them, Lady Tressilian noticed, was clenched on the side of the bed. Audrey lifted her head. Her eyes were calm and untroubled.

She said:

"All that is quite over now. Quite over."

Lady Tressilian leaned more heavily back on her pillows.

"Well you should know. I'm tired you must leave me now, dear. Mary is waiting for you downstairs. Tell them to send Barrett

to me.

Barrett was Lady Tressilian's elderly and devoted maid.

She came in to find her mistress lying
back with closed eyes.

"The sooner I'm out of this world the
better, Barrett," said Lady Tressilian. "I
don't understand anything or anyone in it."

"Ah! don't say that, my lady, you're tired."

"Yes, I'm tired. Take that eiderdown off
my feet and give me a dose of my tonic."

"It's Mrs. Strange coming that upset you.
A nice lady, but she could do with a tonic,
I'd say. Not healthy. Always looks as though
she's seeing things other people don't see.
But she's got a lot of character. She makes
herself felt, as you might say."

"That's very true, Barrett," said Lady
Tressilian. "Yes, that's very true."

"And she's not the kind you forget easily,
either. I've often wondered if Mr. Nevile
thinks about her sometimes. The new Mrs.

Strange is very handsome very handsome indeed but Miss Audrey is the kind you remember when she isn't there."

Lady

Tressilian said with a sudden chuckle:
"Nevile's a fool to want to bring those two women together. He's the one who'll be sorry for it!"

May 29th

11

Thomas Royde, pipe in mouth, was surveying the progress of his packing with which the deft-fingered Malayan No. 1 boy was busy. Occasionally his glance shifted to the view over the plantations. For some six months he would not see that view which had been so familiar for the past seven years. It would be queer to be in England again.

Allen Drake, his partner, looked in.

"Hullo, Thomas, how goes it?"

"All set now."

"Come and have a drink, you lucky devil.

I'm consumed with envy."

Thomas Royde moved slowly out of the bedroom and joined his friend. He did not speak, for Thomas Royde was a man who learned to gauge his reactions correctly from the quality of his silences.

A rather thickset figure, with a straight solemn face and observant thoughtful eyes. He walked a little sideways, crablike. This, the result of being jammed in a door during an earthquake, had contributed towards his nickname of the Hermit Crab. It had left his right arm and shoulder partially helpless which, added to an artificial stiffness of gait, often led people to think he was feeling shy and awkward when in reality he seldom felt anything of the kind.

Allen Drake mixed the drinks.

"Well," he said. "Good hunting!"

Royde said something that sounded like

Drake looked at him curiously.

"Phlegmatic as ever," he remarked.

"Don't know how you manage it. How long
is it since you went home?"

"Seven years--nearer eight."

"It's a long time. Wonder you haven't

gone completely native."

"Perhaps I have."

"You always did belong to Our Dumb
Friends rather than to the human race!
Planned out your leave?"

"Well yes--partly."

The bronze impassive face took a sudden
and a deeper brick red tinge.

Allen Drake said with lively astonishment:

"I believe there's a girl! Damn it all, you
are blushing!"

Thomas Royde said rather huskily:

"Don't be a fool!"

And he drew very hard on his ancient
pipe.

He broke all previous records by continu-ing
the conversation himself.

"Daresay," he said, "I shall find things a
bit changed."

Allen Drake asked curiously:

"I've always wondered why you chucked
going home last time. Right at the last
minute, too."

Royde shrugged his shoulders.

"Thought that shooting trip might be in-teresting.

Bad news from home about then."

"Of course. I forgot. Your brother was

killed in that motoring accident."

Thomas Royde nodded.

Drake reflected that, all the same, it
seemed a curious reason for putting off a
journey home. There was a mother he be-lieved,
a sister also. Surely at such a time

had canceled his passage before the news of
his brother's death arrived.

Allen looked at his friend curiously. Dark
horse, old Thomas?

After a lapse of three years he could ask:

"You and your brother great pals?"

"Adrian and I? Not particularly. Each of

us always went his own way. He was a bar-rister."

"Yes," thought Drake, "a very different life. Chambers in London, parties, a living earned by the shrewd use of the tongue." He reflected that Adrian Royde must have been

a very different chap from old Silent Thomas.

"Your mother's alive, isn't she?"

"The Mater? Yes."

"And you've got a sister, too."

Thomas shook his head.

"Oh, I thought you had. In that snap-shot.

"

Royde mumbled. "Not a sister. Sort of distant cousin or something. Brought up with us because she was an orphan."

Once more a slow tide of color suffused the bronzed skin.

Drake thought, "Hello.. -o.

He said: "Is she married?"

"She was. Married that

fellow Nevile

"Fellow who plays tennis and rackets and
all that?"

"Yes. She divorced him."

"And you're going home to try your luck
with her," thought Drake.

Mercifully he changed the subject of the
conversation.

"Going to get any fishing or shooting?"

"Shall go home first. Then I thought of
doing a bit of sailing down at Saltcreek."

"I know it. Attractive little place. Rather a

decent old-fashioned hotel there."

"Yes. The Balmoral Court. May stay there,
or may put up with friends who've got a
house there."

"Sounds all right to me."

"Ah hum. Nice peaceful place, Saltcreek.
Nobody to hustle you."

"I know," said Drake. "The kind of place
where nothing ever happens."

June 16th

"It is really most annoying," said old Mr.
Treves. "For twenty-five years now I have
been to the Marine Hotel at Leahead and
now, would you believe it, the whole place
is being pulled down. Widening the front

or some nonsense of that kind. Why they

can't let these seaside places alone Leahead
always had a peculiar charm of its own
Regency--pure Regency."

Sir Rufus Lord said consolingly:

"Still, there are other places to stay there,
I suppose?"

"I really don't feel I can go to Leahead at
all. At the Marine, Mrs. Mackay understood
my requirements perfectly. I had the same
rooms every year and there was hardly ever
a change in the service. And the cooking was
excellent quite excellent."

"What about trying Saltcreek? There's
rather a nice old-fashioned hotel there. The
Balmoral Court. Tell you who keeps it.
Couple of the name of Rogers. She used to
be cook to old Lord Mounthead he had the
best dinners in London. She married the
butler and they run this hotel now. It sounds
to me just your kind of place. Quiet none
of these jazz bands and first-class cooking

and service."

"It's an idea it's certainly an idea. Is there a sheltered terrace?"

"Yes a covered-in verandah and a terrace beyond. You can get sun or shade as you prefer. I can give you some introductions in the neighborhood, too, if you

like. There's old Lad, Tressilian she lives almost next door. A charming house and she herself is a delightful woman in spite of being very much of a invalid."

"The judge's widow do you mean?"

"That's it."

"I used to know Matthew Tressilian, and I think I've met her. A charming woman though of course that's a long time ago. Saltcreek is near St. Loo, isn't it? I've several friends in that part of the world. Do you know, I really think Saltcreek is a very good idea. I shall write and get particulars. The middle of August is when I wish to go there the middle of August to the middle of

September. There is a garage for the car, I suppose? And my chauffeur?"

"Oh, yes. It's thoroughly up to date."

"Because, as you know, I have to be careful about walking up) hill. I should prefer rooms on the ground floor, though I suppose there is a lift."

"Oh, yes, all that sort of thing."

"It sounds," said Mr. Treves, "as though it would solve my problem perfectly. And I should enjoy renewing my acquaintance with Lady Tressilian."

July 28th

Kay Strange, dressed in shorts and a canary-colored woolly, was leaning forward watching the tennis players. It was the semifinal of the tournament, men's singles, and Neville was playing young Merrick who was regarded as the coming star in the tennis firmament. His brilliance was undeniable some of his serves quite unreturnable but he occasionally

struck a wild patch when the older man's
experience and court craft won the day.

The score was three-all in the pounds al set.

Slipping onto a seat next to Kay, Ted
Latimer observed in a lazy, ironic voice:

"Devoted wife watches her husband slash
his way to victory!"

Kay started.

"How you startled me. I didn't know you
were there."

"I am always there. You should know that
by this time."

Ted Latimer was twenty-five and ex-tremely
good looking even though unsym-pathetic
old colonds were wont to say of

"Touch of the Dago!"

He was dark and beautifully sunburned
and a wonderful dancer.

like. There's old Lady Tressilian she lives
almost next door. A charming house and she
herself is a delightful woman in spite of
being very much of an invalid."

"The judge's widow, do you mean?"

"That's it."

"I used to know Matthew Tressilian, and

I think I've met her. A charming woman

though of course that's a long time ago.

Saltcreek is near St. Loo, isn't it? I've sev-eral

friends in that part of the world. Do you

know, I really think Saltcreek is a very good

idea. I shall write and get particulars. The

middle of August is when I wish to go there

the middle of August to the middle of
September. There is a garage for the car, I
suppose? And my chauffeur?"

"Oh, yes. It's thoroughly up to date."

"Because, as you know, I have to be care-ful
about walking up hill. I should prefer
rooms on the ground floor, though I suppose
there is a lift."

"Oh, yes, all that sort of thing."

"It sounds," said Mr. Treves, "as though

it would solve my problem perfectly. And
I should enjoy renewing my acquaintance
with Lady Tressilian."

Kay Strange, dressed in shorts and a canary-colored
woolly, was leaning forward watch-ing
the tennis players. It was the semifinal of
the tournament, men's singles, and Nevile
was playing young Merrick who was regarded
as the coming star in the tennis firmament.

His brilliance was undeniable some of his
serves quite unreturnable but he occasion-ally
struck a wild patch when the older man's
experience and court craft won the day.

The score was three-all in the f'mal set.

Slipping onto a seat next to Kay, Ted
Latimer observed in a lazy, ironic voice:

"Devoted wife watches her husband slash

his way to victory!"

Kay started.

"How you startled me. I didn't know you
were there."

"I am always there. You should know that

by this time."

Ted Latimer was
tremely good looking

pathetic old colonels

him:

twenty-five and ex

even

though unsym-were

wont to say of

"Touch of the Dago!"

He was dark and beautifully sunburned

and a wonderful dancer.

His dark eyes could be very eloquent, and

he managed his voice with the assurance

of an actor. Kay had known him since she

was fifteen. They had oiled and sunned

themsdves at Juan-les-Pins, had danced together

and played tennis together. They had

been not only friends but allies.

Young Merrick was serving from the left

hand court. Neville's return was unplayable,

a superb shot to the extreme corner.

"Nevile's backhand is good," said Ted.

"It's better than his forehand. Merrick's weak on the backhand and Nevile knows it. He's going to pound at it all he knows how."

The game ended. "Four-three--Strange leads."

He took the next game on his service.

Young Merrick was hitting out wildly. "Five-three."

"Good for Nevile," said Latimer.

And then the boy pulled himself together.

His play became cautious. He varied the pace of his shots.

"He's got a head on him," said Ted. "And his footwork is lb:st class. It's going to be a fight."

Slowly the boy pulled up to five-all. Then went to seven-all and Merrick finally won

Nevile came up to the net, grinning and shaking his head ruefully, to shake hands.

Youth tells, smd Ted Laumer.

"Nineteen against thirty-three. But I can tell

you the reason,

Kay, why. Nevfle has never
been actually championship class. He's too
good a loser."

"Nonsense."

"It isn't. Nevfle, blast him i

..... , - - , o ,y me

c.ompete .gooa sportsman. I've never seen

him lose his temper over losing a match."

"Of course not," said Kay. "People don't."

"Oh, yes, they do! We've all

seen em.

Tennis stars who give way to nerves and

who damn well

snatch every advantage. But

old Neville he's always ready to take the

count

and grin. Let the best man win and

all that. God, how I hate the public-school

spirit! Thank the Lord I never went to one."

Kay turned her head.

"Being rather spiteful, aren't you?"

"Positively feline!"

"I wish you wouldn't make it so clear you

don't like Neville."

"Why should I like him? He pinched my

His eyes lingered on her.

"Quite so. Not even the proverbial tup-pence
a year between us."

"Shut up. I fell in love with Neville and

"And he's a jolly good fellow
all of us!"

"Are you trying to annoy me?"

and so say

She turned her head as she asked the ques-tion.

He smiled and presently she returned
his smile.

"How's the summer going, Kay?"

"So, so. Lovely yachting trip. I'm rather
tired of all this tennis business."

"How long have you got of it? Another
month?"

"Yes. Then in September we go to Gull's Point for a fortnight."

"I shall be at the Easterhead Bay Hotd," said Ted. "I've booked my room."

"It's going to be a lovely party!" said Kay.

"Nevile and I, and Nevile's Ex, and some

Malayan planter who's home on leave."

"That does sound hilarious!"

"And the dowdy cousin, of course. Slav-ing away around that unpleasant old woman

and she won't get anything for it, either, since the money comes to me and Nevile."

"Perhaps," said Ted, "she doesn't know that?"

"That would be rather funny," said Kay.

But she spoke absently.

She stared down at the racket she was twiddling in her hands. She caught her breath suddenly.

"Oh, Ted!"

"What's the matter, sugar?"

"I don't know. It's just sometimes I get I get cold feet! I get scared and feel queer."

"That doesn't sound like you, Kay."

"It doesn't, does it? Anyway," she smiled rather uncertainly, "you'll be at the Easterhead Bay Hotel."

"All according to plan."

When Kay met Neville outside the changing rooms, he said:

"I see the boy friend's arrived."

"Ted?"

"Yes, the faithful dog or faithful liTard might be more apt."

"You don't like him, do you?"

"Oh, I don't mind him. If it amuses you to pull him around on a string

"

He shrugged his shoulders.

Kay said:

"I believe you're jealous."

"Of Latimer?" His surprise was genuine.

Kay said:

"Ted's supposed to be very attractive."

"I'm sure he is. He has that lithe South
American charm."

"You are jealous."

Nevile gave her arm a friendly squeeze.

"No, I'm not, gorgeous. You can have
your tame adorers a whole court of them
if you like. I'm the man in possession and
possession is Nine points of the law."

"You're very sure of yourself," said Kay
with a slight pout.

"Of course. You and I are Fate. Fate let
us meet. Fate brought us together. Do you
remember when we met at Cannes and I was
going on to Estoril and suddenly, when I
got there, the first person I saw was lovely
and that

Kay! I knew then that it was Fate

I couldn't escape."

"It wasn't exactly Fate," said was me I"

Kay. "It

"What do you mean by 'it was me'?"

"Because it was! You see, I heard you say
in the hotel you were going to Estoril, so I
set to work on Mums and got her all worked
up and that's why the first person you saw
when you got there was Kay."

Nevile looked at her with a rather curious
expression. He said slowly: "You never told
me that before."

"No, because it wouldn't have been ood

for you. It might have made you conceited!

But I always have been good at planning.

Things don't happen unless you make them!

You call me a nitwit sometimes .but in my
own way I'm quite clever. I make things
happen. Sometimes I have to plan a long
way beforehand."

"The brainwork must be intense."

"It's all very well to laugh."

Nevile said with a sudden curious bitterness,

"Am I just beginning to understand
the woman I've married? For Fate read

Kay?

Kay said:

"You're not cross, are you, Nevile?"

He said rather absently:

"No no, of course not. I was just thinking "

August loth

"And bang goes my holiday," said Superintendent
Battle disgustedly.

Mrs. Battle was disappointed, but long
years as the wife of a police officer had pre-
pared her to take disappointments philosophically.

"Oh, well," she said, "it can't be helped.

And I suppose it's an interesting case?"

"Not so that you'd notice it," said Superintendent

Battle. "It's got the Foreign Office

in a twitter all those tall, thin young men

rushing about and saying Hush Hush here,

there and everywhere. It'll straighten out easy

enough and we shall save everybody's face.

But it's not the kind of case I'd put in my
Memoirs, supposing I was ever foolish
enough to write any."

"We could put our holiday off, I suppose

"began Mrs. Battle doubtfully but

her husband interrupted her decisively.

"Not a bit of it. You and the girls go off
to Brifington the rooms have been booked
since March pity to waste them. I tell you
what I'll do go down and spend a week
with Jim when this blows over."

Jim was Superintendent Battle's nephew,
Inspector James Leach.

"Saltington's quite close to Easterhead Bay
and Saltcreek," he went on. "I can get a bit
of sea air and a dip in the briny."

Mrs. Battle sniffed.

"More likely he'll rope you in to help him
over a case I"

"They don't have any cases this time of
the year unless it's a woman who 3inche.q

IF

few sixpennyworths, from Woolworth's;
d anyway Jim's all right--he doesn't need
his wits sharpened for him."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Battle. "I suppose
it will work out all right but it is disappoint-

"These things are sent to try us," Superintendent
Battle assured her.

Snow White and Rose Red

Thomas Royde found Mary Aldin waiting
for him on the platform at Saltington when
he got out of the train.

He had only a faint recollection of her and
now that he saw her again, he was rather
surprisedly aware of pleasure at her brisk
capable way of dealing with things.

She called him by his Christian name

"How nice to see you, Thomas. After all these years."

"Nice of you to put me up. Hope it isn't a

bother."

"Not at all. On the contrary. You'll be particularly welcome. Is that your porter?"

Tell him to bring the things out this way.

I've got the car right at the end."

The bags were stowed in the Ford. Mary took the wheel and Mr Royde got in beside her.

They drove off and Thomas noticed that she, -I rlv4,, .a rL --,,.1,fid in traffic

and with a nice judgment of distance and spaces.

Saltington was seven miles from Saltcreek. Once they were out of the small market town and on the open road, Mary Aldin reopened the subject of his visit.

"Really, Thomas, your visit just now is going to be a godsend. Things are rather difficult and a stranger or rather an outsider is just what is needed."

"What's the trouble?"

His manner, as always, was incurious almost lazy. He asked the question, it seemed, more from politeness than because he had any desire for the information. It was

a manner particularly soothing to Mary Aldin. She wanted badly to talk to someone but she much preferred to talk to someone who was not too much interested.

She said:

"Well we've got rather a difficult situation.

Audrey is here, as you probably know?"

She paused questioningly and Thomas nodded.

"And Nevile and his wife too."

Thomas Royde's eyebrows went up. He after a minute or two:

"Bit awkward what?"

"Yes, it is. It was all Nevile's idea."

She paused. Royde did not speak, but as though aware of some current of disbelief issuing from him, she repeated it assertively:

"It was Nevile's idea."

"Why?"

She raised her hands for a moment from the steering wheel.

"Oh, some modern reaction! All sensible

and friends together. That iclfiea. But I don't think, you know, it's workin\$g very well."

"Possibly it mightn't." He added, "What's the new wife like?"

"Kay? Good looking, of course. Really very good looking. And quitee young."

"And Nevile's keen on herr?"

"Oh, yes. Of course the-;y've only been married a year and a half."

Thomas Royde turned hiss head slowly to look at her. His mouth smiled a little. Mary said hastily:

"I didn't mean that exactl3y."

"Come now, Mary. I you did."

"Well, one can't help seeeing that they've really got very little in common. Their friends, for instance "She ocame to a stop.

Royde asked:

"I-Iv- met her. didn't he. on the Riviera?"

I don't know much about it. Only just the bare facts that the Mater wrote."

"Yes, they met first at Cannes. Nevile was attracted but I should imagine he'd been

attracted before in a harmless sort of way.

I still think myself that if he'd been left to himself nothing would have come of it. He

was fond of Audrey, you know?"

Thomas nodded.

Mary went on:

"I don't think he wanted to break up his marriage I'm sure he didn't. But the girl was absolutely determined. She wouldn't rest until she'd got him to leave his wife and what's a man to do under those circum-stances?

It flatters him, of course."

"Head over ears in love with him, was she?"

"I suppose it may have been that."

Mary's tone sounded doubtful. She met his inquiring glance with a flush.

"What a cat I am! There's a young man always hanging about good looking in a

gigolo kind of way an old friend of hers
and I can't help wondering sometimes
whether the fact that Nevile is very well off
and distinguished and all that didn't have
something to do with it. The girl hadn't a
:ennv of her own, I gather."

She paused, looking rather ashamed.

Thomas Royde merely said: "Um-hum," in
a speculative voice.

"However," said Mary, "that's probably
plain cat! The girl is what one would call
glamorous and that probably rouses the
feline instincts of middle-aged spinsters."

Royde looked thoughtfully at her, but his
poker face showed no recognizable reaction.

He said, after a minute or two:

"What, exactly, is the present trouble
about?"

"Really, you know, I haven't the least ideal
That's what's so odd. Naturally we consulted

Audrey first and she seemed to have no feeling against meeting Kay--she was charm-ing about it all. She has been charming. No one could have been nicer. Audrey, of course, in everything she does is always just right. Her manner to them both is perfect. She's very reserved, as you know, and one never has any idea of what she is really thinking or feeling but honestly I don't believe she minds at all."

"No reason why she should," said Thomas Royde. He added rather belatedly, "After all, it's three years ago."

"Do people like Audrey forget? She was very fond of Nevile."

Thomas Royde shifted in his seat.

"She's only thirty-two. Got her life in front of her."

"Oh, I know. But she did take it hard. She had quite a bad nervous breakdown, you knOW."

"I know. The Mater wrote me."

"In a way," said Mary, "I think it was good for your mother to have Audrey to look after. It took her mind off her own grief about your brother's death. We were so sorry about that."

"Yes. Poor old Adrian. Always did drive too fast."

There was a pause. Mary stretched out her hand as a sign she was taking the turn that led down the hill to Saltcreek.

Presently, as they were slipping down the narrow twisting road, she said:

"Thomas you know Audrey very well?"

"So, so. Haven't seen much of her for the last ten years."

"No, but you knew her as a child. She was like a sister to you and Adrian?"

He nodded.

"Was she was she at all unbalanced in any way? Oh, I don't mean that quite the way it sounds. But I've a feeling that there is something very wrong with her now. She's

so completely detached, her poise is so unnaturally

perfect but I wonder sometimes
what is going on behind the facade. I've a
feeling, now and then, of some really powerful
emotion. And I don't quite know what
it is! But I do feel that she isn't normal.
There's something! It worries me. I do know
that there's an atmosphere in the house
that affects everybody. We're all nervous and
jumpy. But I don't know what it is. And
sometimes, Thomas, it frightens me."

"Frightens you?" His slow wondering tone made her pull herself together with a little
nervous laugh.

"It does sound absurd But that's
what I meant just now your arrival will be
good for us create a diversion. Ah, here we
are.

They had slipped round the last corner.

Gull's Point was built on a plateau of
rock overlooking the river. On two sides it
had sheer cliff going down to the water. The
gardens and tennis court were on the left
of the house. The garage a modern afterthought
was actually further along the road,
on the other side of it.

Mary said:

"I'll put the car away now and come back.

Hurstall, the aged butler, was greeting Thomas with the pleasure of an old friend.

"Very glad to see you, Mr. Royde, after all these years. And so will her ladyship be.

You're in the East Room, sir. I think you'll find everyone in the garden, unless you want to go to your room first."

Thomas shook his head. He went through the drawing room and up to the window which opened onto the terrace. He stood there a moment, watching, unobserved himself.

Two women were the only occupants of the terrace. One was sitting on the corner of the balustrade looking out over the water.

The other woman was watching her.

The first was Audrey--the other, he knew, must be Kay Strange. Kay did not know she was being looked over and she took no pains to disguise her expression. Thomas Royde was not, perhaps, a very observant man where women were concerned, but he could not fail to notice that Kay Strange disliked Audrey Strange very much.

As for Audrey, she was looking out across the river and seemed unconscious of, or indifferent to, the other's presence.

It was over seven years since Thomas had

very carefully. Had she changed, and, if so, in what way!

There was a change, he decided. She was thinner, paler, altogether more ethereal-looking.

But there was something else, something he could not quite define. It was as though she were holding herself tightly in leash, watching over every movement and yet all the time intensely aware of everything going on around her. She was like a person, he thought, who had a secret to hide. But what secret? He knew a little of the events that had befallen her in the last few years.

He had been prepared for lines of sorrow and loss but this was something else. She was like a child who, by a tightly clenched hand over a treasure, calls attention to what it wants to hide.

And then his eyes went to the other

woman the girl who was now' Neville
Strange's W/re' Beautiful, yes. MaY Aldin
had been fight. He rather fancied dagerous,

too. He %ght: ffI wouldn't like to .thrust
her near XMrey she had a knife m her
hand
And yet Xhv should she hate Nev'ile's first
wife? All t
tll was over and. doae. W..lth.
Audrey had no part or parcel m tlaexr lives
nowadays.

Footsteps rang out on the terrace, as
Nevile came round the corner of the house.

He looked warm and was carrying a picture
paper.

"Here's the Illustrated Review," he said.

"Couldn't get the other "

Then two things happened at precisely the
same minute.

Kay said: "Oh, good, give it to me," and
Audrey, without moving her head, held out
her hand almost absentmindedly.

Nevile had stopped halfway between the two women. A dawn of embarrassment showed in his face. Before he could speak, Kay said, her voice rising with a slight note

of hysteria:

"I want it. Give it to me! Give it to me, Nevile!"

Audrey Strange started, turned her head, withdrew her hand and murmured with just the slightest air of confusion:

"Oh, sorry, I thought you were speaking to me, Nevile."

Thomas Royde saw the color come up brick red in Nevile Strange's neck. He took three quick steps forward and held out the picture paper to Audrey.

She said, hesitating, her air of embarrassment rowinm

"Oh, but "

Kay pushed back her chair with a rough movement. She stood up, then, turning, she

made for the drawing-room window. Royde had no time to move before she had charged into him blindly.

The shock made her recoil; she looked at him as he apologized. He saw then why she had not seen him, her eyes were brimming with tears, he fancied, of anger.

"Hullo," she said. "Who are you? Oh! of course, the man from Malay!"

"Yes," said Thomas. "I'm the man from Malay."

"I wish to God I was in Malay," said Kay.

"Anywhere but here! I loathe this beastly lousy house! I loathe everyone in it!"

Emotional scenes always alarmed Thomas.

He regarded Kay warily and murmured nervously:

"Unless they're careful," said Kay, "I shall kill someone! Either Nevile or that whey-faced cat out there!"

She brushed past him and went out of the room banging the door.

Thomas Royde stood stock still. He was not quite sure what to do next, but he was elad that voune Mrs. Stranee had eone.

He stood and looked at the door that she had slammed so vigorously. Something of a tiger cat, the new Mrs. Strange.

The window was darkened as Nevile Strange paused in the space between the French doors. He was breathing rather fast. He greeted Thomas vaguely.

"Oh er hullo, Royde, didn't know you'd arrived. I say, have you seen my wife?"

"She passed through about a minute ago," said the other.

Nevile in lais turn went out through the drawing-room door. He was looking annoyed.

Thomas Royde went slowly through the open window. He was not a heavy walker.

Not until he was a couple of yards away, did

Audrey turn her head.

Then he saw those wide-apart eyes open,
saw her lips part. She slipped down from the
wall and came towards him, hands outstretched.

"Oh, Thomas," she said. "Dear Thomas!

How glad I a you've come."

As he took the two small white hands
in his and bet down to her, Mary Aldin in
her turn arrived at the French windows. Seeing
the two on the terrace she checked herself,
watched them for a moment or two,

then slowlvllened away and went back into
the house..e.

II

Upstairs, -- lilde had found Kay in her bedroom.

Th,aeoy large double bedroom in the

house wasps Ldy Tressilian's. A married couple

were : ys given the two rooms with

communi-cg door and a small bathroom

beyond OIXç west side of the house. It was

a small iscoted suite.

Neville looked through his own room and
on into the parlour. Kay had flung herself
down on the bed. Raising a tear-stained face,
she cried out angrily:

"So you've come! About time, too!"

"What is all this fuss about? Have you

gone quite crazy, Kay?"

I

Neville spoke quietly, but there was a dint

I

at the corner of his nostril that registered

restrained anger.

"Why could you give that Illustrated Review

to her and all of to me?"

"Really, by, you are a child! All this fuss

about a wretched little picture paper."

I

"You gave it to her and not to me," re

mated

Ka-- stubbornly'

"Well, why not? What does it matter?"

"It matters to me."

"I don't know what's wrong with you.

You can't behave in this hysterical fashion

when you're staying in other people's

houses. Don't you know how to behave in

public?"

"Why did you give it to Audrey?"

"Because she wanted it."

"So did I, and I'm your wife."

"All the more reason, in that case, for

giving it to an older woman and one who,

technically, is no relation."

"She scored off me! She wanted to and

she did. You were on her side!"

"You're talking like an idiotic jealous child.

For goodness' sake, control yourself, and try

and behave properly in public!"

"Like she does, I suppose?"

Neville said coldly:

"At any rate Audrey can behave like a

lady. She doesn't make an exhibition of

herself."

"She's mining you against me! She hates

me and she's getting her revenge."

"Look here, Kay, will you stop being

melodramatic and completely foolish? I'm fed

up!"

"Then let's go away from here! Let's go

tomorrow. I hate this place!"

"We've only been here four days.',

"It's quite enough! Do let's go, Neville."

"Now look here, Kay, I've had enough of this. We came here for a fortnight and I'm going to stay for a fortnight."

"If you do," said Kay, "you'll be sorry.

You and your Audrey! You think she' won- defful!"

"I don't think Audrey is wonderful. I think she's an extremely nice and kindly laerson whom I've treated very badly and wlho has been most generous and forgiving."

"That's where you're wrong," saidt Kay.

She got up from the bed. Her fury had died down. She spoke seriously almost so;berly.

"Audrey hasn't forgiven you, Nevil. Once

or twice I've seen her looking at youy . . . I don't know what is going on in her miind but

something is She's the kind that , doesn't let anyone know what they're thinkintg."

"It's a pity," said Nevile, "that ther,:e aren't more people like that."

Kay's face went very white.

"Do you mean that for me?" Therxe was a dangerous edge to her voice.

"Well you haven't shown mucx:h retio -oneo- have yom? Every bit of ill temner and

spite that comes into your mind you blurt
straight out. You make a fool of yourself and
you make a fool of me!"

"Anything more to say?"

Her voice was icy.

He said in an equally cold tone:

"I'm sorry if you think that was unfair.

But it's the plain truth. You've no more
self-control than a child."

"You never lose your temper, do you?

Always the self-controlled chamg-mannered

little pukka sahib! I don't believe

you've got any feelings. You're just a fish a

damned cold-blooded fish.t Why don't you

let yourself go now and then? Why don't

you shout at me, swear at me, tell me to go

to hell?"

Nevile sighed. His shoulders sagged.

"Oh, Lord," he said.

Turning on his heel he left the room.

III

"You look exactly as you did at seventeen, Thomas Royde," said Lady Tressilian. "Just the same owlish look. And no more conversation now than you had then. Why not?"

Thomas said vaguely:

"I dunno. Never had the gift of the gab."

"Not like Adrian. Adrian was a very clever and witty talker."

"Perhaps that's why. Always left the talking to him."

"Poor Adrian. So much promise."

Thomas nodded.

Lady Tressilian changed her subject. She was granting an audience to Thomas. She usually preferred her visitors one at a time.

It did not tire her and she was able to concentrate

her attention on them.

"You've been here twenty-four hours," she said. "What do you think of our Situation?"

"Situation?"

"Don't look stupid. You do that deliberately.

You know quite well what I mean.

The eternal triangle which has established itself under my roof."

Thomas said cautiously:

"Seems a bit of friction."

Lady Tressilian .smiled rather diabolically.

"I will confess to you, Thomas, I am rather enjoying myself. This came about through no wish of mine indeed I did my utmost to prevent it. Nevile was obstinate. He would insist on bringing these two together .and now he is reaping what he has sown!"

Thomas Rovde .hifted a little in hi. chair
"Seems funny," he said.

"Elucidate," snapped Lady Tressilian.

"Shouldn't have thought Strange was that kind of chap."

"It's interesting your saying that. Because

it is what I felt. It was uncharacteristic of Nevile. Nevile, like most men, is usually anxious to avoid any kind of embarrassment or possible unpleasantness. I suspected that it wasn't originally Nevile's idea but, if not, I don't see whose idea it can have been."

She paused and said with only the slight-est upward inflection, "It wouldn't be Audrey's?"

Thomas said promptly, "No, not Audrey."

"And I can hardly believe it was that unfortunate young woman, Kay's, idea. Not unless she is a really remarkable actress. You know, I have almost felt sorry for her lately."

"You don't like her much, do you?"

"No. She seems to me empty-headed and lacking in any kind of poise. But as I say, I do begin to feel sorry for her. She is blundering about like a daddy long-legs in lamp-light. She has no idea of what weapons to use. Bad temper, bad manners, childish rudeness all things which have a most unfortunate

effect upon a man like Nloxr;lo"

Thomas said quietly:

"I think Audrey is the one who is in a difficult position."

Lady Tressilian gave a sharp glance.

"You've always been in love with Audrey, haven't you, Thomas?"

His reply was quite impenetrable.

"Suppose I have."

"Practically from the time you were children together?"

He nodded.

"And then Nevile came along and carried her off from under your nose?"

He moved uneasily in his chair.

"Oh, well---I always knew I hadn't a chance."

"Defeatist," said Lady Tressilian.

"I always have been a doll dog."

"Dobbin?"

"Good old Thomas! That's what Audrey feels about me."

"True Thomas," said Lady Tressilian.

"That was your nickname, wasn't it?"

He smiled as the words brought back
memories of childish days.

"Funny! I haven't heard that for years."

"It might stand you in good stead now,"

-id 1 .adv Tressilian.

She met his glance clearly and deliberately.

"Fidelity," she said, "is a quality that any-one
who has been through Audrey's experience
might appreciate. The doglike devotion
of a lifetime, Thomas, does sometimes get its
reward."

Thomas Royde looked down, his fingers
fumbled with a pipe.

"That," he said, "is what I came home
hoping."

"So here we all are," said Mary Aldin.

Hurstall, the old butler, wiped his fore-head.

When he went into the kitchen, Mrs.

Spicer, the cook, remarked upon his expres-sion.

"I don't think I can be well and that's the truth," said Hurstall. "If I can so express myself, everything that's said and done in this house lately seems to me to mean some-thing that's different from what it sounds like if you know what I mean?"

Mrs. Spicer did not seem to know what he meant, so Hurstall went on:

"Miss Aldin, now, as they all sat down to

dinner she says 'So here we all are' and just that gave me a turn! Made me think of a trainer who's got a lot of wild animals into a cage, and then the cage door shuts. I felt, all of a sudden, as though we were all caught in a trap."

"Law, Mr. Hurstall," said Mrs. Spicer.

"You must have eaten something that's disagreed."

"It's not my digestion. It's the way every-one's strung up. The front door banged just now and Mrs. Strange our Mrs. Strange, Miss Audrey she jumped as though she had been shot. And there's the silences, too. Very queer they are. It's as though, all of a sud-den, everybody's afraid to speak. And then they all break out at once just saying the things that first come into their heads."

"Enough to make anyone embarrassed," said Mrs. Spicer. "Two Mrs. Stranges in the house. What I feel is, it isn't decent."

In the dining room, one of those silences that Hurstall had described was proceeding.

It was with quite an effort that Mary Aldin turned to Kay and said:

"I asked your friend, Mr. Latimer, to dine

tomorrow night!"

"Oh, good," said Kay.

Nevile said:

"Latimer? Is he down here?"

"He's staying at the Easterhead Bay

Hotel," said Kay.

Nevile said:

"We might go over and dine there one

night. How late does the ferry go?"

"Until half past one," said Mary.

"I suppose they dance there in the
evenings?"

"Most of the people are about a hundred,"
said Kay.

"Not very amusing for your friend," said

Nevile to Kay.

Mary said quickly:

"We might go over and bathe one day at
Easterhead Bay. It's quite warm still and it's
a lovely sandy beach."

Thomas Royde said in a low voice to
Audrey:

"I thought of going out sailing tomorrow.

Will you come?"

"I'd like to."

"We might all go sailing," said Nevile.

"I thought you said you were going to
play golf," said Kay.

"I did think of going over to the links.

I was right off my wooden shots the other
day."

Nevile said Rood huna,o, redly:

"Golf's a tric game.

a

kea Cay

"Yes--after fashion.

Nevile said:

"Kay wouldt be very good if she to, ok a

little trouble. le's got natural swing.

Kay said ta Judrey:

"You don't olay any games, do you?"

"Not reallyri play tetmis after a fashion

but I'm a cortholete rablit."

"Do you 01 play me pxano, Audrey?"

asked Thoma..

She shook lhtr head.

"Not nowaxdays."

"You usel to play rather well," said

Nevile.

"I thought: you didn't like music, Nevile,"

said Kay.

"I don't lc0w much about it," said Nevile

vaguely. "I ways v0ndered how Audrey

managed to setch a octave, her hands are

so small."

He was l%g at them as she laid down

her dessert, knife and fork.

She flushed a little and said quickly:

"I've got very long little finger. I expect

that helps."

...

, ---, eh then "-said Kay-"If

you're unselfish you have a short little
finger."

"Is that true?" asked Mary Aldin. "Then
I must be unselfish. Look, my little fingers
are quite short."

"I think you are very unselfish," said
Thomas Royde, eyeing her thoughtfully.

She went red and continued, quickly:

"Who's the most unselfish of us? Let's
compare little fingers. Mine are shorter than
yours, Kay. But Thomas, I think, beats me."

"I beat you both," said Nevile. "Look,"

he stretched out a hand.

"Only one hand, though," said Kay.

"Your left hand little finger is short but your right hand one is much longer. And your left hand is what you are born with and the right hand is what you make of your life. So that means that you were born unselfish but have become much more selfish as time goes on."

"Can you tell fortunes, Kay?" asked Mary Aldin. She stretched out her hand, palm upwards. "A fortune teller told me I should have two husbands and three children. I shall

have to hurry up!"

Kay said:

"Those little crosses aren't children, they're journeys. That means you'll take three journeys across water."

"That seems unlikely, too," said Mary
Aldin.

Thomas Royde asked her:

"Have you traveled much?"

"No, hardly at all."

He heard an undercurrent of regret in her
voice.

"You would like to?"

"Above everything."

He thought in his slow
her life. Always in attendance on an old
woman. Calm, tactful, an excellent manager.

reflective way of

He asked curiously:

"Have you rived
long?"

"For nearly fifteen years. I came to be with her after my father died. He had been a helpless invalid for some years before his death."

And then, answering the question she felt to be in his mind:

"I'm thirty-six. That's what you wanted to know, wasn't it?"

"I did wonder," he admitted. "You might

be any age, you see.

"That's rather a two-edged remark!"

"I suppose it is. I didn't mean it that way."

That .nmher thnllehtfifi ffaze of his did

with Lady Tressilian

not leave her face. She did not find it em-barrassing.

It was too free from self-consciousness

for that a genuine thoughtful

interest. Seeing his eyes on her hair, she put

her hand to the one white lock.

"I've had that," she said, "since I was
very young."

"I like it," said Thomas Royde simply.

He went on looking at her. She said at

last, in a slightly amused tone of voice, "Well,

what is the verdict?"

He reddened under his tan.

"Oh, I suppose it is rude of me to stare. I

was wondering about you what you are re-ally

like."

"Please," she said hurriedly and rose from

the table. She said as she went into the draw-ing

room with her arm through Audrey's:

"Old Mr. Treves is coming to dinner to-morrow, too."

"Who's he?" asked Nevile.

"He brought an introduction from the Rufus Lords. A delightful old gentleman. He's staying at the Balmoral Court. He's got a weak heart and looks very frail, but his faculties are perfect and he has known a lot of interesting people. He was a solicitor or a barrister I forget which."

"Everybody down here is terribly old," said Kay discontentedly.

She was standing just under a tall lamp. Thomas was looking that way, and he gave her that same slow interested attention that he gave to anything that was immediately occupying his line of vision.

He was struck suddenly with her intense and passionate beauty. A beauty of vivid coloring, of abundant and triumphant vitality.

He looked across from her to Audrey,
pale and motblike in a silvery grey dress.

He smiled to himself and murmured:

"Rose Red and Snow White."

"What?" It was Mary Aldin at his elbow.

He repeated the words. "Like the old fairy
story, you know--"

Mary Aldin said:

"It's a very good description...."

V

Mr. Treves sipped his glass of port appreciatively.

A very nice wine. And an excellently

cooked and served dinner. Clearly Lady

Tressilian had no difficulties with her servants.

The house was well managed, too, in spite
of the mistress of it being an invalid.

A pity, perhaps, that the ladies did not

leave the dining room when the port went

round. He preferred the old-fashioned routine

But these young people had their own

ways.

His eyes rested thoughtfully on that brilliant
and beautiful young woman who was

the wife of Nevile Strange.

It was Kay's night tonight. Her vivid
beauty glowed and shone in the candlelit
room. Beside her, Ted Latimer's sleek dark
head bent to hers. He was playing up to her.

She felt triumphant and sure of herself.

The mere sight of such radiant vitality
warmed Mr. Treves' old bones.

Youth there was really nothing like
youth!

No wonder the husband had lost his head
and left his first wife. Audrey was sitting
next to him. A charming creature and a lady
but then that was the kind of woman who
invariably did get left, in Mr. Treves' experience.

He glanced at her. Her head had been
down and she was staring at her plate. Something
in the complete immobility of her
attitude struck Mr. Treves. He looked at

"Everybody down here is terribly old,"

said Kay discontentedly.

She was standing just under a tall lamp.

Thomas was looking that way, and he gave

her that same slow interested attention that

he gave to anything that was immediately

occupying his line of vision.

He was struck suddenly with her intense

and passionate beauty. A beauty of vivid

coloring, of abundant and triumphant vitality.

He looked across from her to Audrey,

pale and mothlike in a silvery grey dress.

He smiled to himself and murmured:

"Rose Red and Snow White."

"What?" It was Mary Aldin at his elbow.

He repeated the words. "Like the old fairy

story, you know "

Mary Aldin said:

"It's a very good description... ."

V

Mr. Treves sipped his glass of port appreciatively.

A very nice wine. And an excellently
cooked and served dinner. Clearly Lady
Tressilian had no difficulties with her servants.

The house was well managed, too, in spite
of the mistress of it being an invalid.

A pity, perhaps, that the ladies did not
leave the dining room when the port went
round. He preferred the old-fashioned routine
But these young people had their own
ways.

His eyes rested thoughtfully on that brilliant
and beautiful young woman who was
the wife of Nevile Strange.

It was Kay's night tonight. Her vivid
beauty glowed and shone in the candlelit
room. Beside her, Ted Latimer's sleek dark
head bent to hers. He was playing up to her.

She felt triumphant and sure of herself.

The mere sight of such radiant vitality
warmed Mr. Treves' old bones.

Youth there was really nothing like
youth!

No wonder the husband had lost his 'head
and left his first wife. Audrey was sitting
next to him. A charming creature and a lady
but then that was the kind of woman who
invariably did get left, in Mr. Treves' experience.

He glanced at her. Her head had been
down and she was staring at her plate. Something
in the complete immobility of her
attitude struck Mr. Treves. He looked at

her more keenly. He wondered what she was
thinking about. Charming the way the hair
sprang up from that small shell-like ear

With a little start, Mr. Treves came to
himself as he realized that a move was being
made. He got hurriedly to his feet.

In the drawing room, Kay Strange went
straight to the gramophone and put on a
record of dance music.

Mary Aldin said apologetically to Mr.

Treves:

"I'm sure you hate jazz."

"Not at all," said Mr. Treves untnly but politely.

"Later, perhaps, we might have some

bridge?" she suggested. "But it is no good starting a rubber now, as I know Lady Tressilian is looking forward to having a chat with you."

"That will be delightful. Lady Tressilian never joins you down here?"

"No, she used to come down in an invalid chair. That is why we had a lift put in. But nowadays she prefers her own room. There she can talk to whomsoever she likes, summoning them by a kind of Royal Command."

"Very aptly put, Miss Aldin. I am always sensible of the royal touch in Lady Tressilian's manner."

In the middle of the room, Kay was mov-

ing in a slow dance step.

She said:

"Just take that table out of the way,

Nevile."

Her voice was autocratic, assured. Her eyes were shining, her lips parted.

Nevile obediently moved the table. Then

he took a step towards her, but she turned deliberately towards Ted Latimer.

"Come on, Ted, let's dance."

Ted's arm went round her immediately.

They danced, swaying, bending, their steps perfectly together. It was a lovely performance to watch.

Mr. Treves murmured:

"Er quite professional."

Mary Aldin winced slightly at the word yet surely Mr. Treves had spoken in simple admiration. She looked at his little wise nutcracker face. It bore, she thought, an absentminded look as though he were following some train of thought of his own.

Nevile stood hesitating a minute, then he walked to where Audrey was standing by the window.

"Dance, Audrey?"

His tone was formal, almost cold. Mere politeness, you might have said, inspired his

request. Audrey Strange hesitated a minute before nodding her head and taking a step towards him.

Mary Aldin made some commonplace re-marks

to which Mr. Treves did not reply.

He had so far shown no signs of deafness

and his courtesy was punctilious she real-ized

that it was absorption that hdd him

aloof. She could not quite make out if he

was watching the dancers, or was staring

across the room at Thomas Royde standing

alone at the other end.

With a little start Mr. Treves said:

"Excuse me, my dear lady, you were
saying?"

"Nothing. Only that it was an unusually
frae September."

"Yes, indeed rain is badly needed lo-cally,
so they tell me at my hotel."

"You are comfortable there, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, though I must say I was vexed

when I arrived to find "

Mr. Treves broke off.

Audrey had disengaged herself from
Nevile.. She said with an apologetic little
laugh:

"It's really too hot to dance."

She went towards the open window and
out onto the terrace.

"Oh! go after her, you fool," murmured
Mary. She meant the remark to be under her
breath, but it was loud enough for Mr. Treves
to mm and stare at her in astonishment.

reddened and gave an embarrassed

She

laugh.

"I'm

speaking my thoughts aloud," she
said ruefully. "But really he does irritate me
so. He's sos/ow."

"Mr. Strange?"

"Oh, no, not Nevile. Thomas Royde."

Thomas Royde was just preparing to
move forward, but by now Nevile, after a
moment's pause, had followed Audrey out of
the window.

For a moment Mr. Treves' eye, interest-edly
speculative, rested on the window, then
his attention returned to the dancers.

"A beautiful dancer, young Mr.

Latimer,

did you say the name was?"

"Yes, Edward Latimer."

"Ah, yes, Edward Latimer. An old friend,

I gather, of Mrs. Strange?"

"Yes."

"And what does this very

er decorative

young gentleman do for a living?"

"Well, really, I don't quite know."

"In-deed," said Mr. Treves, managing to

put a good deal of comprehension into one

harmless word.

Mary went on:

"He is staying at the Easterhead Bay

Hotel."

"A very pleasant situation," said Mr.

Treves.

He added dreamily after a moment or two:

"Rather an interesting-shaped head a curious

angle from the crown to the neck

rendered less noticeable by the way he has

his hair cut, but distinctly unusual." After

another pause, he went on, still more dream-ily:

"The last man I saw with a head like

that got ten years' penal servitude for a brutal

assault on an elderly jeweler."

"Surely," exclaimed Mary, "you don't

mean

"Not at all, not at all," said Mr. Treves.

"You mistake me entirely. I am suggesting

no disparagement of a guest of yours. I was

merely pointing out that a hardened and

brutal criminal can be in appearance a most

charming and personable young man. Odd,

but so it is."

He smiled gently at her. Mary said: "You know, Mr. Treves, I think I am a little frightened of you."

"But I am. You are such a very shrewd observer."

"My eyes," said Mr. Treves complacently, "are as good as ever they were." He paused and added: "Whether that is fortunate, or unfortunate, I cannot at the moment decide."

"How could it be unfortunate?"

Mr. Treves shook his head doubtfully.

"One is sometimes placed in a position of responsibility. The right course of action

is not always easy to determine."

Hurstall entered bearing the coffee tray.

After taking it to Mary and the old lawyer,

he went down the room to Thomas

Royde. Then, by Mary's directions, he put

the tray down on a low table and left the

room.

Kay called over Ted's shoulder, "We'll

finish out this tune."

Mary said: "I'll take Audrey's out to her."

She went to the French windows, cup in hand. Mr. Treves accompanied her. As she paused on the threshold he looked out over her shoulder.

Audrey was sitting on the corner of the balustrade. In the bright moonlight, her beauty came to life a beauty born of line rather than color. The exquisite line from

mouth, and the really lovely bones of the head and the small straight nose. That beauty would be there when Audrey Strange was an old woman it had nothing to do with the covering flesh it was the bones themselves that were beautiful. The sequined dress she wore accentuated the effect of the moon-light. She sat very still and Nevile Strange stood and looked at her.

Nevile took a step towards her:

"Audrey," he said, "you "

She shifted her position, then sprang
lightly to her feet and clapped a hand to her

ear:

"Oh! My earring I must have dropped
it."

"Where? Let me look "

They both bent down, awkward and em-barrassed
and collided in doing so. Audrey
sprang away, and Nevile exclaimed:

"Wait a sec my cuff button it's caught
in your hair. Stand still."

She stood quite still as he fumbled with
the button. "Oo you're pulling it out by
the roots how clumsy you are, Nevile, do
be quick."

"Sorry I I seem to be all thumbs."

The moonlight was bright enough for the

two onlcke to .ee what Audrey could not

see, the trembling of Nevile's .hands as. he
strove to free the strand of fair silvery haxr.

But Audrey herself was trembling too as

though suddenly cold.

Mary Aldin jumped as a quiet voice said
behind her:

"Excuse me "

Thomas Royde passed between them and

out.

"Shall I do that, Strange?" he asked.

Nevile straightened up and he and Audrey
moved apart.

"It's all right. I've done it."

Nevile's face was rather white.

"You're cold," said Thomas to Audrey.

"Come in and have coffee."

She came back with him and Nevile turned
away staring out to sea.

"I was bringing it out to you," said Mary.

"But perhaps you'd better come in."

"Yes," said Audrey. "I think I'd better
come in."

They all went back into the drawing room.

Ted and Kay had stopped dancing.

The door opened and a tall gaunt woman
dressed in black came in. She said respect-fully:

"Her ladyship's compliments and she

would be glad to see Mr. Treves up in her

VI

Lady Tressilian received Mr. Treves with evident pleasure.

He and she were soon deep in an agree-

able flood of reminiscences and a recalling of mutual acquaintances.

At the end of half an hour Lady Tressilian gave a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"Ah," she said, "I've enjoyed myself.

There's nothing like exchanging gossip and remembering old scandals."

"A little malice," agreed Mr. Treves,

"adds a certain savor to life."

"By the way," said Lady Tressilian, "what do you think of our example of the eternal Mangle?"

Mr. Treves looked discreetly blank.

"Er---what triangle?"

"Don't tell me you haven't noticed it!

Nevile and his wives."

"Oh, that! The present Mrs. Strange is a singularly attractive young woman."

"So is Audrey," said Lady Tressilian.

"She has charm yes."

Lady Tressilian exclaimed:

"Do you mean to tell me you can understand a man leaving Audrey, who is a--a

person of rare quality for for a Kay?"

Mr. Treves replied calmly:

"Perfectly. It happens frequently."

"Disgusting. I should soon grow tired of Kay if I were a man and wish I had never made such a fool of myself!"

"That also happens frequently. These sudden passionate infatuations," said Mr. Treves, looking very passionless and precise himself, "are seldom of long duration."

"And then what happens?" demanded

Lady Tressilian.

"Usually," said Mr. Treves, "the original parties adjust themselves. Quite often there is a second divorce. The man then marries a third party someone of a sympathetic nature."

"Nonsense! Nevile isn't a Mormon what-ever some of your clients may be!"

"The remarriage of the original parties occasionally takes place."

Lady Tressilian shook her head.

"That, no/Audrey has too much pride."

"I am sure of it. Do not shake your head in that aggravating fashion!"

"It has been my experience," said Mr. Treves, "that women possess little or no

pride where love affairs are concerned. Pride is a quality often on their lips, but not apparent in their actions."

"You don't understand Audrey. She was violently in love with Nevile. Too much so, perhaps. After he left her for this girl (though I don't blame him entirely the girl pursued him everywhere and you know what

men are!) she never wanted to see him again."

Mr. Treves coughed gently.

"And yet," he said, "she is here!"

"Oh, well," said Lady Tressilian, annoyed.

"I don't profess to understand these modern ideas. I imagine that Audrey is here just to show that she doesn't care, and that it doesn't matter!"

"Very likely," Mr. Treves stroked his jaw. "She can put it to herself that way, certainly."

"You mean," said Lady Tressilian, "that

you think she is still hankering after Nevile
and that oh, no, I won't believe such a
thing!"

"It could be" said Mr. Treves.

"I won't have it," said Lady Tressilian. "I
won't have it in my house."

"You are already disturbed, are you not?"

asked Mr. Treves shrewdly. "There is tension.
I have felt it in the atmosphere."

"So you feel it too?" said Lady Tressilian
sharply.

"Yes, I am puzzled, I must confess. The
true feelings of the parties remain obscure,
but in my opinion, there is gunpowder about.
The explosion may come any minute."

"Stop talking like Guy Fawkes and tell me
what to do," said Lady Tressilian.

Mr. Treves held up his hands.

"Really, I am at a loss to know what to
suggest.-There is, I feel sure, a focal point.
If we could isolate that but there is so much
that remains obscure."

"I have no intention of asking Audrey to leave," said Lady Tressilian. "As far as my observation goes, she has behaved perfectly in a very difficult situation. She has been courteous but aloof. I consider her conduct irreproachable."

"Oh, quite," said Mr. Treves. "Quite. But it's having a most marked effect on young Nevile Strange all the same."

"Nevile," said Lady Tressilian, "is not behaving well. I shall speak to him about it."

But I couldn't mm him out of the house for a moment. Matthew regarded him as practically his adopted son."

"I know."

Lady Tressilian sighed. She said in a lowered voice:

"You know that Matthew was drowned here?"

"Yes."

"So many people have been sm'prised at my remaining here. Stupid of them. I have always felt Matthew near to me here. The whole house is full of him. I should feel

lonely and strange anywhere else." She
paused and went on. "I hoped at first that it
might not be very long before I joined him.
Especially when my health began to fail. But
it seems I am one of these creaking gates ..
these perpetual invalids who never die." She
thumped her pillow angrily.

"It doesn't please me, I can tell you! I
always hoped that when my time came, it
would come quickly that I should meet
Death face to face not feel him creeping
along beside me, always at my shoulder
gradually forcing me to sink to one indignity
after another of illness. Increased helplessness
increasing dependence on other

"But very devoted people, I am sure. You
have a faithful maid?"

"Barrett? The one who brought you up?
The comfort of my life! A grim old battleax,
absolutely devoted. She's been with me for
years."

"And you are lucky, I should say, in having
Miss Aldin."

"You are right. I am lucky in having

Mary."

"She is a relation?"

"A distant cousin. One of those selfless

creatures whose lives are continually being

sacrificed to those of other people. She looked

after her father a clever man but terribly

exacting. When he died I begged her to make

her home with me and I have blessed the

day she came to me. You've no idea what

horrors most companions are. Futile boring

creatures. Driving one mad with their inanity.

They are companions because they are

fit for nothing better. To have Mary, who is a well-read intelligent woman, is marvelous.

She. has really a first-class brain a man's

brain She has read widely and deeply and

there is nothing she cannot discuss. And she

is as clever domestically as she is intellectually.

She runs the house perfectly and keeps

1

.....4- 1 11'

"It's a long time from that ..only half past

ten," said Nevile. "They don't lock you out,

I hope?"

"Oh, no. In fact I doubt if the door is locked at all at night. It is shut at nine o'clock but one has only to turn the handle and walk in. People seem very haphazard down here, but I suppose they are justified in trusting to the honesty of the local people."

"Certainly no one locks their door in the day time here," said Mary. "Ours stands wide open all day long but we do lock it up at night."

"What's the Balmoral Court like?" asked Ted Latimer. "It looks a queer High Victorian atrocity of a building."

"It lives up to its name," said Mr. Treves.

"And has good solid Victorian comfort. Good beds, good cooking roomy Victorian ward-robos. Immense baths with mahogany surrounds."

"Weren't you saying that you were annoyed

about something at first?" asked Mary.

"Ah, yes. I had carefully reserved by letter two rooms on the ground floor. I have a weak heart, you know, and stairs are forbid-den me. When I arrived I was vexed to find the rooms were not available. Instead I was allotted two rooms (very pleasant rooms I

11/I

must admit) on the top floor. I protested, but it seems that an old resident who had been going to Scotland this month, was ill

and had been unable to vacate the rooms."

"Mrs. Lucan, I expect," said Mary.

"I believe that is the name. Under the circumstances, I had to make the best of things. Fortunately there is a good automatic lift so that I have really suffered no incon-venience."

Kay said:

"Ted, why don't you come and stay at the Balmoral Court? You'd be much more accessible."

"Oh, I don't think it looks my kind of place."

"Quite right, Mr. Latimer," said Mr. Treves. "It would not be at all in your line of country."

For some reason or other Ted Latimer flushed.

"I don't know what you mean by that," he said.

Mary Aldin, sensing constraint, hurriedly made a remark about a case in the paper.

"I see they've detained a man in the Kentish Town trunk case" she said.

"It's the second man they've detained,"

said Nevile. "I hope they've got the right one this time."

"They may not be able to hold him even if he is," said Mr. Treves.

"Insufficient evidence?" asked Royde.

"Yes."

"Still," said Kay, "I suppose they always get the evidence in the end."

"Not always, Mrs. Strange. You'd be surprised if you knew how many of the people who have committed crimes are walking about the country free and unmolested."

"Because they've never been found out, you mean?"

"Not that only. There is a man" he mentioned a celebrated case of two years back

"the police know who committed those child murders know it without a shadow of

doubt but they are powerless. The man has been given an alibi by two people and though that alibi is false there is no proving it to be

so. Therefore the murderer goes free."

"How dreadful," said Mary.

Thomas Royde knocked out his pipe and said in his quiet reflective voice, "That con-fa'ns what I have always thought that there are times when one is justified in taking the law into one's own hands."

"Wht dn vnu mean. Mr. Rovde?"

Thomas began to reffil his pipe. He looked thoughtfully down at his hands as he spoke in jerky disconnected sentences.

"Suppose you knew--of a dirty piece of work knew that the man who did it isn't accountable to existing laws that he's im-mune from punishment. Then I hold that

one is justified in executing sentence oneself."

Mr. Treves said warmly:

"A most pernicious doctrine, Mr. Royde!

Such an action would be quite unjustifiable!"

"Don't see it. I'm assuming, you know,
that the facts are proved--it's just that the
law is powerless!"

"Private action is still not to be excused."

Thomas smiled--a very gentle smile.

"I don't agree," he said. "If a man ought
to have his neck wrung I wouldn't mind
taking the responsibility of wringing it for
him!"

"And in turn would render yourself liable
to the law's penalties!"

Still smiling, Thomas said: "I'd have to be
careful, of course In fact one would
have to go in for a certain amount of low
cunning "

Audrey said in her clear voice:

"You'd be found out, Thomas."

"Matter of fact," said Thomas, "I don't think I should."

"I knew a case once," began Mr. Treves and stopped. He said apologetically: "Criminology is rather a hobby of mine, you know."

"Please go on," said Kay.

"I have had a fairly wide experience of criminal cases," said Mr. Treves. "Only a few of them have held any real interest. Most murderers have been lamentably uninteresting and very short-sighted. However! I could tell you of one interesting example."

"Oh, do," said Kay. "I like murders."

Mr. Treves spoke slowly, apparently choosing his words with great deliberation and care.

"The case concerned a child. I will not mention that child's age or sex. The facts

were as follows: Two children were playing with bows and arrows. One child sent an arrow through the other child in a vital spot and death resulted. There was an inquest, the surviving child was completely distraught and the accident was commiserated and sympathy expressed for the unhappy author of the deed."

He paused.

"Was that all?"

"That was all.

asked Ted Latimer.

A regrettable accident.

But there is, you see, another side to the story. A farmer, some time previously, happened to have passed up a certain path in a

lously, "that it was not an accident that it was intentional?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Treves. "I have never known. But it was stated at the inquest

that the children were unused to bows
and arrows and in consequence shot wildly
and ignorantly."

"And that was not so?"

"That, in the case of one of the children,
was certainly not so!"

"What did the farmer do?" said Audrey
breathlessly.

"He did nothing. Whether he acted rightly

or not, I have never been sure. It was the
future of a child that was at stake. A child,

he felt, ought to be given the benefit of a
doubt."

Audrey said:

"But you yourself have no doubt about

what really happened?"

Mr. Treves said gravely:

wood nearby. There, in a little clearing, he had noticed a child practicing with a bow and arrow."

He paused to let his meaning sink in.

"You mean," said Mary Aldin incredu

"Personally, I am of the opinion that it was a particularly ingenious murder a murder committed by a child and planned down

to every detail beforehand."

Ted Latimer asked:

"Was there a reason?"

"Oh, yes, there was a motive. Childish teasings, unkind words, enough to foment

hatred. Children hate easily "

Mary exclaimed:

"But the deliberation of it."

Mr. Treves nodded.

"Yes, the deliberation of it was bad. A child, keeping that murderous intention in its heart, quietly practicing day after day and then the final piece of acting the awkward shooting the catastrophe, the pretense of grief and despair. It was all incredible so incredible that probably it would not have been believed in court."

"What happened to to the child?" asked Kay curiously.

"Its name was changed, I believe," said Mr. Treves. "After the publicity of the in-quest that was deemed advisable. That child is a grown up person today somewhere in the world. The question is, has it still got a murderer's heart?"

"It is a long time ago, but I would recognize my little murderer anywhere."

"Surely not," objected Royde.

"Oh, yes. There was a certain physical peculiarity. Well, I will not dwell on the subject. It is not a very pleasant one. I must really be on my way home."

He rose.

Mary said, "You will have a drink first?"

The drinks were on a table at the other end of the room. Thomas Royde, who was near them, stepped forward and took the stopper out of the whisky decanter.

"A whisky and soda, Mr. Treves? Latimer, what about you?"

Nevile said to Audrey in a low voice:

"It's a lovely evening. Come out for a little."

She had been standing by the window looking out at the moonlit terrace. He stepped past her and stood outside, waiting. She mined back into the room, shaking her head quickly.

"No, I'm tired. I... I think I'll go to bed."

She crossed the room and went out. Kay gave a wide yawn.

"I'm sleepy too. What about you Mary?"

"Yes, I think so. Good night, Mr. Treves.

"Good night, Miss Aldin. Good night,

Mrs. Strange."

"We'll be over for lunch tomorrow, Ted,"

said Kay. "We could bathe if it's still like

ths."

"Right. I'll be looking out for you. Good

night, Miss Aldin."

The two women left the room.

Ted Latimer said agreeably to Mr. Treves,

"I'm coming your way, sir. Down to the
ferry, so I pass the hotel."

"Thank you, Mr. Latimer. I shall be glad
of your escort."

Mr. Treves, although he had declared his

intention of departing, seemed in no hurry.

He sipped his drink with pleasant deliberation and devoted himself to the task of extracting information from Thomas Royde as to the conditions of life in Malaya.

Royde was monosyllabic in his answers.

The everyday details of existence might have been secrets of national importance from the difficulty with which they were dragged from him. He seemed to be lost in some abstraction of his own, out of which he roused himself with difficulty to reply to his questioner.

Ted Latimer fidgeted. He looked bored,

Suddenly interrupting, he exclaimed, "I nearly forgot. I brought Kay over some gramophone records she wanted. They're in the hall. I'll get them. Will you tell her about them tomorrow, Royde?"

The other man nodded. Ted left the room.

"That young man has a restless nature," murmured Mr. Treves.

Royde grunted without replying.

"A friend, I think, of Mrs. Strange's?"

pursued the old lawyer.

"Of Kay Strange's," said Thomas.

Mr. Treves smiled.

"Yes," he said. "I meant that. He w'otld

hardly be a friend of the first Mrs.

Strange."

,Royde said emphatically:

"No, he wouldn't."

Then, catching the other's quizzical eye,

he said, flushing a little, "What I -nean

iS- "

"Oh, I quite understood what you meant,

Mr. Roy&. You yourself are a friend of

Mrs. Audrey Strange, are you not?"

Thomas Royde slowly filled his pipe from

his tobacco pouch. His eyes bent to his task,

he said or rather mumbled:

"M. yes. More or less broueht uo to

"She must have been a very charming

young girl!"

Thomas Royde said something that

sounded like "Um-yum."

· ::"A little awkward having two Mrs.

Stranges in the house?"

"Oh, yes yes, rather."

"A difficult position for the original Mrs.

Strange."

Thomas Royde's face flushed.

"Extremely difficult."

Mr. Treves leaned forward. His question popped out sharply.

"Why did she come, Mr. Royde?"

"Well I suppose ..." the other's voice was indistinct, "she didn't like to refuse."

"To refuse whom?"

Royde shifted awkwardly.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I believe she always comes this time of year beginning of September."

"And Lady Tressilian asked Nevile Strange and his new wife at the same time?" The old gentleman's voice held a nice note of political

incredulity.

"As to himself."

"He

that, I believe Nevile asked

was anxious, then, for this re

Royde shifted uneasily. He replied, avoiding the other's eye:

"I suppose so."

"Curious," said Mr. Treves.

"Stupid sort of thing to do," said Thomas Royde, goaded into longer speech.

"Somewhat embarrassing, one would have thought," said Mr. Treves.

"Oh, well people do do that sort of thing nowadays," said Thomas Royde vaguely.

"I wonder," said Mr. Treves, "if it had been anybody else's idea?"

Royde stared.

"Whose else's could it have been?"

Mr. Treves sighed.

"There are so many kind friends about in the world always anxious to arrange other people's lives for them--to suggest courses of action that are not in harmony "He broke off as Nevile Strange strolled back through the French window. At the same moment Ted Latimer entered by the door from the hall.

"Hullo, Ted, what have you got there?"

asked Neville.

"Gramophone records for Kay. She asked me to bring them over."

"Oh, did she? She didn't tell me." There was just a moment of constraint between the

two, then Neville strolled over to the drink

tray and helped himself to a whisky and soda. His face looked excited and unhappy

and he was breathing deeply.

Someone in Mr. Treves' hearing had referred to Neville as "that lucky beggar. Strange--got everything in the world anyone could wish for." Yet he did not look, at this moment, at all a happy man.

Thomas Loyde with Neville's reentry, seemed to feel that his duties as host were

over. He left the room without attempting to say good night and his walk was slightly more hurried than usual. It was almost an escape.

"A delightful evening," said Mr. Treves

politely as he set down his glass. "Most ah instructive.,,

"Instructive?,, Nevile raised his eyebrows

slightly.

"Information re the Malay States," suggested

Ted, smiling broadly. "Hard work

dragging answers out of Taciturn Thomas."

"Extraordixaary fellow, Royde," said Nevile.

"I believe he's always been the same.

Just smokes that awful old pipe of his and

listens and sss Um and Ah occasionally and

looks wise lille an owl."

"Perhaps he thinks the more," said Mr.

Treves. "And now I really must take my

leave."

"Come and see Lady Tressilian again

soon," said Nevile as he accompanied the

two men to the hall. "You cheer her up

enormously. She has so few contacts now

with the outside world. She's wonderful, isn't

she?"

"Yes, indeed. A most stimulating conversationalist."

Mr. Treves dressed himself carefully with overcoat and muffler and after renewed good nights, he and Ted Latimer set out together.

The Balmoral Court was actually only about a hundred yards away, around one curve of the road. It loomed up prim and forbidding, the first outpost of the straggling country street.

The ferry, for which Ted Latimer was bound, was two or three hundred yards further down, at a point where the river was at its narrowest.

Mr. Treves stopped at the door of the Balmoral Court and held out his hand.

"Good night, Mr. Latimer. You are staying down here much longer?"

Ted smiled with a flash of white teeth.

"That depends, Mr. Treves. I haven't had time to be bored yet."

"No no, so I should imagine. I suppose like most young people nowadays, boredom is what you dread most in the world, and yet, I can assure you, there are worse things."

"Such as?"

Ted Latimer's voice was soft and pleasant, but it held an undercurrent of something else something not quite so easy to define,

"Oh, I leave it to your imagination, Mr.

Latimer. I would not presume to give you advice, you know. The advice of such elderly fogeys as myself is invariably treated with scorn. Rightly, perhaps, who knows?

But we old buffers like to think that experience has taught us something. We have noticed a good deal, you know, in the course of a lifetime."

A cloud had come over the face of the moon. The street was very dark. Out of the darkness, a man's figure came towards them walking up the hill.

It was Thomas Royde.

"Just been down to the ferry for a bit of a walk," he said indistinctly because of the pipe clenched between his teeth.

"This your pub?" he asked Mr. Treves.

"Looks as though you were locked out."

"Oh, I don't think so," said Mr. Treves.

He turned the big brass door knob and the door swung back.

"We'll see you safely in," said Royde.

The three of them entered the hall. It was dimly lit with only one electric light.

There was no one to be seen, and an odor of bygone dinner, rather dusty velvet, and good furniture polish met their nostrils.

Suddenly Mr. Treves gave an exclamation of annoyance.

On the lift in front of them hung a notice:

LIFT OUT OF ORDER

"Dear me," said Mr. Treves. "How ex-tremely vexing. I shall have to walk up those stairs."

"Too bad," said Royde. "Isn't there a service lift luggage all that?"

"I'm afraid not. This one is used for all

purposes. Well, I must take it slowly, that is all. Good night to you both."

He started slowly up the wide staircase.

Royde and Latimer wished him good night, then let themselves out into the dark street.

There was a moment's pause, then Royde said abruptly:

"Well, good night."

"Good night. See you tomorrow."

Ted Latimer strode lightly down the hill
towards the ferry. Thomas Royde stood look-
ing after him for a moment, then he walked
slowly in the opposite direction towards Gull's
Point.

The moon came out from behind the cloud
and Saltcreek was once more bathed in sil-very
radiance.

VII

"Just like summer," murmured Mary Aldin.

She and Audrey were sitting on the beach
just below the imposing edifice of the Eas-terhead
Bay Hotel. Audrey wore a white
swim suit and looked like a delicate ivory
figurine. Mary had not bathed. A little way
along from them Kay lay on her face, expos-
ing her bronzed limbs and back to the sun.

"Ugh," she sat up. "The water's horribly cold," she said accusingly.

"Oh, well, it's September," said Mary.

"It's always cold in England," said Kay discontentedly. "How I wish we were in the south of France. That really is hot."

Ted Latimer from beyond her murmured:

"This sun here isn't a real sun."

"Aren't you going in at all, Mr. Latimer?" asked Mary.

Kay laughed.

"Ted never goes in the water. Just suns himself like a lizard."

She stretched out a toe and prodded him.

He sprang up.

"Come and walk, Kay. I'm cold."

They went off together along the beach.

"Like a lizard? Rather an unfortunate

comparison," murmured Mary Aldin, looking after them.

"Is that what you think of him?" asked Audrey.

Mary Aldin frowned.

"Not quite. A lizard suggests something quite tame. I don't think he is tame."

"No," said Audrey thoughtfully. "I don't think so either."

"How well they look together," said Mary, watching the retreating pair. "They match

somehow, don't they?"

"I suppose they do."

"They like the same

things," went on

Mary. "And have the same opinions and
and use the same language. What a thousand

pities it is that "

She stopped.

Audrey said sharply:

"That what?"

Mary said slowly:

"I suppose I was going to say what a pity
it was that Neville and she ever met."

Audrey sat up stiffly. What Mary called
to herself "Audrey's frozen look" had come
over her face. Mary said quickly:

"I'm sorry, Audrey. I shouldn't have said
that."

"I'd so much rather not talk about it if
you don't mind."

"Of course, of course. It was very stupid
of me. I I hoped you'd got over it, I
suppose."

Audrey turned her head slowly. With a calm expressionless face she said:

"I assure you there is nothing to get over. I have no feeling of any kind in the matter. I hope I hope with all my heart, that Kay and Nevile will always be

very happy together."

"Well, that's very nice of you, Audrey."

"It isn't nice. It is just true. But I do think it is well unprofitable to keep on going back over the past. 'It's a pity this happened or that?' It's all over now. Why rake it up? We've got to go on living our lives in the present."

"I see," said Mary simlaly. "that

people like Kay and Ted are exciting to me

from

because

well, they are so different

anything

or anyone that I have ever

across.

"Yes, I suppose they are."

come

"Even you," said Mary with sudden bit-terness,

"have lived and had experiences that

I shall probably never have. I know you've

been unhappy very unhappy but I can't

help feeling that even that is better than

well nothing. Emptiness!"

She said the last word with a fierce em-phasis.

Audrey's wide eyes looked a little startled.

"I never dreamed you ever felt like that."

"Didn't you?" Mary Aldin laughed apol-ogetically.

"Oh, just a momentary fit of dis-content,
my dear. I didn't really mean it."

"It can't be very gay for you," said Audrey
Slowly. "Just living here with Camilla dear
thing though she is. Reading to her, manag-ing
the servants, never going away."

"I'm well fed and housed," said Mary.
"Thousands of women aren't even that. And
really, Audrey, I am quite contented. I have"

a smile played for a moment round her
lips "my private distractions."

"Secret vices?" asked Audrey, smiling also.

"Oh, I plan things," said Mary vaguely.

"In my mind, you know. And I like experimenting
sometimes upon people. Just seeing,
you know, if I can make them react to
what I say in the way I mean."

"You sound almost sadistic, Mary. How
little I really know you!"

"Oh, it's all quite harmless. Just a childish

little amusement."

Audrey asked curiously:

"Have you experimented on me?"

"No. You're the only person I have always found quite incalculable. I never know, you see, what you are thinking."

"Perhaps," said Audrey gravely, "that is just as well."

She shivered and Mary exclaimed:

"You're cold."

"Yes. I think I will go and dress. After all, it is September."

Mary Aldin remained alone staring at the reflection on the water. The tide was going out. She stretched herself out on the sand dosing her eyes.

They had had a good lunch at the hotd. It was still quite full although it was past the height of the season. A queer mixed-looking lot of people. Oh, well, it had been a day out. Something to break the monotony of

to get away from that sense of tension, that stnmg-up atmosphere that there had been

lately at Gull's Point. It hadn't been Audrey's
fault, but Nevile

Her thoughts broke up abruptly as Ted
Latimer plumped himself down on the beach
beside her.

"What have you done with Kay?" Mary
asked.

Ted replied briefly:

"She's been claimed by her legal owner."

Something in his tone made Mary Aldin
sit up. She glanced across the stretch of shining
golden sands to where Nevile and Kay
were walking by the water's edge. Then she
glanced quickly at the man beside her.

She had thought of him as meretricious, as
queer, as dangerous, even. Now for the first
time she got a glimpse of someone young
and hurt. She thought:

"He was in love with Kay
with her and then Nevile
her away "

She said gently:

"I hope you are enjoying
here."

They were conventional

Aldin seldom used any

really in love

came and took

yourself down

words. Mary

words but con

her tone was an offer for the first time of

friendliness. Ted Latimer responded to it.

"As much, probably, as I should enjoy

myself anywhere!"

Mary said:

"i'm sorry."

"But you don't care a damn, really! I'm

an outsider and what does it matter what

outsiders feel and think?"

She turned her head to look at this bitter

and handsome young man.

He returned her look with one of deft-

ance.

She said slowly, as one who makes a di

Mary said with disamg sincerity:

"I wish you would tell me

really I wish

coverly, "I see. You don't like us."

He laughed shortly. "Did you expect me to?"

She said thoughtfully:

"I suppose, you know, that I did expect just that One takes, of course, too much for granted. One should be more humble.

Yes, it would not have occurred to me that you would not like us. We have tried to make you welcome as Kay's friend."

"Yes as Kay's friend!"

The interruption came with a quick venom.

it just why you dislike us? What have we done? What is wrong with us?"

Ted Latimer said, with a blistering emphasis on the one word:

"Smug!"

"Smug?" Mary queried it without rancor, examining the charge with judicial appraisal.

"Yes," she admitted. "I see that we could seem like that."

"You are like that. You take all the good things of life for granted. You're happy and superior in your little roped-off enclosure shut off from the common herd. You look at people like me as though I were one of the animals outside!"

"I'm sorry," said Mary.

"It's true, isn't it?"

"No, not quite. We are stupid, perhaps,

and tmimaginative but not malicious. I myself am conventional and superficially,

I daresay, what you call smug. But really, you know, I'm quite human inside. I'm very sorry, this minute, because you are unhappy and I wish I could do something about it."

"Well if that's so it's nice of you."

There was a pause, then Mary said gently:

"Have you always been in love with Kay?"

"And shehe?"

SO

"I thought, until Strange came along.

, ia genuy:

' , A n4 volOU're still m love with her?"

„;’-oCld think that was obvious."

I sn

After a r/moment or two, Mary said quietly:

"I-IaAn't t you better go away from here?"

„ ""7i.hould I?"

””

;e you are omy letting yourself in

tecau=

,

anhappiness."

for

more u,

He

lookç:ed at. her and

laughed.

„ ,re:a race creature," he said.

"But

You

.

,A-, .:know much about

the animals

you

oo

t

.

,-- n

About outside your little

enclosure.

pro.wtm

,- .. , .

Quite a lot t

oz

mings

may happen in me near

future."

”

ort of

things?" said Mary

sharply.

What

He lauge,a' ,,

"Wait aa

see.

VIII

When Aueclrey had dressed she

went along

th

,

h and

out along a jutting point

of

e

oea)..

Tho

,

...mng mas Royde who

was s t-

rockS

lu"

-' --gere

smoking a ppe, exactly opposite

thni us

.

.

.

to

Gull's

IJ

o

m.

t

which

stood

white

and

serene

....

,

--

..aos te

side

of

the

river.

Thomas turned his head at Audrey's approach,

but he did not move. She sat down

beside him without speaking. They were

silent with the comfortable silence of two

people who know each other very well in&ed.

"How near it looks," said Audrey at last,
breaking the silence.

Thomas looked across at Gull's Point.

"Yes, we could swim home."

"Not at this tide. There was a housemaid
Camilla had once. She was an enthusiastic
bather, used to swim across and back whenever
the tide was right. It has to be low
or high but when it's running out it sweeps
you right down to the mouth of the river.
It did that to her one day only luckily she

her head and

ashore all

kept

right

came

on

Easter Point only very exhausted."

"It doesn't say anything about its being
dangerous here."

"It isn't this side. The current is the other

side. It's deep there under the cliffs. There was a would-be suicide last year threw himself off Stark Head but he got caught by a tree halfway down the cliff and the coast guards got to him all right."

"Poor devil," said Thomas. "I bet he didn't thank them. Must be sickening to

have made up your mind to get out of it all and then be saved. Makes a fellow feel a fool."

"Perhaps he's glad now," suggested Audrey dreamily.

"I wonder."

Thomas puffed away at his pipe. By turn-ling his head very slightly he could look at Audrey. He noted her grave absorbed face as she stared across the water. The long brown lashes that rested on the pure line of the cheek, the small shell-like ear That reminded him of something.

"Oh, by the way, I've got your earring the one you lost last night."

His fingers dived into his pocket. Audrey

stretched out a hand.

"Oh, good, where did you find it? On the

terrace?"

"No. It

have lost it

was near the stairs. You must

as you came down to dinner. I

noticed you hadn't got it at dinner."

"I'm glad to have it back."

She took it. Thomas reflected that it was

rather a large barbaric earring for so small

an ear. The ones she had on today were

large, too.

He remarked:

"You wear your earrings even when you

bathe. Aren't you afraid of losing them?"

"Oh, these are very cheap things. I hate

being without earrings because of this."

She touched her left ear. Thomas remem-bered.

"Oh, yes, that time old Bouncer bit you?"

Audrey nodded.

They were silent, reliving a childish memory.

Audrey Standish (as she then was), a long spindle-legged child, putting her face down on old Bouncer who had had a sore paw. A nasty bite, he had given her. She had had to have a stitch put in it. Not that there was much to show now just the tiniest little

Scar.

"My dear girl," he said. "You can hardly see the mark. Why do you mind?"

Audrey paused before answering with evident sincerity, "It's because because I just can't bear a blemish."

Thomas nodded. It

knowledge of Audrey

perfection. She was in
finished an article.

He said suddenly:

fitted in with his
of her instinct for
herself so perfectly

"You're far more beautiful than Kay."

She turned quickly.

"Oh, no, Thomas. Kay Kay is really
lovely."

"On the outside. Not underneath."

"Are you referring," said Audrey with faint
amusement, "to my beautiful soul?"

Thomas knocked out the ashes of his pipe.

"No," he said. "I think I mean your

bones."

Audrey laughed.

Thomas packed a new pipeful of tobacco.

They were silent for quite five minutes, but

Thomas glanced at Audrey more than once

though he did it so unobtrusively that she

was unaware of it.

He said at last quietly, "What's wrong,

Audrey?"

"Wrong? What do you mean by wrong?"

"Wrong with you. There's something."

"No, there's nothing. Nothing at all."

"But there is."

She shook her head.

"Won't you tell me?"

"There's nothing to tell."

"I suppose I'm being a chump

but I've

got to say it "He paused. "Audrey can't
you forget about it? Can't you let it all go?"

She dug her small hands convulsively into

the mat

to

"You don't understand you can't begin
understand."

"But, Audrey, my dear, I do. That's just
it. I know."

She turned a small doubtful face to him.

"I know just exactly what you've been
through. And and what it must have meant

to you.

She was very white now, white to the lips.

"I see," she said. "I didn't think anyone
knew."

"Well, I do. I I'm not going to talk about
it. But what I want to impress upon you is

that it's all over it's past and done with."

She said in a low voice:

"Some things don't pass."

"Look here, Audrey, it's no good brood-ing
and remembering. Granted you've been
through hell. It does no good to go over
and over a thing in your mind. Look forward

not back. You're quite young. You've got
your life to live and most of that life is
in front of you. Think of tomorrow, not of
yesterday."

She looked at 'him with a steady, wide-eyed

gaze that was singularly unrevealing of
her real thoughts.

"And supposing," she said, "that I can't
do that."

"But you must."

Audrey said gently:

"I thought you didn't understand. I'm---I'm
not quite normal about some 'things, I
suppose."

He broke in roughly, "Rubbish. You--"

He stopped.

"I what?"

"I was thinking of you as you were when
you were a girl before you married Neville.

Why did you marry Neville?"

Audrey smiled.

"Because I fell in love with him."

"Yes, yes, I know that. But why did you fall in love with him? What attracted you to him so much?"

She crinkled her eyes as though trying to see through the eyes of a girl now dead.

"I think," she said, "it was because he was so 'positive.' He was so much the op-posite of what I was, myself. I always felt shadowy not quite real. Neville was very real. And so happy and sure of himself and so everything that I was not." She added

with a smile: "And very good looking."

Thomas Royde said bitterly:

"Yes, the ideal Englishman good at sports, modest, good looking alwnv. the.

ttle pukka sahib getting everything he

wanted all along the line."

Audrey sat very upright and stared at him.

"You hate him," she said slowly. "You hate him very much, don't you?"

He avoided her eyes, turning away to cup a match in his hands as he relit the pipe that had gone out.

"Wouldn't be surprising if I did, would it?" he said indistinctly. "He's got every-thing that I haven't. He can play games, and swim and dance, and talk. And I'm a tongue-fled oaf with a crippled arm. He's always been brilliant and successful and I've always been a dull dog. And he married the only girl I ever cared for."

She made a faint sound. He said savagely:

"You've always known that, haven't you? You knew I cared about you ever since you

were fifteen. You know that I still care

She stopped him.

"No. Not now."

"What do you mean

not now?"

Audrey got up. She said in a quiet reflective

voice:

"Because now I am different."

"Different in what way?"

He returned and stood facing her.

Audrey said in a quick, rather breathless

voice:

"If you don't know, I can't tell you...."

I'm not always sure myself. I only know '
She broke off and mining ab'uptly away,
she walked quickly back over te rocks towards
the hotel.

Turning a corner of the cliff, she came
across Nevile. He was lying full .length peering
into a rock pool. He lool<ed up and
grinned.

"Hullo, Audrey."

"Hullo, Nevile."

"I'm watching a crab. Awfully active little
beggar. Look, here he is."

She kndt down and stared Where he
pointed.

"See him?"

"Yes."

"Have a cigarette?"

She accepted one and he lighted it for her.

After a moment or two, during which she
did not look at him, he said nervously:

"I say, Audrey?"

"Yes."

"It's all right, isn't it? I mean

US."

"Yes. Yes, of course."

between

xao'ro frlenci. nnd all that."

l

"oh, es--yes, of course."

"I--I do want us to be friends."

He looked at her anxiously. She gave him
a nervous'smile.

He said conversationally:

"It's been a jolly day, hasn't it? Weather
good and all that?"

"Oh, yesmyes."

"Quite hot really for September."

"Very."

There was a pause.

"Audrey "

She got up.

"Your wife wants you, sh.e's having to
you."

"XXZho.. oh, Kay."

"I said your wife."

He scrambled to his feet and stood looking at her.

He said in a very low voice:

"You're my wife, Audrey-....."

She turned away. Neville ran down on to the beach and across the sand to join Kay.

IX

On their arrival back at Gull's Point, Hurstall came out into the hall and spoke to Mary.

"Would you go up at once to her lady-ship, Miss? She is feeling very upset and wanted to see you as soon as you got in."

Mary hurried up the stairs. She found Lady Tressilian looking white and shaken.

"Dear Mary, I am so glad you have come. I am feeling most distressed. Poor Mr. Treves is dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes, isn't it terrible? So sudden. Apparently he didn't even get undressed last night. He must have collapsed as soon as he got home."

"Oh, dear, I am sorry."

"One knows, of course, that he was delicate. A weak heart. I hope nothing happened while he was here to overstrain it? There was nothing indigestible for dinner?"

"I don't think so no, I am sure there wasn't. He seemed quite well and in good spirits."

"I am really very distressed. I wish, Mary, that you would go to the Balmoral Court and make a few inquiries of Mrs./Rogers. Ask her if there is anything we can do? And then the funeral. For Matthew's sake I would like to do anything we could. These things are so awkward at a hotel."

Mr. .roke firmly.

"Dear Camilla, you really must not worry.

This has been a shock to you."

"Indeed it has."

"I will go to the Balmoral Court at once
and then come back and tell you all about
things."

"Thank you, Mary dear, you are always
so practical and understanding."

"Please try and rest now. A shock of this
kind is so bad for you."

Mary Aldin left the room and came down-stairs.

Entering the drawing room she ex-claimed:

"Old Mr. Treves is dead. He died last
night after returning home."

"Poor old boy," exclaimed Nevile. "What
was it?"

"Heart apparently. He collapsed as soon as he got in."

Thomas Royde said thoughtfully:

"I wonder if the stairs did him in."

"Stairs?" Mary looked at him inquiringly.

"Yes. When Latimer and I left him, he was just starting up. We told him to take it slow."

Mary exclaimed:

"But how very foolish of him not to take the lift."

"The lift was out of order."

"Oh, I see. How very unfortunate. Poor old man."

She added: "I am going round there now.

Camilla wants to know if there is anything we can do."

Thomas said: "I'll come with you."

They walked together down the road and

round the corner to the Balmoral Court. Mary remarked:

"I wonder if he has any relatives who ought to be notified."

"He didn't mention anyone."

"No, and people usually do. They say 'my niece,' or 'my cousin.'"

"Was he married?"

"I believe not."

They entered the open door of the Balmoral Court.

Mrs. Rogers, the proprietress, was talking to a tall middle-aged man, who raised a friendly hand in greeting to Mary.

"Good afternoon, Miss Aldin."

"Good afternoon, Dr. Lazenby. This is Mr. Royde. We came round with a message from Lady Tressilian to know if there is anything we can do."

"That's very kind of you, Miss Aldin," said the hotel proprietress. "Come into my room."

They all went into the small comfortable sitting room and Dr. Lazenby said:

"Mr. Treves was dining at your place last

night, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"How did he seem? Did he show any
signs of distress?"

"No, he seemed very well and cheerful."

The doctor nodded.

"Yes, that's the worst of these heart cases.

The end is nearly always sudden. I had a
look at his prescriptions upstairs and it seems
quite clear that he was in a very precarious
state of health. I shall commticate with his
London doctor, of course."

"He was very careful of himself always,"

said Mrs. Rogers. "And I'm sure he had
every care here we could give him."

"I'm sure of that, Mrs. Rogers," said the

doctor tactfully. "It was just some tiny additional strain, no doubt."

"Such as walking upstairs," suggested Mary.

"Yes, that might do it. In fact almost

certainly would that is, if he ever walked up those three flights but surely he never

did do anything of that kind?"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Roeers. "He always

used the lift. Always. He was most particularo"

"I mean," said Mary, "that with the lift being out of order last night "

fi/irs. Rogers was staring at her in surprise.

"But the lift wasn't out of order at all yesterday, Miss Aldin."

Thomas Royde coughed.

"Excuse me," he said. "I came home with

Mr. Treves last night. There was a placard
on the lift saying 'Out of Order.'"

Mrs. Rogers stared.

"Well, that's an odd thing. I'd have declared
there was nothing wrong with the lift
in fact I'm sure there wasn't. I'd have
heard about it if there was. We haven't had
anything go wrong with the lift (touching
wood) since oh, not for a good eighteen
months. Very reliable it is."

"Perhaps," suggested the doctor, "some
porter or hall boy put that notice up when
he was off duty?"

"It's an automatic lift, Doctor, it doesn't
need anyone to work it."

"Ah, yes, so it is. I was forgetting."

"I'll have a word with Joe," said Mrs.

Rogers. She bustled out of the room calling,

"Joe--Joe."

Dr. Lazenby looked curiously at Mrs.

er

"Excuse me, you're quite sure, Mr.

"Royde," put in Mary.

"Quite sure," said Thomas.

Mrs. Rogers came back with the porter.

Joe was emphatic that nothing whatever had been wrong with the lift on the preceding night. There was such a placard as Thomas had described but it was tucked away under the desk and hadn't been used for over a year.

They all looked at each other and agreed it was a most mysterious thing. The doctor suggested some practical joke on the part of one of the hotel visitors, and perforce they left it at that.

In reply to Mary's inquiries, Dr. Lazenby explained that Mr. Treves' chauffeur had given him the address of Mr. Treves' solicitors,

and he was communicating with them
and that he would come round and see Lady
Tressilian and tell her what was going to be
done about the funeral.

Then the busy cheerful doctor hurried off
and Mary and Thomas walked slowly back
to Gull's Point.

Mary said:

"You're quite sure you saw that notice,
Thomas?"

"Both Latimer and I saw it."

"What an extraordinary thing!" said Mary.

X

It was the twelfth of September.

"Only two more days," said Mary Aldin.

Then she bit her lip and flushed.

Thomas Royde looked at her thoughtfully.

"Is that how you feel about it?"

"I don't know what's the matter with me," said Mary. "Never in all my life have I been so anxious for a visit to come to an end. And usually we enjoy having Nevile so much. And Audrey too."

Thomas nodded.

"But this time," went on Mary, "one feels as though one were sitting on dynamite. At any minute the whole thing may explode. That's why I said to myself first thing this morning: 'Only two days more.' Audrey goes on Wednesday and Nevile and Kay on Thursday."

"And I go on Friday," said Thomas.

"Oh, I'm not counting you. You've been a tower of strength. I don't know what I should have done without you."

"Thhrman hnffer?"

"More than that. You've been so calm and so so kind. That sounds rather ridiculous but it really does express what I mean."

Thomas looked pleased though slightly embarrassed.

"I don't know why we've all been so het up," said Mary reflectively. "After all, if there was an an outburst it would be awk-ward and embarrassing, but nothing more."

"But there's been more to your feeling than that."

"Oh, yes, there has. A de pounds ite feeling of apprehension. Even the servants feel it. The kitchenmaid burst into tears and gave notice this morning for no reason at all. The cook's jumpy Hurstall is all on edge even Barrett who is usually as calm as a a

battleship has shown signs of nerves. And all because Nevile had this ridiculous idea of wanting his former and his present wife to make friends and so soothe his own conscience."

"In which ingenious idea he has singularly failed," remarked Thomas.

"Yes. Kay is is getting quite beside her-self. And really, Thomas, I can't help sym-pathizing with her." She paused. "Did you notice the way Nevile looked after Audrey as she went up the stairs last night? He still

cares about her, Thomas. The whole ttng has been the most tragic mistake."

Thomas started filling his pipe.

"He should have thought of that before,"

he said in a hard voice.

"Oh, I know. That's what one says. Buit doesn't alter the fact that the whole thing is a tragedy. I can't help feeling sorry for Nevile."

"People like Nevile--" began Thomas and then stopped.

"Yes?"

"People like Nevile think that they can always have everything their own way and have everything they want, too. I don't suppose Nevile has ever had a setback over anything in his life till he came up against this business of Audrey. Well, he's got it now. He can't have Audrey. She's out of his reach. No good his making a song and dance about it. He's just got to lump it."

"I suppose you're quite right. But you do sound hard. Audrey was so much in love with Nevile when she married him and they always got on together so well."

"Well, she's out of love with him now."

"I wonder," murmured Mary under her breath.

Thomas was going on:

"And I'll tell you something else. Neile

had better look out for Kay. She's a dangerous kind of young woman really dangerous.

If she got her temper up she'd stop at nothing."

"Oh, dear," Mary sighed and, returning to her original remark, said hopefully: "Well, it's only two days more."

Things had been very difficult for the last four or five days. The death of Mr. Treves had given Lady Tressilian a shock which had told adversely on her health. The funeral had taken place in London for which Mary was thankful, since it enabled the old lady to take her mind off the sad event more quickly than she might have been able to do otherwise.

The domestic side of the household had been nervy and difficult and Mary really felt tired and dispirited this morning.

"It's partly the weather," she said aloud.

"It's unnatural."

It had indeed been an unusually hot and fine spell for September. On several days the thermometer had registered 70 in the shade.

Nevile strolled out of the house and joined them as she spoke.

"Blaming the weather?" he asked with a glance up at the sky. "It is rather incredible. Hotter than ever today. And no wind. Makes one feel jumpy somehow. However I think

we'll get rain before very long. Today is just a bit too tropical to last."

Thomas Royde had moved very gently and aimlessly away and now disappeared round the corner of the house.

"Departure of gloomy Thomas," said Neville. "Nobody could say he shows any enjoyment of my company."

"He's rather a dear," said Mary.

"I disagree. Narrow-minded prejudiced sort of chap."

"He always hoped to marry Audrey; I think. And then you came along and cut him out.

"It would have taken him about seven years to make up his mind to ask her to marry him. Did he expect the poor girl to wait about while he made up his mind?"

"Perhaps," said Mary deliberately, "it will

all come fight now."

Nevile looked at her and raised an eyebrow.

"True love rewarded?

wet fish? She's a lot too

I don't see Audrey

Audrey marry that

good for that. No,

marrying gloomy

Thomas."

"I believe she is really very fond of him,

Nevile."

,

are! Can't you let Audrey enjoy her freedom

for a bit?"

"If she does enjoy it, certainly."

Nevile said quickly:

"You think she's not happy?"

"I really haven't the least idea."

"No more have I," said Nevile slowly.

"One never does know what Audrey is feeling."

He paused and then added, "But Audrey

is one hundred per cent thoroughbred.

She's white all through."

Then he said, more to himself than to

Mary, "God, what a damned fool I've been!"

Mary went into the house a little worried.

For the third time she repeated to herself the

comforting words, "Only two days more."

Nevile wandered restlessly about the garden

and terraces.

Right at the end of the garden he found

Audrey sitting on the low wall looking down

at the water below. It was high tide and the

river was full.

She got up at once and came towards him.

"I was just coming back to the house. It

must be nearly teatime."

She spoke quickly and nervously without

looking at him.

Only when they reached the terrace again

did he say:

"Can I talk to you, Audrey?"

She said at once, her fingers gripping the edge of the balustrade:

"I think you'd better not."

"That means you know what I want to

say.

She did not answer.

"What about it, Audrey? Can't we go back to where we were? Forget everything that has happened?"

"Including Kay?"

"Kay," said Nevile, "will be sensible."

"What do you mean by sensible?"

"Simply this. I shall go to her and tell her the truth. Fling myself on her generosity. Tell her, what is true, that you are the only woman I ever loved."

"You loved Kay when you married her."

"My marriage to Kay was the biggest mis-take
I ever made. I

He stopped. Kay had come out of the
drawing room window. She walked towards
them, and before the fury in her eyes even
Neville shrank a little!

"Sorry to interrupt this touching scene,"
said Kay. "But I think it's about time I
did."

Audrey got up and moved away.

"I'll leave you alone," she said.

Her face and voice were colorless.

"That's right," said Kay. "You've done
all the mischief you wanted to do, haven't
you? I'll deal with you later. Just now I'd
rather have it out with Neville."

"Look here, Kay, Audrey has absolutely nothing to do with this. It's not her fault. Blame me if you like--"

"And I do like," said Kay. Her eyes blazed at Neville. "What sort of a man do you think you are?"

"A pretty poor sort of man," said Neville bitterly.

"You leave your wife, come bullheaded after me, get your wife to give you a divorce. Crazy about me one minute, tired of me the next! Now I suppose you want to go back to that whey-faced, mewling, double-crossing little cat "

"Stop that, Kay!"

"Well, what do you want?"

Neville was very white. He said:

"I'm every kind of a worm you like to

call me. But it's no good, Kay. I can't go on.

I think really I must have loved Audrey

all the time. My love for you was was a

kind of madness. But it's not me, it's you, Kay.

you and I don't belong. I shouldn't be able to make you happy in the long run. Believe me, Kay, it's better to cut our losses. Let's try and part friends. Be generous."

Kay said in a deceptively quiet voice:

"What exactly are you suggesting?"

Nevile did not look at her. His chin took on a dogged angle.

"We can get a divorce. You can divorce me for desertion."

"Not for some time. You'll have to wait for it."

"I'll wait," said Nevile.

"And then, after three years or whatever it is, you'll ask dear sweet Audrey to marry all over again?"

"If she'll have me."

"She'll have you all right!" said Kay viciously.

"And where do I come in?"

"You'll be free to find a better man than

I am. Naturally I shall see you're well provided

for "

"Cut out the bribes!" Her voice rose, as

she lost control of herself:

"Listen to me, Nevile. You can't do this

thing to me! I'll not divorce you. I married you because I loved you. I know when you

started turning against me. It was after I let you know I followed you to Estoril. You

wanted to think it was all Fate. It upset your

vanity to think it was me. Well, I'm not

ashamed of what I did. You fell in love with

me and married me and I'm not going to let

you go back to that sly little cat who's got

her hooks into you again. She meant this

to happen but she's not going to bring it

off! I'll kill you fast. Do you hear? I'll kill

you. I'll kill her too. I'll see you both dead.

I'll "

Nevile took a step forward and caught her

by the arm.

"Shut up, Kay. For goodness' sake. You

can't make this kind of scene here."

"Can't I? You'll see. I'll "

Hurstall stepped out on the terrace. His face was quite impassive.

"Tea is served in the drawing room," he announced.

Kay and Nevile walked slowly towards the drawing room window.

Hurstall stood aside to let them pass in.

Up in the sky the clouds were gathering.

XI

The rain started falling at a quarter to seven.

Nevile watched it from the window of his

bedroom. He had had no further conversation with Kay. They had avoided each other after tea.

Dinner that evening was a stilted difficult meal. Neville was sunk in abstraction; Kay's face had an unusual amount of make-up; Audrey sat like a frozen ghost. Mary Moin did her best to keep some kind of conversation going and was slightly annoyed with Thomas Royde for not playing up to her better.

Hurstall was nervous and his hands trembled as he handed the vegetables.

As the meal drew to a close, Neville said with elaborate casualness, "Think I shall go over to Easterhead after dinner and look up Latimer. We might have a game of billiards."

"Take the latchkey," said Mary. "Ira case you're back late."

"Thanks, I will."

They went into the drawing room where coffee was served.

The turning on of the wireless and the news was a welcome diversion.

Kay, who had been yawning ostentatiously ever since dinner, said she would go up to

bed. She had got a headache.

"Have you got any aspirin?" asked Mary.

"Yes, thank you."

She left the room.

Nevile tuned the wireless on to a program with music. He sat silent on the sofa for some time. He did not look once at Audrey, but sat huddled up looking like an unhappy little boy. Against her will, Mary felt quite sorry for him.

"Well," he said at last, rousing himself.

"Better be off if I'm going."

"Are you taking your car or going by ferry?"

"Oh, ferry. No sense in going a rotmd of

fifteen miles. I shall enjoy a bit of a walk."

"It's raining, you know."

"I know. I've got a Burberry."

He went towards the door.

"Good night."

In the hall, Hurstall came to him.

"If you please, sir, will you go up to Lady Tressilian? She wants to see you specially."

Nevile glanced at the clock. It was already ten o'clock.

He shrugged his shoulders and went up-stairs and along the corridor to Lady Tressilian's room and tapped on the door. While he waited for her to say come in, he heard the voices of the others in the hall down below. Everybody was going to bed early tonight, it seemed.

"Come in," said Lady Tressilian's clear voice.

Nevile went in, shutting the door behind him.

Lady Tressilian was all ready for the night.

All the lights were extinguished except one reading lamp by her bed. She had been reading, but she now laid down the book. She looked at Neville over the top of her spectacles.

It was, somehow, a formidable glance.

"I want to speak to you, Neville," she said.

In spite of himself, Neville smiled faintly.

"Yes, Headmaster," he said.

Lady Tressilian did not smile.

"There are certain things, Neville, that I will not permit in my house. I have no wish to listen to anybody's private conversations but if you and your wife insist on shouting at each other exactly under my bedroom windows, I can hardly fail to hear what you say. I gather that you were outlining a plan whereby Kay was to divorce you and in due course you would remarry Audrey. That, Neville, is a thing you simply cannot do and

I will not hear of it for a moment."

Nevile seemed to be making an effort to control his temper.

shortly. "As for the rest of what you say, surely that is my business!"

"No, it is not. You have' used my house in order to get into touch with Audrey or else Audrey has used it--"

"She has done nothing of the sort. She "

Lady Tressilian stopped him with upraised hand.

"Anyway you can't do this thing, Nevile. Kay is your wife. She has certain rights of which you cannot deprive her. In this mat-ter, I am entirely on Kay's side. You have made your bed and must lie upon it. Your duty now is to Kay and I am telling you so plainly"

Nevile took a step forward. His voice rose:

"This is nothing whatever to do with
you "

"That is more," Lady Tressilian swept on
regardless of his protest, "Audrey leaves this
house tomorrow "

"You can't do that! I won't stand for it "

"Don't
shout at me, Nevile."

"I tell you I won't have it "

Somewhere along the passage a door
shut..

XII

Alice Bentham, the gooseberry-eyed housemaid,
came to Mrs. Spicer the cook, in some
perturbation.

"Oh, Mrs. Spicer, I don't rightly know what I ought to do."

"What's the matter, Alice?"

"It's Miss Barrett. I took her in her cup of tea over an hour ago. Fast asleep she was and never woke up, but I didn't like to do much. And then, five minutes ago, I went in again because she hadn't come down and her ladyship's tea all ready and waiting for her to take in. So I went in again and she's sleeping ever so- I can't stir her."

"Have you shaken her?"

"Yes, Mrs. Spicer. I shook her hard but she just goes on lying there and she's ever such a horrid color."

"Goodness, she's not dead, is she?"

"Oh no, Mrs. Spicer, because I can hear her breathing, but it's funny breathing. I think she's ill or something."

"Well, I'll go up and see myself. You take in her ladyship's tea. Better make a fresh pot. She'll be wondering what's happened." Alice obediently did as she was told whilst Mrs. Spicer went up to the second floor.

Taking the tray along the corridor, Alice knocked at Lady Tressilian's door. After knocking twice and getting no answer she went in. A moment later, there was a crash of broken crockery and a series of wild screams and Alice came rushing out of the room and down the stairs to where Hurstall was crossing the hall to the dining room. "Oh, Mr. Hurstall there've been burglars and her ladyship's dead killed with a great hole in her head and blood everywhere

"

A Fine Italian Hand...

I

Superintendent Battle had enjoyed his holi-day. There were still three days of it to run and he was a little disappointed when the

weather changed and the rain fell. Still, what else could you expect in England? And he'd been extremely lucky up to now.

He was breakfasting with Inspector James Leach, his nephew, when the telephone rang.

"I'll come fight along, sir." Jim put the receiver back.

"Serious?" asked Superintendent Battle.

He noted the expression on his nephew's face.

"We've got a murder. Lady Tressilian.

An old lady, very well known down here, an invalid. Has that house at Saltcreek that

hangs fight over the cliff."

Battle nodded.

"I'm going along to see the old man" (thus disrestx:ctfixllv did Leach seek of his Chief

Constable). "He's a friend of hers. We're going to the place together."

As he went to the door he said pleadingly:

"You'll give me a hand, won't you, Uncle, over this? First case of this kind I've had."

"As long as I'm here, I will. Case of robbery and housebreaking, is it?"

"I don't know yet."

II

Half an hour later, Major Robert Mitchell, the Chief Constable, was speaking gravely to uncle and nephew.

"It's early to say as yet," he said, "but one thing seems clear. This wasn't an outside job. Nothing taken, no signs of breaking in. All the windows and doors found shut this

morning."

He looked directly at Battle.

"If I were to ask Scotland Yard, do you think they'd put you on the job? You're on the spot, you see. And then there's your relationship with Leach here. That is, if

you're willing. It means cutting the end of

your holiday."

"That's all right," said Battle. "As for the

author, I'll have to put it up to Sir

Edgar" (Sir Edgar Cotton was Assistant Commissioner) "but I believe he's a friend of yours?"

Mitchell nodded.

"Yes, I think I can manage Edgar all right.

That's settled, then! I'll get through right

away."

He spoke into the telephone: "Get me the
Yard."

"You think it's going to be an important
case, sir?" asked Battle.

Mitchell said gravely:

"It's going to be a case where we don't
want the possibility of making a mistake.
We want to be absolutely sure of our man
or woman, of course."

Battle nodded. He understood quite well
that there was something behind the words.

"Thinks he knows who did it," he said to
himself. "And doesn't relish the prospect.
Somebody well known and popular or I'll eat
my boots!"

Battle and Leach stood in the doorway of the well-furnished, handsome bedroom. On the

carefully testing for fingerprints the handle of a golf club a heavy niblick. The head of the club was bloodstained and had one or two white hairs sticking to it.

By the bed Dr. Lazenby, who was police surgeon for the district, was bending over the body of Lady Tressilian.

He straightened up with a sigh.

"Perfectly straightforward. She was hit from in front with terrific force. First blow smashed in the bone and killed her, but the murderer struck again to make sure. I won't give you the fancy terms just the plain horse sense of it."

"How long has she been dead?" asked Leach.

"I'd put it between ten o'clock and
midnight."

"You can't go nearer than that?"

"I'd rather not. All sorts of factors to take
into account. We don't hang people on r/gor
mon/s nowadays. Not earlier than ten, not later
than midnight."

"And she was hit with this niblick?"

The doctor glanced over at it.

"Presumably. Luck, though, that the
murderer left it behind. I couldn't have de-duced
a niblick from the wound. As it hap
none
tho .hm edge nf the club didn't touch

the head it was the angled back of the club
that must have hit her."

"Wouldn't that have been rather difficult
to do?" asked Leach.

"If it had been done on purpose, yes,"
agreed the doctor. "I can only suppose, that
by a rather odd chance, it just happened that
way."

Leach was raising his hands, instinctively
trying to reconstruct the blow.

"Awkward," he commented.

"Yes," said the doctor thoughtfully. "The
whole thing was awkward. She was struck,
you see, on the right temple but whoever
did it must have stood on the right hand
side of the bed facing the head of the bed

there's no room on the left, the angle from
the wall is too small."

Leach pricked up his ears.

"Left handed?" he queried.

"You won't get me to commit myself on
that point," said Lazenby. "Far too many

snags. I'll say, if you like, that the easiest explanation is that the murderer was left handed but there are other ways of accounting for it. Suppose, for instance, the old lady had turned her head slightly to the left just

moved the bed out, stood on the left of it

and afterwards moved the bed back."

"Not very likely that last."

"Perhaps not, but it might have happened.

I've had some experience in these things,

and I can tell you, my boy, deducing that

a murderous blow was struck left handed is

full of pitfalls!"

Detective Sergeant Jones from the floor,

remarked, "This golf club is the ordinary

right-handed kind."

Leach nodded. "Still, it mayn't have be-longed

to the man who used it. It was a

man, I suppose, Doctor?"

"Not necessarily. If the weapon was that heavy niblick a woman could have landed a terrible swipe with it."

Superintendent Battle said in his quiet voice:

"But you couldn't swear that that was the weapon, could you, Doctor?"

Lazenby gave him a quick interested glance.

"No. I can only swear that it might have been the weapon, and that presumably it was the weapon. I'll analyze the blood on it, make sure that it's the same blood group also the hairs."

"Yes," said Battle approvingly. "It's always as well to be thorough."

Lazenby asked curiously:

"Got any doubts about that golf club yourself, Superintendent?"

Battle shook his head.

"Oh, no, no. I'm a simple man. Like to believe the thing I see with my eyes. She was hit with something heavy that's heavy. It has blood and hair on it, therefore presumably her blood and hair. Ergo that was the weapon used."

Leach asked:

"Was she awake or asleep when she was hit?"

"In my opinion, awake. There's astonishment on her face. I'd say this is just a private personal opinion that she didn't expect what was going to happen. There's no sign of any attempt to fight and no horror or fear. I'd say off hand that either she had just woken up from sleep and was hazy and didn't take things in or else she recognized her assailant as someone who could not possibly wish to harm her."

"The bedside lamp was on and nothing else," said Leach thoughtfully.

"Yes, that cuts either way. She may have turned it' on when she was suddenly woken

up by someone entering her room. Or it may have been on already."

Detective Sergeant Jones rose to his feet.

He was smiling appreciatively.

"Lovely set of prints on that club," he said. "Clear as anything!"

Leach gave a deep sigh.

"That ought to simplify things."

"Obliging chap," said Dr. Lazenby. "Left the weapon left his fingerprints on it wonder he didn't leave his visiting card!"

"It might be," said Superintendent Battle,

"that he just lost his head. Some do."

The doctor nodded.

"True enough. Well, I must go and look after my other patient."

"What patient?" Battle sounded suddenly interested.

"I was sent for by the butler before this was discovered. Lady Tressilian's maid was found in a coma this morning."

"What was wrong with her?"

"Heavily doped with one of the barbitu-rates. She's pretty bad, but she'll pull round."

"The maid?" said Battle. His rather ox-like eyes went heavily to the big bell pull, the tassel of which rested on the pillow near the dead woman's hand.

Lazenby nodded.

"Exactly. That's the fzrst thing Lady Tressilian would have done if she'd cause to fed alarm pull that bell and summon the maid. Well, she could have pulled it till all was blue. The maid wouldn't have heard."

"That was taken care of, was it?" said Battle. "You're sure of that? She wasn't in the habit of taking sleeping draughts?"

"I'm positive she wasn't. There's not a sign of such a thing in her room. And I've found out how it was given to her. Senna pods. She drank off a brew of senna pods every night. The stuff was in that."

Superintendent Battle scratched his chin. "H'm," he said. "Someone knew all about this house. You know, Doctor, this is a very odd sort of murder."

"Well," said Lazenby. "That's your busi-ness."

"He's a good man, our doctor," said Leach when Lazenby had left the room.

The two men were alone now. The photo-graphs had been taken, and measurements recorded. The two police officers knew every fact that was to be known about the room where the crime had been committed.

Battle nodded in answer to his nephew's remark. He seemed to be puzzling over

"Do you think anyone could have handled that club, with gloves on, say, after those fingerprints were made?"

Leach shook his head.

"I don't and no more do you. You couldn't grasp that club not use it, I mean, without smearing those prints. They weren't smeared. They were clear as clear. You saw for your-self."

Battle agreed.

"And now we ask very nicely and politely if everyone will allow us to take their fingerprints, no compulsion, of course. And everybody will say yes. and then one of two things will happen. Either none of these fingerprints will agree, or else "

"Or else we'll have got our man?"

"I suppose so. Or our woman, perhaps."

Leach shook his head.

"No, not a woman. Those prints on the clubs were a man's. Too big for a woman's, Besides this isn't a woman's crime."

"No," agreed Battle. "Quite a man's crime. Brutal, masculine, rather athletic and slightly stupid. Know anybody in the house like that?"

"I don't know anyone in the house yet.

They're all together in the dininrcm"

"We'll go and have a look at them." He

glanced o°ver his shoulder at the bed, shook

his head ,(and remarked:

"I don't like that bell pull."

"What; about it?"

"It doesn't fit."

He admitted as he opened the door:

"Who ' wanted to kill her, I wonder? A lot

of cantankerous old ladies about just asking
for a

tap on the skull. She doesn't look that

tap , ,

sort. I should have thought she was liked." He paused

a minute

"Well

money?"

Leach

and then asked:

off, wasn't she? Who gets her

answered the implication of the

words:

„You,de hit it! That will be the answer.

It's one of the first things to fmd out."

As thffy went downstairs together, Battle

glanced t the list in his hand.

He read out:

"Miss Aldin, Mr. Royde, Mr. Strange,

Mrs. Stfange' Mrs. Audrey Strange. H'm,

seem a ltyt of the Strange family."

"Thos are his two wives, I understand."

Battle,eyebrows rose and he murmured:

”

card, is he?"

Bluel

, - cAmilv were assembled round the clin-

ing room table, where they had rade apre-tense
of eating.

Superintendent Battle glanced keer/7 at
the faces turned to him. Fie was s'zfing hem
up after his OWl pectfiar methods. His view
of them might have surprised the had they
known it. It was a sternly biased view, No
matter what the law pretends as to regarding
people innocent until they are proed gfilty,
Superintendent Battle always regarded eery-one
connected with a murder case as potential
murderer.

He glanced from Mary Aldin sitting upright
and pale at the head of the table, to
Thomas Royde filling a pipe beside her, to
Audrey sitting with her chair pushed lack,
a coffee cup and saucer in her right had, a
cigarette in her left, to Nevile looking (azed
and bewildered, trying with a shaking aand
to light a cigarette, to Kay with ler elbOWS
on the table and the pallor of her face stXOWing
through her makeup.

These were Superintendent Battle's

thoughts:

Suppose that's Miss Aldin. Cool customer
competent woman, I should say.

Won't catch her off her guard easily. Man

next to her is a dark horse got a groggy arm hit nfa nker face---,,t on inferior

ity complex as likely as not. That's one of

these wives, I suppose she's scared to

death yes, she's scared all right. Funny

about that coffee cup. That's Strange, I've

seen him before somewhere. He's got the

jitters all right nerves shot to pieces. Red

headed girl's a tartar devil of a temper.

Brains as well as temper, though.

Whilst he was thus sizing them up, Inspector

Leach was making a stiff little speech.

Mary Aldin mentioned everyone present by

nalTle.

She ended up:

"It has been a terrible shock to us, of
course, but we are anxious to help you in
any way we can."

"To begin with," said Leach, holding it

up, "does anybody know anything about this

golf club?"

With a LITTLE cry, Kay said, "How horrible.

Is that what "and stopped.

Nevile Strange got up and came round the

table.

"Looks like one of mine. Can I just see?"

"It's quite all right now," said Inspector

Leach. "You can handle it."

That little significant "now" did not seem

to produce any reaction in the onlookers.

Nevile examined the club.

"I think it's one of the niblicks out of my

bag," he said. "I can tell you for sure in a

minute or two. If you will just come with

me." They followed him to a big cupboard

under the stairs. He flung open the door of

it and to Battle's confused eyes it seemed

literally crowded with tennis rackets. At

the same time, he remembered where he had

seen Neville Strange. He said quickly:

"I've seen you play at Wimbledon, sir."

Neville half mined his head.

"Oh, yes, have you?"

He was; throwing aside some of the rackets.

There were two golf bags in the cupboard
leaning up against fishing tackle.

"Only my wife and I play golf," explained

Neville. "And that's a man's club. Yes, that's
right it' mine."

He had taken out his bag which contained
at least fourteen clubs.

Inspector Leach thought to himself:

"These athletic chaps certainly take themselves
seriously. Wouldn't like to be his
caddy."

Neville was saying:

"It's one of Walter Hudson's niblicks from
St. Esbert's."

"Thank you, Mr. Strange. That settles
one question."

Neville said:

"What beats me is that nothing was taken.
And the house doesn't seem to have been

broken into?" Sfis voice was bewildered

but it was also..righteneCI'

Battle said to himself:

thinging it out, all of

"They've

ben

them "

"The servants,, said lqevile, "are so absolutely

harmless ,,

"I shall tal to Mis Aldin about the

servants," saiel Tnsoect0r L-each smoothly.

In the meane I wo0cler if you could give

me any idea Wiho Lady Tressilian's solicitors

are?"

"Askwith &k Trçla'SY," replied Nevile

promptly. "St,,. Loo."

"Thank yo%, Mr. strange. We shall have

to £nd out

from em all about Lady

Tressilian's

Prt°PerL,,Y'asged--' Nevile, "who in"Do

you rrean'

hefits her mor

”

„-., ri..ncY'.. er will, and all that."

w U," aia 4evae.

·oI t xxaaOW aDOU

"She had not we, muç of her own to leave

so far as I kow. I tell you about the

bulk of her pro..rty."

xes, xr... Strange?

„.0

-- my wife under the

will of the late Sir Matthew Tressilian. Lady
Tressilian only had a life interest in it."
"Indeed, is that so?" Inspector Leach
looked at Neville with the interested attention
of someone who spots a possibly valuable
addition to his pet collection. The look made
Nevile wince nervously. Inspector Leach
went on and his voice was impossibly genial,

"You've no idea of the amount, Mr.

Strange?"

"I couldn't tell you off hand. In the neigh-I

borhood of a hundred thousand pounds,

believe."

"In-deed. To each of you?"

"No, divided between us."

"I see. A very considerable sum."

Nevile smiled. He said quietly, "I've got

plenty to live on of my own, you know,

without hankering to step into dead people's

shoes."

Inspector Leach looked shocked at having

such ideas attributed to him.

They went back into the dining room and

Leach said his next little piece. This was on

the subject of fingerprints a matter of rou-fine

elimination of those of the household

in the dead woman's bedroom.

Everyone expressed willingness almost

eaeerness t have their finernrint. taken

They were shepherded into the library for

that purpose where Detective Sergeant Jones

was waiting for them with his little roller.

Battle and Leach began on the servants.

Nothing very much was to be got from them. Hurstall explained his system of lock-ing up the house and swore that he had found it untouched in the morning.. There were no signs of any entry by an intruder. The front door, he explained, had been left on the latch. That is to say it was not bolted, but could be opened from outside with a key. It was left like that because Mr. Nevile had gone over to Easterhead Bay and would be back late.

"Do you know what time he came in?"

"Yes, sir, I think it was about half past two. Someone came back with him, I think. I heard voices and then a car drive away and then I heard the door close and Mr. Nevile come upstairs."

"What time did he leave here last night for Easterhead Bay?"

"About twenty past ten. I heard the door

close."

Leach nodded. There did not seem much more to be got from Hurstall at the moment.

He interviewed the others. They were all

no more so than was natural in the circum-stances.

Leach looked questioningly at his uncle as the door closed behind the slightly hysterical kitchenmaid who had tailed the procession.

Battle said: "Have the housemaid back not the pop-eyed one--the tall thin bit of vinegar. She knows something."

Emma Wales was clearly uneasy. It alarmed her that this time it was the big elderly square man who took upon himself the task of questioning her.

"I'm just going to give you a bit of advice, Miss Wales," he said pleasantly. "It doesn't do, you know, to hold anything back from the police. Makes them look at you unfavor-ably,

if you understand what I mean "

Emma Wales protested indignantly but
uneasily:

"I'm sure I never "

"Now, now." Battle held up a large square
hand. "You saw something or else you heard
something, what was it?"

"I didn't exactly hear it I mean I couldn't
help hearing it Mr.. Hurstall, he heard it
too. And I don't think, not for a moment
I don't, that t had anything to do with the

"Probably not, probably not. Just tell us
hat was."

"Witell, I was going up to bed. Just after

te.n. it was.-]and I d slipped along, first to put

/Miss Aldm's hot water bottle in her bed.

-r

and

always has one,

Summer or winter she

so of course I had to pass right by her

ladyship's door."

"Go on," said Battle.

And I heard her and Mr. Nevile going

at the hammer and tongs. Voices right up.

Shouting, he was. Oh, it was a proper quarrel!"

"Remember exactly what was said?"

"Well, I wasn't really listening as you might say."

"No. But still you must have heard some

of the words." . ,

"Her ladyship was saying as she wouldn't

or other going on in her

have something

.

house and Mr. Nevile. was saying; , ,

dare to say anything against me.

you

worked up he was.

e with an expressionless face, ux

Battle, --, --....A to more out of

once more, but not so, y, ; n. :

the end he dissects me woman.

her In

ach

He and Jim. -3-.o.? ,a,ach other. Le

"Jones ought to be able to tell us something

about those prints by now."

Battle asked:

"Who's doing the rooms?"

"Williams. He's a good man. He won't

miss anything."

"You're keeping the occupants out of

them?"

"Yes. Until Williams has finished."

The door opened at that minute and young
Williams put his head in.

"There's something I'd like you to see. In
Mr. Nevile Strange's room."

They got up and followed him to the suite
on the west side of the house.

Williams pointed to a heap on the floor. A
dark blue coat, trousers and waistcoat.

Leach said sharply:

"Where did you find this?"

"Bundled down into the bottom of the
wardrobe. Just look at this, sir."

He picked up the coat and showed the
edges of the dark blue cuffs.

"See those dark stains? That's blood, sir,
or I'm a Dutchman. And see here, it's spattered
all up the sleeve."

"Hm," Battle avoided the other's eager
eyes. "Looks bad for young Nevile, I must
say. Any other suit in the room?"

"Dark grey pin stripe hanging over a chair.
Lot of water on the floor here by the wash
basin."

"Looking as though he washed the blood off himself in the devil of a hurry? Yes. It's near the open window, though, and the rain has come in a good deal."

"Not enough to make those pools on the floor, sir. They're not dried up yet."

Battle was silent. A picture was forming itself before his eyes. A man with blood on his hands and sleeves, flinging off his clothes, bundling the bloodstained garments into the cupboard, sluicing water furiously over his hands and bare arms.

He looked across at a door in the other wall.

Williams answered the look.

"Mrs. Strange's room, sir. The door is locked."

"Locked? On this side?"

"No. On the other."

"On her side, eh?"

Battle was reflective for a minute or two.

He said at last, "Let's see that old butler again."

Hurstall was nervous. Leach said crisply:

"Why didn't you tell us, Hurstall, that

you overheard a quarrel between Mr. Strange and Lady Tressilian last night?"

The old man blinked.

"I really didn't think twice about it, sir.

I don't imagine it was what you'd call a

quarrel but an amicable difference of opinion."

Resisting the temptation to say, "Amicable

difference of opinion my foot!" Leach

went on:

"What suit was Mr. Strange wearing last night at dinner?"

Hurstall hesitated. Battle said quietly:

"Dark blue suit or grey pin stripe? I daresay someone else can tell us if you don't remember."

Hurstall broke his silence.

"I remember now, sir. It was his dark blue. The family," he added, anxious not to lose prestige, "have not been in the habit of changing into evening dress during the summer months. They frequently go out after dinner--sometimes in the garden, some-times down to the quay."

Battle nodded. Hurstall left the room. He passed Jones in the doorway. Jones looked excited.

He said:

q'here's onl

.. the bill. Of course .I v

;nly been :onk.e,a r.°Ug..c°mpar,,s°n

as yet, but I'll bet thFY re the ngrtt ones.

w

yMr. N .

. '

Battle leant back iq- his chatr.

. .-

„xvr,u

„ '

., ;'that seems to setue

doesn't it? ',

IV

They were in the (5hief Constable's office

three men . .:øe worded faces.

Major Mitchell sighed with a sigh:

"Well, I suppose, there's nothing to be

done but arrest him.

Leach said again:

"T. d,

1. ,, ,,

"u°3 like it, "

Mitchell looked across at Superintendent

Baffle.

"Cheer -- 4/" he said kindly. "Your

. . . .

. up, lau. ,,

test line isn't dead' .

Superintendent J. Attle suggested.

"I don't like it, " he said.

it like it. . ,,

"I do", thinkmY of us like t,

.smd

· s,,hon"ln.,t.. 'e ample evidence, I think,

"More than ample," said Battle.

"In fact if we don't apply for one, anybody might ask why the dickens not?"

Battle nodded an unhappy head.

"Let's go over it," said the Chief Constable.

"You've got motive Strange and his wife come into a considerable sum of money at the old lady's death. He's the last person known to have seen her alive he was heard quarreling with her. The suit he wore that night had bloodstains on it and that blood is the same group as that of the deceased woman (that's only negative evidence, of course); most damning of all, his fingerprints were found upon the actual weapon and no one else' s."

"And yet, sir," said Battle, "you don't like it either."

"I'm damned if I do."

"What is it exactly you don't like about it,

Sir?"

Major Mitchell rubbed his nose.

"Makes the fellow out a bit too much of a fool, perhaps?" he suggested.

"And yet, sir, they do behave like fools sometimes."

"Oh, I know I know. Where would we be if they didn't?"

Battle said to Leach:

„What don't you ix-ilv'

L';h stirred unh. aPr. Strange. Seen him

"I've always likea 'for years. He's a nice

on and off dow.n.he, rsesportsman." „ .

- d rte

entleman an,, . Battle slowly, why a

„

't see,

sma

't be a murderer

I don

ouldn

.

eood

tennis play. er s)fing against xt." He

o well. There's nut like is the niblick."

puzzled.

. eatively, the bell. The

"Yes, sir, or .aliof both."

bell or the nibli, cg] :sslow careful voice.

He went on m ru'tt actually happened?

"What do we to her room, have a

qD&d Mr. Strange ,er. and hit her over the

arrel, lose his t..eiOJlf so, and t was

a raon'

,

head with

. , did he happen to have

unpremeditated, lç."t's not the sort of thing

a niblick with hira.,(you in the eveni.gs."

you carry.apo .een pracncmg swmgs--

"He rmght

something like tha

"He might.Da

saw him doing xt.

him with a niblic

weepreviously sands. As I look at it,

tobody says so. Nobody
te last time anybody saw
n his hand was about a
:n he was practicing sand

there was a quarrel and he lost his temper
and mind you, I've seen him on the courts,
and in one of these tournament matches these
tennis stars are all het up and a mass of
nerves and if their tempers fray easily it's
going to show. I've never seen Mr. Strange
raffled. I should say he'd got an excellent
control over his temper better than most
and yet we're suggesting that he goes berserk
and hits a frail old lady over the head."

"There's another alternative, Battle," said
the Chief Constable.

"I know, sir. The theory that it was premeditated.

He wanted the old lady's money.

That fits in with the bell which entailed the
doping of the maid but it doesn't fit in with
the niblick and the quarrel! If he'd made
up his mind to do her in, he'd be very careful

not to quarrel with her. He could dope
the maid creep into her room in the night
crack her over the head and stage a nice
little robbery, wiping the niblick and putting
it carefully back where it belonged! It's all
wrong, sir it's a mixture of cold premeditation
and unpremeditated violence and the
two don't mix!"

"There's something in what you say, Bat-tie
but what's the alternative?"

"It's the niblick that takes my fancw sir."

"Nobody could have hit her over the head
with that niblick without disturbing Neville's
prints that's quite certain."

"In that case," said Superintendent Battle,
"she was hit over the head with something
else."

Major Mitchell drew a deep breath.

"That's rather a wild assumption, isn't it?"

"I think it's common sense, sir. Either
Strange hit her with that niblick or nobody

did. I plump for nobody. In that case that niblick was put there deliberately and blood and hair smeared on it. Dr. Lazenby doesn't like the niblick much he had to accept it because it was the obvious thing and because he couldn't say definitely that it hadn't been used."

Major Mitchell leaned back in his chair.

"Go on, Battle," he said. "I'm giving you a free hand. What's the next step?"

"Take away the niblick," said Battle, "and what is left? First, motive. Had Nevile Strange really got a motive for doing away with Lady Tressilian? He inherited money a lot depends to my mind on whether he needed that money. He says not. I'd suggest we verify that. Find out the state of his finances. If he's in a hole financially, and

very much strengthened. If, on the other hand, he was speaking the truth and his

finances are in a good state, why, then "

"Well, what then?"

"Why, then we might have a look at the motives of the other people in the house."

"You think, then, that Nevile Strange was framed?"

Superintendent Battle screwed up his eyes.

"There's a phrase I read somewhere that tickled my fancy. Something about a fine Italian hand. That's what I seem to see in this business. Ostensibly it's a blunt brutal straightforward crime, but it seems to me I catch glimpses of something else of a fine Italian hand at work behind the

scenes "

There

was a long pause while the Chief Constable looked at Battle.

"You

may be right," he said at last. "Dash it all, there's something funny about the busi-ness. What's your idea, now, of our plan of campaign?"

Battle

stroked his square jaw.

"Well,

sir," he said. "I'm always in favor of going about things in the obvious way. Everything's been set to make us suspicious of Mr. Nevile Strange. Let's go on being

really to arrest him, but hint at it, question him, put the wind up him and observe everybody's reactions generally. Verify his statements, go over his movements that night with a toothcomb. In fact show our hand as plainly as may be."

"Quite Machiavellian," said Major Mitchell with a twinkle. "Imitation of a heavy handed policeman by star actor Battle."

The Superintendent smiled.

"I always like doing what's expected of

me, sir. This time I mean to be a bit slow about it take my time. I want to do some nosing about. Being suspicious of Mr. Nevile Strange is a very good excuse for nosing about. I've an idea, you know, that some-thing rather odd has been going on in that house."

"Looking for the sex angle?"

"If you like to put it that way, sir."

"Handle it your own way, Battle. You and Leach carry on between you."

"Thank you, sir." Battle stood up.

"Nothing suggestive from the solicitors?"

"No, I rang them up. I know Trelawny fairly well. He's sending me a copy of Sir Matthew's will and also of Lady Tressilian's. She had about five hundred a year of her own invested in gilt-edged securities. She

left a legacy to Barrett and a small one to Hurstall, the rest to Mary Aldin."

"That's three we might keep an eye on,"

said Battle.

Mitchell looked amused.

"Suspicious fellow, aren't you?"

"No use letting oneself be hypnotized by fifty thousand pounds," said Battle stolidly.

"Many a murder has been done for less than fifty pounds. It depends on how much you want the money. Barrett got a legacy and maybe she took the precaution to dope herself so as to avert suspicion."

"She very nearly passed out. Lazenby hasn't let us question her yet."

"Overdid it out of ignorance, perhaps. Then Hurstall may have been in bad need of cash for all we know. And Miss Aldin, if

she's no money of her own, might have fancied
a bit of life on a nice little income before
she's too old to enjoy it."

The Chief Constable looked doubtful.

"Well," he said, "it's up to you two. Get
on with the job."

V

Back at Gull's Point the two police officers
received Williams' report.

Nothing of a suspicious or suggestive nature
had been found in any of the bedrooms.

The servants were clamoring to be allowed
to get on with the housework. Should he
give them the word?

"Might as well, I suppose," said Battle.

"I'll just have a stroll myself first through
the upper floors. Rooms that haven't been

done very often tell you something about their occupants that's useful to know."

Jones put down a small cardboard box on the table.

"From Mr. Nevile Strange's dark blue coat," he announced. "The red hairs were on the cuff, blonde hairs on the inside of the collar and the right shoulder."

Battle took out the two long red hairs and the half dozen blonde ones and looked at them. He said, with a faint twinkle in his eye:

"Convenient. One blonde, one redhead and one brunette in this house. So we know where we are at once. Red hair on the cuff, blonde on the collar? Mr. Nevile Strange

arm round one wife and the other one's head on his shoulder."

"The blood on the sleeve has gone for

analysis, sir. They'll ring us up as soon as

they get the result."

Leach nodded.

"What about the servants?"

"I followed your instructions, sir. None of them is under notice to leave, or seems likely to have borne a grudge against the old lady. She was strict, but well liked. In any case the management of the servants lay with Miss Aldin. She seems to have been popular with them."

"Thought she was an efficient woman the moment I laid eyes on her," said Battle. "If she's our murderess, she won't be easy to hang."

Jones looked startled.

"But those prints on that niblick, sir, were "

"I know I know," said Battle. "The singularly obliging Mr. Strange's. There's a general belief that athletes aren't over-burdened by brains (not at all true, by the way) but I can't believe Nevile Strange is a complete moron. What about those senna pods of the maid's?"

servants' bathroom on the second floor. She used to put 'em in to soak midday and they stood there until the evening when she went to bed."

"So that absolutely anybody could get at them? Anybody inside the house, that is to say.

Leach said with conviction:

"It's an inside job all right!"

"Yes, I think so. Not that this is one of those closed-circle crimes. It isn't. Anyone who had a key could have opened the front

door and walked in. Nevile Strange had that key last night but it would probably be a simple matter to have got one cut, or an old hand could do it with a bit of wire. But I don't see any outsider knowing about the bell and that Barrett took senna at night! That's local inside knowledge! Come along, Jim, my boy. Let's go up and see this bath-room and all the rest of it."

They started on the top floor. Here was a box room full of old broken furniture and junk of all kinds.

"I haven't looked through this, sir," said Jones. "I didn't know "

"What you were looking for? Quite right.

C}nlxr xxraet c pounds time Fram the dust on the

floor nobody has been in here for at least six months."

The servants' rooms were all on this floor, also two unoccupied bedrooms with a bath-room, and Battle looked into each room and gave it a cursory glance noticing that Alice, the popeyed housemaid, slept with her window shut; that Emma, the thin one, had a great many relations, photographs of whom were crowded on her chest of drawers, and that Hurstall had one or two pieces of good, though cracked, Dresden and Crown Derby porcelain.

The cook's room was severely neat and the kitchenmaid's chaotically untidy. Battle passed on into the bathroom which was the room nearest to the head of the stairs.

Williams pointed out the long shelf over the washbasin, on which stood tooth glasses and brushes, various unguents and bottles of salts and hair lotion. A packet of senna pod stood open at one end.

"No prints on the glass or packet?"

"Only the maid's own. I got hers from her room."

"He didn't need to handle the glass," said

Leach. "He'd only have to drop the stuff

Battle went down the stairs followed by

servants' bathroom on the second floor. She used to put 'em in to soak midday and they stood there until the evening when she went to bed."

"So that absolutely anybody could get at them? Anybody inside the house, that is to say."

Leach said with conviction:

"It's an inside job all right!"

"Yes, I think so. Not that this is one of those closed-circle crimes. It isn't. Anyone who had a key could have opened the front door and walked in. Nevile Strange had that key last night but it would probably be a simple matter to have got one cut, or an old hand could do it with a bit of wire. But I don't see any outsider knowing about the

bell and that Barrett took senna at night!

That's local inside knowledge! Come along,
Jim, my boy. Let's go up and see this bathroom
and all the rest of it."

They started on the top floor. Here was
a box room full of old broken furniture and
junk of all kinds.

"I haven't looked through this, sir," said

Jones. "I didn't know "

"What you were looking for? Quite right.

Only waste of time. From the dust on the

floor nobody has been h here for at least six
months."

The servants' rooms ere all on this floor,
also two unoccupied bdrooms wiff a bathroom,
and Baffle lookç into each room and
gave it a cursory glanct noticing that Alice,
the popeyed housemid, slept with her
window shut; that Em, the thin one, had
a great many rdafions, photographs of whom
were crowded on her ciest of drawers, and
that Hurstall had one Or two pieces of good,
though cracked, Dresden and Crowa Derby
porcdain.

The cook's room was severely raeat and the kitchenmaid's chaotically untidy-. Battle passed on into the batlxoom which was the room nearest to the head of the stairs.

Williams pointed out te 10ng shelf)ver the washbasin, on which stood tooth glasses and brushes, various unguents and bottles of salts and hair lotion. A packet of senna pod stood open at one end.

"No prints on the glass or packet?"

"Only the maid's owa. I got hers fxom her room,"

"He didn't need to handle the glas," said Leach. "He'd only have to drop t.e stuff

Battle went down the stairs folio, wed hv

Leach. Halfway down this top flight was a rather awkwardly placed window. A pole with a hook on the end stood in a corner.

"You draw down the top sash with that," explained Leach. "But there's a burglar screw. The window can be drawn down, only so far. Too narrow for anyone to get in

that way."

"I wasn't thinking of anyone getting in,"

said Battle. His eyes were thoughtful.

He went into the first bedroom on the next floor which was Audrey Strange's. It was neat and fresh, ivory brushes on the dressing table no clothes lying about. Battle looked into the wardrobe. Two plain coats and skirts, a couple of evening dresses, one or two summer frocks. The dresses were cheap, the tailormades well cut and expensive but not new.

Battle nodded. He stood at the writing table a minute or two, fiddling with the pen tray on the left of the blotter.

Williams said: "Nothing of any interest on the blotting paper or in the waste paper basket."

"Your word's good enough," said Battle.

"Nothing to be seen here."

They went on to the other rooms.

Thomas Royde's was untidy, with clothes

lying about. Pipes and pipe ash on the tables

and beside the bed, where a copy of Kipling's
Kim lay half open.

"Used to native servants clearing up after
him," said Battle. "Likes reading old favor-ites.
Conservative type."

Mary Aldin's room was small but comfort-able.
Battle looked at the travel books on the
shelves and the old-fashioned dented silver
brushes. The furnishing and coloring in the
room were more modern than the rest of the
house.

"She's not so conservative," said Battle.

"No photographs either. Not one who lives
in the past."

There were three or four empty rooms, all
well kept and dusted ready for occupation,
and a couple of bathrooms. Then came Lady
Tressilian's big double room. After that,
reached Dy going down three little steps,
came the two rooms and bathroom occupied
by the Stranges.

Battle did not waste much time in Neville's

room. He glanced out of the open casement window below, which the rocks fell sheer to the sea. The view was to the West, towards

Stark Head which rose wild and forbidding out of the sea.

"Gets the afternoon sun," he murmured.

"But rather a grim morning outlook. Nasty smell of seaweed at low tide too. And that headland has got a grim look! Don't wonder

it attracts suicides?

He passed into the larger room, the door of which had been unlocked.

Here everything was wild confusion.

Clothes lay about in heaps, filthy under-wear,

stockings, jumpers tried on and dis-carded
a patterned Ser frock thrown
sprawling over the back of a chair. Battle
looked inside the wardrobe. It was full of
furs, evening dresses, shorts, tennis frocks,
playsuits.

Battle shut the doors again almost rever-ently.

"Expensive tastes," he remarked. "She

must cost her husband a lot of money."

Leach said darkly:

"Perhaps that's why---2,,

He left the sentence mished.

"Why he needed a] hundred or rather
fifty thousand pounds? 5 Maybe. We'd better
see, I think, what he hats to say about it."

They went down to tthe library. Tilliams
was dispatched to tell ttt,ae servants they could
get on with the housework. The family were
free to return to their rrooms if they wished.

also that Inspector Leach would like an in-terviewwith
each of them separately starting
with Mr. Nevile Strange.

When Williams had gone out of the room.,
Battle and Leach established themselves be.

hind a massive Victorian table. A young
policeman with notebook sat in the corner
the room, his pencil poised.

Battle said:

"You carry on for a start, Jim. Make it
impressive." As the other nodded his head,
Battle rubbed his chin and frowned.

"I wish I knew what keeps putting Hercule
Poirot into my head."

"You mean that old chap. the Belgian-- comic
little guy?"

"Comic my foot," said Superintendent
Battle. "About as dangerous as a black
mamba and a she-leopard that's what he is
when he starts making a mountebank of hi.
self I wish he were here this sort of thing
would be right up his street."

"In what way?"

"Psychology," said Battle. "Real psychology-not the haft-baked stuff people hand out who know nothing about it." His memory dwelt resentfully on Miss Amphrey and his daughter, Sylvia' "No.- the real genuine

go round. Keep a murderer talking--that's one of his lines. Says everyone is bound to speak what's true sooner or later because

in the end it's easier than telling lies. And

so they make some little slip they don't think matters and that's when you get them."

"So you're going to give Nevile Strange plenty of rope?"

Battle gave an absent-minded assent. Then he added, in some annoyance and perplexity:

"But what's really worrying me is what put Hercule Poirot into my head? Upstairs that's where it was. Now what did I see that

reminded me of that little guy?"

The conversation was put to an end by the arrival of Nevile Strange.

He looked pale and worried, but much less nervous than he had done at the break-fast table. Battle eyed him keenly. Incredible that a man who knew and he must know if he were capable of any thought processes at all that he had left his fingerprints on the instrttment of the crime and who had since had his fingerprints taken by the police should show neither intense nervousness nor an elaborate brazening of it out.

Nevile Strange looked quite natural shocked, worried, grieved and just slightly and healthily nervous.

Jim Leach was speaking in his pleasant West country voice.

"We would like you to answer certain questions, Mr. Strange. Both as to your

movements last night and in reference to particular facts. At the same time I must caution you that you are not bound to answer these questions unless you like and that if you prefer to do so you may have your solicitor present."

He leaned back to observe the effect of this.

Nevile Strange looked, quite plainly, bewildered.

"He hasn't the least idea what we're getting at, or else he's a damned good actor,"

Leach thought to himself. Aloud he said, as

Nevile did not answer, "Well, Mr. Strange?"

Nevile said:

"Of course, ask me anything you like."

"You realize," said Battle pleasantly, "that anything you say will be taken down in writing and may subsequently be used in a court of law in evidence."

A flash of temper showed on Strange's face. He said sharply:

"Are you threatening me?"

"No, no, Mr. Strange. Warning you."

Nevile shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose all this is part of your routine.

Go ahead."

"You are ready to make a statement?"

"If that's what you call it."

"Then will you tell us exactly what you did last night. From dinner onwards, shall we say?"

"Certainly. After dinner we went into the drawing room. We had coffee. We listened to the wireless the news and so on. Then I decided to go across to Easterhead Bay Hotel and look up a chap who is staying there a friend of mine."

"That friend's name is?"

"Latimer. Edward Latimer."

"An intimate friend?"

"Oh, so, so. We've seen a good deal of him since he's been down here. He's been over to lunch and dinner and we've been over there."

Battle said:

"Rather late, wasn't it, to go off to Easterhead Bay?"

"Oh, it's a gay spot they keep it up till all hours."

"But this is rather an early to bed house-hold, isn't it?"

"Yes, on the whole. However, I took the latchkey with me. Nobody had to sit ut."

"Your arife didn't think of going with you?"

There was a slight change, a stiffening in Nevile's tone as he said:

"No, she had a. headache. She'd already gone up to bed."

"Please go on, Mr. Strange."

"I was just going up to change."

Leach interrupted.

"Excuse me, Mr. Strange. Change into what? Int0 evening dress or out of evening dress?"

"Neither. I was wearing a blue suit my best, as it happened, and as it was raining a bit and I proposed to take the ferry and walk the other side it's about half a mile, as you know--I changed into an older suit a

grey pin stripe if you want me to go into every detail."

"We do like to get things clear," said Leach humbly. "Please go on."

"I was going upstairs, as I say, when Hurstall came and told me Lady Tressilian wanted to see me, so I went along and had

a a jaw with her for a bit."

Battle said gently:

"You were the last person to see her alive, I think, Mr. Strange?"

Nevile flushed.

"Yes yes I suppose I was. She was quite all right then."

"How long were you with her?"

"About twenty minutes to half an hour, I should think, then I went to my room, changed my suit and hurried off. I took the latchkey with me."

"What time was that?"

"About half past ten, I should think. I hurried down the hill, just caught the ferry starting and went on as planned. I found Latimer at the Hotd, we had a drink or two and a game of billiards. The time passed so quickly that I found I'd lost the last ferry back. It goes at one thirty. So Latimer very decently got out his car and drove me back. That, as you know, means going all the way round by Saltington sixteen miles. We left the Hotel at two o'clock and got back here somewhere around half past, I should say. I thanked Ted Latimer, asked him in for a drink, but he said he'd rather get straight back, so I let myself in and went straight up to bed. I didn't hear or see anything amiss. The house seemed all asleep and peaceful. Then this morning I heard that girl scream-ing and "

Leach stopped him.

-your conversation with Lady Tressilian she
was quite normal in her marmot>"

"Oh, absolutely."

"What did you talk about?"

"Oh, one thing and another."

"Amicably?"

Neville flushed.

"Certainly."

"You didn't for instance," went on Leach
smoothly, "have a violent quarrel?"

Neville did not answer at once. Leach said:
i,.. "Y.o.u had better tell the truth, you know.
n ten you frankly some of your conversation
was overheard."

Neville said shortly:

"We had a bit of a disagreement. It was
nothing."

"What was the subject of the disagreement?"

With an effort Neville recovered his temper.

He smiled.

"Frady," he said, "she ticked me off.
at often happened. If she disapproved of
anyone she let them have it straight from the
Shoulder.

She was old-fashioned, you see,

and she was reclined to be down on modern

Ways

and modern

More—all that. We hold on to thought—di-

"No, Mr.

handled it in

it to strike

marks."

perfectly friendly terms agreeing to differ."

He added, with some heat, "I certainly didn't

bash her over the head because I lost my

temper over an argument if that's what you

think?"

Leach glanced at Battle. Battle leaned forward ponderously across the table. He said:

"You recognized that niblick as your property this morning. Have you any explanation for the fact that your fingerprints were found upon it?"

Nevile stared. He said sharply:

"I .but of course they would be it's my club . . .I've often handled it."

"Any explanation, I mean, for the fact that your fingerprints show that you were the last person to have handled it."

Nevile sat quite still. The color had gone out of his face.

"That's not true," he said at last. "It can't be. Somebody could have handled it after me someone wearing gloves."

Strange nobody could have

the sense you mean .by raising

without blurring your own

There was a pause

a very long pause.

.gave a long shudder..He put his hands over

his eyes. The two policemen watched him.

Then he took away his hands. He sat up

straight.

isn]It isn't true," he said ui "It

t true. You think I q'-'tl'Y' simply

,

.

r, mea her, but .I

didn t: I swear I didn't. There's some homble
rmstake."

"You've no explanation to offer about those

£mgerprints ?"

"How can I have? I' ,,.-Lr .

m ,,mtounced.-"Have

you any explanataon for the fact

that the sleeves and cuffs of your dark blue

suit are stained with blood?"

"Blood?" It was a horror-struck whisper.

"It couldn't be!"

"You didn't, for instance, cut yourself--"

"No. No, of course I didn't!"

They waited a little while.

Nevile Strange, his forehead creased,

seemed to be thinking. He looked up at

them at last with frightened horrorstricken

eyes.

"It's fantastic!" he said. "Simply fantastic.

It's none of it true."

"Facts are true enough," said Superintendent

Battl,

unthinkable unbelievable! I've know

milla all my life."

Leach coughed.

"I believe you told us yourself, r
Strange, that you come into a good demeanor
money upon Lady Tressilian's death?" °

"You think that's why

But I don't I't wt

money! I don't need it!"

"That," said Leach, with his little

"is what you say, Mr. Strange."

Nevile sprang up.

"Look here, that's something I can p:oro,e.

That I didn't need money. Let me ring
up my bank manager--you can talk too
yourself."

The call was put through. The line-' Was
clear and in a very few minutes they 'Were
through to London. Nevile spoke:

"That you, Ronaldson? Nevile Strange speaking. You know my voice. Look, here, will you give the police they're here now all the information they want about my affairs? Yes, please."

Leach took the phone. He spoke quietly.

It went on, question and answer.

He replaced the phone at last.

"Well," said Nevile eagerly.

Leach said impassively, "You have a substantial credit balance, and the bank has

you'll agree, Mr. Strange, to ask for a war

charge

of all your investments and reports

them to be in a favorable condition."

"So you see it's true what I said!"

"It seems so but again, Mr. Strange, you may have commitments, debts payment of blackmail reasons for requiring money of which we do not know."

"But I haven't! I assure you I haven't. You won't find anything of that kind."

Superintendent Battle shifted his heavy shoulders. He spoke in a kind fatherly voice.

"We've sufficient evidence, as I'm sure

arrant for your arrest. We haven't done so as yet. We're giving you the benefit of the doubt, you see."

Neville said bitterly:

"You mean, don't you, that you've made up your minds I did it, but you want to get at the motive so as to clinch the case against me?"

Battle was silent. Leach looked at the ceiling.

Neville said desperately:

"It's like some awful dream. There's nothing I can say or do. It's like being in a trap and you can't get out."

Sutrintendent Battle stirred. An intelli

gent gleam showed between his half-closed

lids.

"That's very nicely put," he said. "Very

nicely put indeed. It gives me an idea "

VI

Sergeant

Jones adroitly got rid of Ne

ile through the hall and dining room and

then brought Kay in by the French window

so that husband and wife did not
meet.

"He'll see all the others, though,"

Leaach

remarked.

"All the better," said Battle. "It's

oOnly this one I want to deal with whilst she's

sstill in the

dark."

The day was overcast with a sharp

w',tind.

Kay was dressed in a tweed skirt

n.d a purple sweater above

which her hair 10obked like a burnished

copper bowl. She 10obked half frightened, half

excited. Her beauty: and vitality bloomed

against the dark Victorian

background of books and saddleback charles.

Leach led her

easily enough over her r

ac-count of the previous evening.

She had had a

headache and gone to , bed early about

quarter past nine, she th0u. l

ght'

She

had

slept

that

heavily

and

heard

nothing

until

the next morning when she was awakened

by hearing someone screaming.

Battle took up the questioning.

"Your husband didn't come in to see how

you were before he went off for the evening?"

"No."

"You didn't see him from the time you

left the drawing room until the following

morning. Is that right?"

Kay nodded.

Battle stroked his jaw.

"Mrs. Strange, the door between your
room and that of your husband was locked.

Who locked it?"

Kay said shortly: "I did."

Baffle said nothing but he waited
waited like an elderly fatherly cat for a
mouse to come out of the hole he was watch-ing.

His silence did what questions might not
have accomplished. Kay burst out impetu-ously:

"Oh, I suppose you've got to have it all!
That old doddenng Hurstall must have heard
us before tea and he'll tell you if I don't.
He's probably told you already. Neville and I
had had a row a flaming row! I was furious
With him! I went un to bed and locked the

door because I was still in a flaming rage
with him!"

"I see I see," said Battle at his most
sympathetic. "And what was the trouble all
about?"

"Does it matter? Oh, I don't mind telling
you. Neville has been behaving like a perfect
idiot. It's all that woman's fault, though."

"What woman?"

"His first wife. She got him to come here
in the first place."

"You mean to meet you?"

"Yes. Neville thinks it was all his own
idea poor innocent! But it wasn't. He never
thought of such a thing until he met her in
the Park one day and she got the idea into
his head and made him believe he'd thought

of it himself. He quite honestly thinks it was his idea, but I've seen Audrey's fine Italian hand behind it from the first."

"Why should she do such a thing?" asked Battle.

"Because she wanted to get hold of him again," said Kay. She spoke quickly and her breath came fast. "She's never forgiven him for going off with me. This is her revenge. She got him to fix up that we'd all be here together and then she got to work on him. She's been doing it ever since we arrived.

She's clever, you know. Knows just how to look pathetic and elusive yes, and how to play up another man, too. She got Thomas Royde, a faithful old dog who's always adored her, to be here at the same time, and she drove Nevile mad by pretending she was going to marry him."

She stopped, breathing angrily.

Battle said mildly:

"I should have thought he'd be glad for her to er find happiness with an old friend."

"Glad? He's jealous as hell!"

"Then he must be very fond of her."

"Oh, he is," said Kay bitterly. "She's seen to that!"

Battle's fmgger still ran dubiously over his

jaW.

"You might have objected to this arrange-ment of coming here?" he suggested.

"How could I? It would have looked as though I were jealous!"

"Well," said Battle, "after all, you were, weren't you?"

Kay flushed.

"Always! I've always been

Audrey. Right from the beginning
the beginning. I used to feel her there in
the house. It was as though it were her house,

jealous of

or nearly

not mine. I changed the color scheme ,t
did it all up but it was no good! I'd feel h:

there like a grey ghost Creeping about. I
knew Neville worried because he thought

he'd treated her badly. He couldn't quite
forget about her she was always there--a
reproachful feeling at the back of his mind.
There are people, you know, who are like

that. They seem rather colorless and not very

interesting but they make themselves felt."

Battle nodded thoughtfully. He said:

"Well, thank you, Mrs. Strange. That's all at present. We have to ask er a good many questions especially with your hus-band inheriting so much money from Lady Tressilian fifty thousand pounds "

"Is it as much as that? We get it from old

Sir Matthew's will, don't we?"

"You know all about it?"

"Oh, yes. He left it to be divided be-tween Nevile and Nevile's wife. Not that I'm glad the old thing is dead. I'm not. I didn't like her very much probably because she didn't like me but it's too horrible to think of some burglar coming along and cracking her head open."

She went out on that. Battle looked at

Leach.

"What do you think of her? Good-looking

bit of goods, I will say. A man could lose his head over her easy enough."

Leach agreed.

"Doesn't seem to be quite a lady, though,"

he said dubiously.

"They aren't nowadays," said Battle.

"Shall we see No. 1 ? No, I think we'll have Miss Aldin next, and get an outside angle on this matrimonial business."

Mary Aldin came in composedly and sat down. Beneath her outward calmness her eyes looked worried.

She answered Leach's questions clearly enough, confirming Nevile's account of the evening. She had come up to bed about ten o'clock.

"Mr. Strange was then with Lady Tressilian?"

"Yes, I could hear them talking."

"Talking, Miss Aldin, or quarreling?"

She flushed but answered quietly:

"Lady Tressilian, you know, was fond of

discussion. She often sounded acrimonious when she was really nothing of the kind. Also, she was inclined to be autocratic and to domineer over people and a man doesn't take that kind of thing as easily as a woman does."

"As you do, perhaps," thought Battle.

He looked at her intelligent face. It was who broke the silence.

she "I don't want to be stupid---but it really seems to me incredible--quite incredible, that you should suspect one of the people in this house. Why shouldn't it be an outsider?"

"For several reasons, Miss Aldin. For one thing, nothing was taken and no entry was forced. I needn't remind you of the geography of Moor own house and grounds, but just bear this in mind. On the west is a sheer cliff down to the sea, to the south are a couple of terraces with a wall and a drop to the sea, on the east the garden slopes down almost to the shore, but it is surrounded by a high wall. The only ways out are a small door leading through on to the road which

was found bolted inside as usual this morning
and the main door to the house which is
set on the road. I'm not saying no one could
climb that wall, nor that they could not have
got in by raising a spare key, the front
or even a skeleton key--but in saying,
as far as I can see no one did do anything, go
the sort, XWhoever committed this crime
at Baxendale took senna pod infusion.
might be doped it--that means someone, hence
the hose. The niblick was taken from
cupboard under the stairs.

vid, Mrs Aldin."

"It wasn't Neville! I'm
Neville!"

"Why are you so sure?"

She raised her hands hopelessly.

"It just isn't like him that's why!

wouldn't kill a defenseless old woman

but Neville!"

"It doesn't

It wasn't an out-

sure it wasn't

He

seem very likely," said Battle
reasonably, "but you'd be surprised at the
things people do when they've got a good
enough reason. Mr. Strange may have wanted
money very badly."

"I'm sure he didn't. He's not an extravagant
person he never has been."

"No, but his wife is."

"Kay? Yes, perhaps but, oh, it's too ridiculous.

I'm sure the last thing Neville has
been thinking of lately is money."

Superintendent Battle coughed.

"He's had other worries, I understand?"

"Kay told you, I suppose? Yes, it really
has been rather difficult. Still, it's nothing to
do with this dreadful business."

"Probably not, but all the same I'd like to
hear your version of the affair, Miss Aldin."

Mary said slowly:

"Well, as I saw. it ha.

situation. Whoever's idea it was to begin

with "

He interrupted her deftly.

"I understood it was Mr. Nevile Strange's
idea?"

"He said it was."

"But you yourself didn't think so?"

"I no. it isn't like Nevile somehow. I've
had a feeling all along that somebody else
put the idea into his head."

"Mrs. Audrey Strange, perhaps?"

"It seems incredible that Audrey should
do such a thing."

"Then who else could it have been?"

Mary raised her shoulders helplessly.

"I don't know. It's just-queer."

"Queer," said Battle thoughtfully. "That's
what I feel about this case. It's queer."

"Everything's been queer. There's been a feeling I can't describe it. Something in the air. A menace."

"Everybody stnmg up ad on edge?"

"Ye.s, just that We've all suffered

.
,
-""'

S
from t. Even Mr. Laurne
he stopped.

"I was just coming to
. Latimer. What can you tell me,

Miss
Aldin,
about
Mr.

'r · ?,,
Latimer?

Who is Mr. Lanner

"Well, really, I

don't

how

much

about

"He's Mrs. Stranee's friend? Known each

other a long time?"

"Yes,

"Nix.

she knew him before her marriage."

"Strange like him?"

"Quite well, I believe."

"No--trouble there?"

Battle put it delicately. Mary replied at

once and emphatically:

"Certainly not!"

"Did Lady Tressilian like Mr. Latimer?"

"Not very much."

She took warning from the aloof tone of

her voice and changed the subject.

"The subject.

Miss Maa, now, Jane Barrett., she has

been with Lady Tressan a long time? You

consider her trustworthy?,,

"Oh, absolutely. She was devoted to Lady

Tressilian."

Battle leaned back in his ch;

m'mInenfa,ct

you-.w..ouldn't cnnider, for a

· t the possibility that Barrett hit Lad.

T,r?silian .over .the head and then do,,a . Y
set to avoid being suspected?"

v-,, -c-

"Of course not. Why on earth should she?"

"She gets a legacy, you know."

"So do I," said Mary Aldin.

She looked at him steadily.

"Mr. Trelawny has just arrived. He told

me."

"You didn't know about it beforehand?"

"No. I certainly assumed, from what Lady

Tressilian occasionally let fall, that she had

left me something. I have very little of my

own, you know. Not enough to live on without

getting work of some kind. I thought

that Lady Tressilian would leave me at least

a hundred a year .. but she has some cousins

and I did not at all know how she proposed to leave that money which was hers to dispose

of. I knew, of course, that Sir Matthew's

estate went to Nevile and Audrey."

"So she didn't know what Lady Tressilian

was leaving her," Leach said when Mary

Aldin had been dismissed. "At least that's

what she says."

"That's what she says," agreed Battle.

"And now for Bluebeard's first wife."

VII

Audrey was wearing a pale grey flannel coat

and skirt. In it she looked so pale and ghostlike

that Battle was reminded of Kay's words,

"A grey ghost creeping about the house."

She answered his questions simply and
without any signs of emotion.

Yes, she had gone to bed at ten o'clock,

the same time as Miss Aldin. She had heard

nothing during the night.

"You'll excuse me butting into your private affairs," said Battle, "but will you

explain just how it comes about that you are

here in the house?"

"I always come to stay at this time. This

year, my late husband wanted to come

at the same time and asked me if I would

mind."

"It was his suggestion.

"Oh, yes."

"Not yours?"

"Oh, ILO."

"But you agreed?"

"Yes, I agreed. I

didn't feel that

I

could very well refuse."

"Why

not, Mrs. Strange?" But

she was vague.

"One

doesn't like to be disobliging." "You

were the injured party?" "I

beg your pardon?"

"It

was you who divorced your husband?" "Yes."

"Do you--excuse me--feel any rancor a

ainst

him?"

"No -nt at all."

"You have a very forgiving nature, Mrs.

Strange."

She did not answer. He tried silence but

Audrey Was not Kay to be thus goaded into

speech. Se could remain silent without any

hint of un,,asiness. Baffle acknowledged himself

beater.

"You axe sure it was not your idea this

meeting?!"

"Quite sure."

"You axe on friendly tes with the pre-ent

Mrs. :Strange?"

"I dont think she likes rae very much."

"Do Y%ou like her?"

"Yes. II think she is verY beautiful."

"Well-thank you -I that is all."

She g%ot up and w-alkedtowards the doo00r.

Then shee hesitated and ce back.

"I wculd just like to say "she spo!lke

nervous!,-y and quickly. 'You think Nevi:-ile

did thisthat he killed er because of -t-she

money. I'm quite sure 0t isn't so. New,Ale

has nev.er cared much ,bout money. I . do

know that. I was married to him for eight
years, you know. I just can't see him killing
anyone like that for money it isn't

great value as evidence but I do wish you
would believe it."

She turned and hurried out of the room.

"And what do you make of her?" asked
Leach. "I've never seen anyone so so devoid
of emotion."

"She didn't show any," said Battle. "But
it's there. Some very strong emotion. And
I don't know what it is... ."

VIII

Thomas Royde came last. He sat, solemn
and stiff, blinking a little like an owl.

He was home from Malaya first time for

eight years. Had been in the habit of staying at Gull's Point ever since he was a boy.

Mrs. Audrey Strange was a distant cousin and had been brought up by his family from the age of nine. On the preceding night he had gone to bed just before eleven. Yes, he had heard Mr. Nevile Strange leave the house but had not seen him. Nevile had left at about twenty past ten or perhaps a little later. He himself had heard nothing during the night. He was up and in the garden when the discovery of Lady Tressilian's body had been made. He was an early riser.

There was a pause.

"Miss Aldin has told us that there was a state of tension in the house. Did you notice this too?"

"I don't think so. Don't notice things much."

"That's a lie," thought Battle to himself.

"You notice a good deal, I should say more than most."

No, he didn't think Nevile Strange had

been short of money in any way. He certainly had not seemed so. But he knew very little about Mr. Strange's affairs.

"How well did you know the second Mrs. Strange?"

"I met her here for the first time."

Battle played his last card.

"You may know, Mr. Royde, that we've found Mr. Neville Strange's fingerprints on the weapon. And we've found blood on the sleeve of the coat he wore last night."

He paused. Royde nodded.

"He was telling us," he muttered.

"I'm asking you frankly: Do you think he did it?"

Thomas Royde never liked to be hurried.

He waited for a minute which is a very long time before he answered:

"Don't see why you ask me? Not my

business. It's yours. Should say myself very

unlikely."

"Can you think of anyone who seems to you more likely?"

Thomas shook his head.

"Only person I think likely can't possibly

have done it. So that's that."

"And who is that?"

But Royde shook his head more decid-edly.

"Couldn't possibly say. Only my private
opinion."

"It's your duty to assist the police."

"Tell you any facts. This isn't fact. Just
idea. And it's impossible, anyway."

"We didn't get much out of him," said

Leach when Royde had gone.

Battle agreed.

"No, we didn't. He's got something in his mind something quite definite. I'd like to know what it is. This is a very peculiar sort of crime, Jim, my boy "

The telephone rang before Leach could answer. He took up the receiver and spoke. After a minute or two of listening he said "Good," and slammed it down.

"Blood on the coat sleeve is human," he announced. "Same blood groud as Lady T.'s.

Looks as though Nevile Strange is in for it "

Battle had walked over to the window and was looking out with considerable interest.

"A beautiful young man out there," he remarked. "Quite beautiful and a definite wrong 'un, I should say. It's a pity Mr. Lati-mer for I feel that that's Mr. Latimer was over at Easterhead Bay last night. He's the type that would smash in his own grand-mother's

head if he thought he could get away with it and if he knew he'd make some-thing out of it."

"Well, there wasn't anything in it for him," said Leach. "Lady T.'s death doesn't benefit him in any way whatever." The tele-phone bell rang again. "Damn this phone,

what's the matter now?"

He went to it.

"Hullo. Oh, it's you, Doctor? What? Come round, has she? What? What?"

He turned his head. "Uncle, just come and listen to this."

Battle came over and took the phone. He listened, his face as usual showing no expres-sion.

He said to Leach:

"Get Nevile Strange, Jim."

When Neville came in, Battle was just replacing the phone on its hook.

Nevile, looking white and spent, stared curiously at the Scotland Yard Superintendent, trying to read the emotion behind the wooden mask.

"Mr. Strange," said Battle. "Do you know

anyone who dislikes you very much?"

Nevile stared and shook his head.

"Sure?" Battle was impressive. "I mean,

sir, someone who does more than dislike you

someone who frankly hates your guts?"

Nevile sat bolt upright.

"No. No, certainly not. Nothing of the kind."

"Think, Mr. Strange. Is there no one

you've injured in any way "

Nevile flushed.

"There's only one person I can be said to have injured and she's not the kind who bears rancor. That's my first wife when I left her for another woman. But I can assure you that she doesn't hate me. She's she's been an angel."

The Superintendent leaned forward across the table.

"Let me tell you, Mr. Strange; you're a very lucky man. I don't say I liked the case against you I didn't. But it was a case! It would have stood up all right, and unless the

jury happened to have liked your personality, it would have hanged you."

"You speak," said Nevile, "as though all that were past?"

"It is past," said Battle. "You've been

saved, Mr. Strange, by pure chance."

Nevile still looked inquiringly at him.

"After you left her last night," said Battle,

"Lady Tressilian rang the bell for her maid."

He watched whilst Nevile took it in. "After Then Barrett saw her "

"Yes. Alive and well. Barrett also saw you

leave the house before she went in to her

mistress."

Nevile said:

"But the niblick my fingerprints "

"She wasn't hit with that niblick. Dr.

Lazenby didn't like it at the time. I saw that.

She was killed with something else. That

niblick was put there deliberately to throw

suspicion on you. It may be by someone who

overheard the quarrel and so selected you as

a suitable victim, or it may be because"

He paused, and then repeated his question:

"Who is there in this house that hates

IX

"I've got a question for you, Doctor," said

Battle.

They were in the doctor's house after re-turning from the nursing home where they had had a short interview with Jane Barrett.

Barrett was weak and exhausted but quite clear in her statement.

She had been just getting into bed after drinking her senna when Lady Tressilian's bell had rung. She had glanced at the clock and seen the time twenty-five minutes past ten.

She had put on her dressing gown and come down. She had heard a noise in the hall below and had looked over the balusters.

"It was Mr. Nevile just going out. He was taking his raincoat down from the hook."

"What suit was he wearing?"

"His grey pin stripe. His face was very

worried and unhappy-looking. He shoved his arms into his coat as though he didn't care how he put it on. Then he went out and banged the front door behind him. I went on in to her ladyship. She was very drowsy, poor dear, and couldn't remember why she had rung for me she couldn't always, poor lady. But I beat up her pillows and brought

her a fresh glass of water and settled her comfortably.,,

"He didn't seem upset or afraid of

"Just tired, that's all. I was tired myself. Yawning. I went up and went right off to sleep.,,

· That was Barrett's story and it seemed impossible to doubt her genuine grief and honor at the news of her mistress' death.

They went back to Lazenby's house and it was then that Battle announced that he had a

question to ask.

"Ask away," said Lazenby.

"What time do you think Lady Tressilian

die l?,,

. "I've told you. Between ten o'clock and

might."

know that's what you said. But it wasn't

my question. I asked you what you, personall,

thought?"

Off the record, eh?"

"Yes."

i'All right: My guess would be in the

neighborhood of eleven o'clock."

"That's what I wanted you to say," said
Battle.

'Glad to oblige. Why?'"

Nloxrov did like the idea of her being

killed before 10.20. Take Barrett's sleeping
draught it wouldn't have got to work by
then. That sleeping draught shows that the
murder was meant to be committed a good
deal later during the night. I'd prefer mid-night,
myself."

"Could be. Eleven is only a guess."

"But it definitely couldn't be later than
midnight?"

"It couldn't be after 2.30?"

"Good heavens, no."

"Well, that seems to let Strange out all right. I'll just have to check up on his move-ments after he left the house. If he's telling the truth, he's washed out and we can go on to our other suspects."

"The other people who inherit money?" suggested Leach.

"Maybe," said Battle. "But somehow, I don't think so. Someone with a kink, I'm looking for."

"A kink?"

"A nasty kink."

When they left the doctor's house they went down to the ferry. The ferry consisted of a rowing boat operated by two brothers, Will and George Barnes. The Barnes brothers

knew everybody in Saltcreek by sight and most of the people who came over from Easterhead Bay. George said at once that Mr. Strange from Gull's Point had gone across at 10.30 on the preceding night. No, he had not brought Mr. Strange back again. Last ferry had gone at 1.30 from the Easterhead side and Mr. Strange wasn't on it.

Battle asked him if he knew Mr. Latimer. "Latimer? Latimer? Tall, handsome young gentleman? Comes over from the hotel up to Gull's Point? Yes, I know him. Didn't see him at all last night, though. He's been over this morning. Went back last trip."

They crossed on the ferry and went up to the Easterhead Bay Hotel.

Here they found Mr. Latimer newly re-turned from the other side. He had crossed on the ferry before theirs.

Mr. Latimer was very anxious to do all he could to help.

"Yes, old Nevile came over last night.

Looked very blue over something. Told me he'd had a row with the old lady. I hear he'd fallen out with Kay too, but he didn't tell me that, of course. Anyway, he was a bit down in the mouth. Seemed quite glad of

"He wasn't able to find you at once, I understand?"

Latimer said sharply:

"Don't know why. I was sitting in the lounge. Strange said he looked in and didn't see me, but he wasn't in a state to concentrate.

Or I may have strolled out into the gardens for five .minutes or so. Always get out when I can. Beastly smell in this hotel. Noticed it last night in the bar. Drains, I think! Strange mentioned it too! We both smelt it. Nasty decayed smell. Might be a dead rat under the billiard room floor."

"You played billiards, and after your

game?"

"Oh, we talked a bit, had another drink or two. Then Neville said, 'Hullo, I've missed the ferry,' so I said I'd get out my car and drive him back, which I did. We got there about 2.30."

"And Mr. Strange was with you all the evening?"

"Oh, yes. Ask anybody. They'll tell you."

"Thank you, Mr. Latimer. We have to be so careful."

Leach said as they left the smiling, self-possessed young man:

"What's the idea of checking up so care Battle smiled. Leach got it suddenly.

"Good Lord, it's the other one you're checking up on. So that's your idea."

"It's too soon to have ideas," said Bat-fie.

"I've just got to know exactly where Mr. Ted Latimer was last night. We know that from quarter past eleven say to after midnight he was with Neville Strange. But where was he before that when Strange ar-rived and couldn't find him?"

They pursued their inquiries doggedly--with bar attendants, waiters, lift boys. Latimer had been seen in the lounge room between nine and ten. He had been in the bar at a quarter past ten. But between that time and eleven twenty, he seemed to have been singularly elusive. Then one of the maids was found who declared that Mr. Latimer had been "in one of the small writing rooms with Mrs. Beddoes.. that's the fat North country lady."

Pressed as to time she said she thought it was about seven o'clock.

"That tears it," said Battle gloomily.

"He was here all right. Just didn't want attention drawn to his fat (and no doubt rich) lady friend. That throws us back on those others the servants, Kay Strange, Audrey Strange, Mary Aldin and Thomas

Royde. One of them killed the old lady, but

which? If we could find the real weapon "

He stopped, then slapped his thigh.

"Got it, Jim, my boy! I know now what made me think of Hercule Po'trot. We'll have a spot of lunch and go back to Gull's Point and I'll show you something."

X

Mary Aldin was restless. She went in and out of the house, picked off a dead dahlia head here and there, went back into the drawing room and shifted flower vases in an unmeaning fashion.

From the library came a vague murmur of voices. Mr. Trelawny was in there with Neville. Kay and Audrey were nowhere to be seen.

Mary went out in the garden again. Down by the wall she spied Thomas Royde placidly smoking. She went and joined him.

"Oh, dear." She sat down beside him with a deep perplexed sigh.

"Anything the matter?" Thomas asked.

Mary laughed with a slight note of hysteria
in the laugh.

"Nobody but you would say a thine like

tat. A murder in the house and you juust

Sy, 'Is anything the matter?'"

Looking a little surprised, Thomas said:::

"I meant anything fresh?"

"Oh, I know what you meant. It's reallyy a
onderfifi relief to fmd anyone so glofiomslly
Jst-the-same-as-usual as you are!"

"Not much good, is it, getting all het up
OVer things?"

"No, no. You're eminently sensible. IIt's
hw you manage to do it beats me."

"Well, I suppose I'm an outsider."

"That's true, of course. You can't feel 'the

relief all the rest of us do that Neville is
Cleared."

"I'm very pleased he is, of course," said
Royde.

Mary shuddered.

"It was a very near thing. If Camilla hadn't
taken it into her head to ring the bell for
Barrett after Neville had left her "

She left the sentence unfinished. Thomas
finished it for her.

"Then old Neville would have been in for
it all right."

He spoke with a certain grim satisfaction,
then shook his head with a slight smile, as
he met Mary's reproachful gaze.

"I'm not really heartless, but now that

Nevile's all right I can't help being pleased
he had a bit of a shaking up. He's always so
damned complacent."

"He isn't really, Thomas."

"Perhaps not. It's just his manner. Any-way
he was looking scared as hell this mom
ing!"

"What
a creel streak you have!"

"Well, he's all fight now. You know,
Mary, even here Nevile has had the devil's
own luck. Some other poor beggar with all
that evidence piled up against him mightn't
have had such a break."

Mary shivered again.

"Don't say that. I like to think the inno-cent
are protected."

"Do you, my dear?" His voice was gentle.

Mary burst out suddenly.

"Thomas, I'm worried. I'm frightfully

worried."

"Yes."

"It's about Mr. Treves."

Thomas dropped his pipe on the stones.

His voice changed as he bent to pick it up.

"What about Mr. Treves?"

"That night he was here that story he
told about a little murderer! I've been
wondering, Thomas Was it just a story?
Or did he tell it with a turtse?"

"You mean," said Royde deliberately,

"was it aimed at someone who was in the
room?"

Mary whispered, "Yes."

Thomas said quietly:

"I've been wondering, too. As a matter of fact that was what I was thinking about when you came along just now."

Mary half closed her eyes.

"I've been trying to remember He told it, you know, so very deliberately He almost dragged it into the conversation. And he said he would recognize the person anywhere. He emphasized that. As though he had recognized him."

"Mm,"

said Thomas. "I've been through all that."

"But

why should he do it? What was the point?"

"I suppose," said Royde, "it was a kind of warning.

Not to try anything on."

"You

mean that Mr. Treves knew then that

Camilla was going to be murdered?"

"No.

I think that's too fantastic. It may have been just a general warning."

"What

I've been wondering is, do you think we ought to tell the police?"

To

that Thomas again gave his thoughtful consideration.

"I think not," he said at last. "I don't see that it's relevant in any way. It's not as though Treves were alive and could tell them

"No," said Mary. "He's dead? She gave a quick shiver. "It's so odd, Thomas, the way he died."

"Heart attack. He had a bad heart."

"I mean that curious business about the lift being out of order. I don't like it."

"I don't like it very much myself," said Thomas Royde.

Superintendent Battle looked round the bedroom.

The bed had been made. Otherwise the room was unchanged. It had been neat when they first looked round it. It was neat now.

"That's it," said Superintendent Battle, pointing to the old-fashioned steel fender.

"Do you see anything odd about that fender?"

"Must take some cleaning," said Jim Leach. "It's well kept. Nothing odd about it that I can see, except--yes, the left-hand knob is brighter than the right-hand one."

"That's what put Hercule Poirot into my head," said Battle. "You know his fad about things not being quite symmetrical gets him all worked up. I suppose I thought un-consciously, 'That would worry old Poirot,' and then I began talking about him. Got your fingerprint kit, Jones? We'll have a look at those two knobs."

Jones reported presently.

"There are prints on the right-hand knob,
sir, none on the left."

"It's the left one we want, then. Those
other prints are the housemaid's when she
last cleaned it. That left-hand one has been
cleaned since."

"There was a bit of screwed-up emery
paper in this wastepaper basket," volunteered
Jones. "I didn't think it meant anything."

"Because you didn't know what you were
looking for, then. Gently now, I'll bet any-thing
you like that knob unscrews yes, I
thought so."

Presently Jones held the knob up.

"It's a good weight," he said, weighing it
in his hands.

Leach, bending over it, said:

"There's something dark on the screw."

"Blood, as likely as not," said Battle.

"Cleaned the knob itself and witted it and

that little stain on the screw wasn't noticed.

I'll bet anything you like that's the weapon
that caved the old lady's skull in. But there's
more to find. It's up to you, Jones, to search
the house again. This time you'll know exactly
what you're looking for."

He gave a few swift detailed instructions.

Going to the window, he put his head out.

"There's something yellow tucked into the
ivy. That may be another piece of the puzzle.

I rather think it is."

XII

Crossing the hall, Superintendent Battle was
waylaid by Mary Aldin.

"Can I speak to you a minute, Superintendent?"

"Certainly, Miss Aldin. Shall we come in
here?"

He threw open the dining-room door.

Lunch had been cleared away by Hurstall.

"I want to ask you something, Superintendent.

Surely you don't, you can't still think

that this that awful crime was done by one

of us? It must have been someone from outside!

Some maniac!"

"You may not be far wrong there. Miss

criminal very well if I'm not mistaken.

not an outsider."

is

Maniac is a word that describes this

But

Her eyes opened very wide.

"Do you mean that someone in this house

is mad?"

"You're thinking," said the Superintendent,

"of someone foaming at the mouth and

rolling their eyes. Mania isn't like that. Some

of the most dangerous criminal lunatics have

looked as sane as you or I. It's a question,

usually, of having an obsession. One idea,

preying on the mind, gradually distorting it.

Pathetic, reasonable people who come up to you and explain how they're being persecuted and how everyone is spying on them and you sometimes feel it must all be true."

"I'm sure nobody here has any ideas of being persecuted."

"I only gave that as an instance. There are other forms of insanity. But I believe whoever committed this crime was under the domination of one fixed idea an idea on which they had brooded until literally nothing else mattered or had any importance."

Mary shivered. She said:

"There's something, I think, you ought to

Concisely and clearly she told him of Mr. Treves' visit to dinner and of the story he had told. Superintendent Battle was deeply interested. "He said he could recognize this person? man or woman, by the way?"

"I took it that it was a boy the story was about but it's true Mr. Treves didn't actually

say so in fact I remember now he
distinctly stated he would not give any par-ticulars
as to sex or age."

"Did he? Rather significant, perhaps. And
he said there was a definite physical peculiar-ity
by which he could be sure of knowing

this child anywhere."

"Yes."

"A scar, perhaps has anybody here got a

SCar?"

He noticed the faint' hesitation before Mary

Aldin replied:

"Not that I have noticed."

"Come now, Miss Aldin." He smiled.

"You have noticed something. If so, don't
you think that I shall be able to notice it,
too?"

She shook her head.

"I haven't noticed anything of the kind."

But he saw that she was startled and up-set.

His words had obviously succeeded a

very unpleasant train of thought to her/. He wished he knew just what it was, but his experience made him aware that to press her at this minute would not yield any result.

He brought the conversation back to old Mr. Treves.

Mary told him of the tragic sequel to the evening.

Battle questioned her at some length. Then he said quietly:

"That's a new one on me. Never come across that before."

"What do you mean?"

"I've never come across a murder committed by the simple expedient of hanging a placard on a lift."

She looked horrified.

"You don't really think "

"That it was murder? Of course it was!

Quick, resourceful murder. It might not have come off, of course--but it did come off."

"Just because Mr. Treves knew "

"Yes. Because he would have been able to direct our attention to one particular person in this house. As it is, we've started in the dark. But we've got a glimmer of light now, and every minute the case is getting clearer. I'll tell you this, Miss Aldin--s

hand down to the smallest detail. And I want to impress one thing on your mind ... don't let anybody know that you've told me what you have. That's important. Don't tell anyone, mind."

Mary nodded. She was still looking dazed. Superintendent Battle went out of the room and proceeded to do what he had been about to do when Mary Aldin intercepted him. He was a methodical man. He wanted certain information, and a new and promising

hare did not distract him from the orderly performance of his duties, however tempting this new hare might be.

He tapped on the library door, and Neville Strange's voice called, "Come in."

Battle was introduced to Mr. Trelawny, a tall, distinguished-looking man with a keen dark eye.

"Sorry if I am butting in," said Superintendent Battle apologetically. "But there's something I haven't got clear. You, Mr. Strange, inherit half the late Sir Matthew's estate, but who inherits the other half?"

Neville looked surprised.

"I told you. My wife."

"Yes. But" Battle coughed in a deprecating manner, "which wife, Mr. Strange?"

The money goes to Audrey who was my wife
at the time the will was made. That's right,
Mr. Trelawny."

The lawyer assented.

"The bequest is quite clearly worded.

The estate is to be divided between Sir
Matthew's ward Neville Henry Strange, and
his wife Audrey Elizabeth Strange and
Stanley. The subsequent divorce makes no
difference whatever."

"That's clear, then," said Battle. "I take
it Mrs. Audrey Strange is fully aware of
these facts?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Trelawny.

"At the present Mrs. Strange?"

"K-?" Neville looked slightly surprised.

"Oh, I suppose so. At least--I've never talked
much about it with her."

"I think you'll find," said Battle, "that
she's under a misapprehension. She thinks
that the money on Lady Resilian's death
came to you and your present wife. At least,
that's what she gave me to understand this
morning. That's why I came along to find
out whether the position really lay."

"It's extraordinary," said Neville. "Still, I suppose it might have happened quite easily. She said once or twice now that I thought about it - 'We come into that money

when Cassia dies,' but I suppose I assumed that she was just associating herself with me in my share of it."

"It's extraordinary," said Battle, "the amount of misunderstandings there are even between two people who discuss a thing quite often both of them assuming different things and neither of them discovering the discrepancy."

"I suppose so," said Neville, not sounding very interested. "It doesn't matter much in this case, anyway. It's not as though we're short of money at all. I'm very glad for Audrey. She has been very hard up and this will make a big difference to her."

Battle said bluntly:

"But, surely, sir, at the time of the di-voice,
she was entitled to an allowance from
you?"

Nevile fluslxed. He said in a constrained
voice:

"There' is such a thing as as pride, Su-perintendent.
Audrey has always persistently
refused to touch a penny of the allowance I
wished to make her."

"A very generous allowance," put in Mr.
Trelawny. "But Mrs. Audrey Strange has
always remrnecl it and refused to accept it."

"Very interesting," said Battle and went

out before anyone could ask him to elaborate
that comment.

He went and found his nephew.

"On its face value," he said, "there's a nice monetary motive for nearly everybody in this case. Nevile Strange and Audrey Strange get a cool fifty thousand each. Kay Strange thinks she's entitled to fifty thousand. Mary Aldin gets an income that frees her from having to earn her living. Thomas Royde, I'm bound to say, doesn't gain. But we can include Hurstall and even Barrett if we admit that she'd take the risk of finishing herself off to avoid suspicion. Yes, as I say, there are no lack of money motives. And yet, if I'm right, money doesn't enter into this at all. If there's such a thing as a murder for pure hate, this is it. And if no one comes along and throws a spanner into the works, I'm going to get the person who did it!"

Afterwards he wondered what had put that particular phrase into his head just then

Andrew MacWhirter had been around at Easterhead Bay on the preceding Saturday.

XIII

Andrew MacWhirter sat on the terrace of the Easterhead Bay Hotel and stared across the river to the frowning height of Stark Head opposite.

He was engaged at the moment in a care-ful stocktaking of his thoughts and emotions.

Here, seven months ago, he had attempted to' take his own life. Chance, nothing but chance, had intervened. Was he, he won-dered, grateful to that chance?

He decided, soberly, that he was not. True, he felt no present disposition to take his life.

That phase was over for good. He was will-ing to address himself now to the task of living, not with enthusiasm nor even with pleasure, but in a methodical day-after-day spirit. You could not, that he admitted, take your own life in cold blood. There had to be some extra fillip of despair, of grief, of des-pera-fion

or of passion. You could not com-mit
suicide merely because you felt that life
was a dreary round of tminteresting happen-ings.

He was now, he supposed, to be consid-ered
quite a fortunate man. Fate, after hav-ing
frowned, had smiled instead. But he was
in no mood to smile huek

humor was grimly tickled when he thought
of the interview to which he had been sum-moned
by that rich and eccentric peer Lord
Comelly.

"You're MacWhirter? You were with
Herbert Clay? Clay got his driving license
endorsed, all because you wouldn't say he
was going at twenty miles an hour. Livid he
was! Told us about it one night at the Savoy.
'Damned pig-headed Scot!' he said. I thought
to myself that's the kind of chap I want!
Man who can't be bribed to tell lies. You
won't have to tell lies for me. I don't do my
business that way. I go about the world look-ing

for honest men and there are damned

few of them."

The little peer had cackled with laughter,
his shrewd monkey-like face wrinkled up
with mirth. MacWhirter had stood stolidly,
not amused.

But he had got the job. A good job. His
future now was assured. In a week's time he
was to leave England for South America.

He hardly knew what it was that had made
him choose to spend his few last days of
leisure where he now was. Yet something
had drawn him there. Perhaps the wish to
test himself to see if there remained in his
heart any of the old despair.

Mona? How little he cared now. She was
married to the other man. He had passed her
in the street one day without feeling any
emotion. He could remember his grief and
bitterness when she left him, but they were
past now and gone.

He was recalled from these thoughts by an impact of wet dog and the frenzied appeal of a newly made friend, Miss Diana Brinton, aged thirteen.

"Oh, come away, Don. Come away. Isn't it awful? He's rolled on some fish or some-thing down on the beach. You can smell him yards away. The fish was awfully dead, you know."

MacWhirter's nose confirmed this assumption.

"In a sort of crevice on the rocks," said Miss Brinton. "I took him into the sea and tried to wash it off, but it doesn't seem to have done much good."

MacWhirter agreed. Don, a wre-haired terrier of amiable and loving disposition, was

looking hurt by the tendency of his friends
to keep him firmly at arm's length.

"Sea water's no good," said MacWhirter.

"Hot water and soap's the only thing."

"I know. But that's not so jolly easy in a

In the end MacWhirter and Diana surreptitiously
entered by the side door with

Don on a lead, and smuggling him up to

MacWhirter's bathroom, a thorough cleansing

took place and both MacWhirter and

Diana got very wet. Don was very sad when

it was all over. That disgusting smell of soap

again just when he had found a really nice

perfume such as any other dog would envy.

Oh, well, it was always the same with humans

they had no decent sense of smell.

The little incident had left MacWhirter

in a more cheerful mood. He took the bus

into Saltington, where he had left a suit to be

cleaned. The girl in charge of the 24Hour

Cleaners looked at him vacantly.

"MacWhirter, did you say? I'm afraid it

isn't ready yet."

"It should be." He had been promised that suit the day before and even that would have been 48 and not 24 hours. A woman might have said all this. MacWhirter merely scowled.

"There's not been time yet," said the girl, smiling indifferently.

"Nonsense."

The girl stopped smiling. She snapped.

"Then I'll take it away as it is," said

MacWhirter.

"Nothing's been done to it," the girl warned him.

"I'll take it away."

"I daresay we might get it done by tomorrow as a special favor."

"I'm not in the habit of asking for special favors. Just give me the suit, please."

Giving him a bad-tempered look, the girl went into a back room. She returned with a clumsily done up parcel which she pushed across the counter.

MacWhirter took it and went out.

He felt, quite ridiculously, as though he had won a victory. Actually it merely meant that he would have to have the suit cleaned elsewhere!

He threw the parcel on his bed when he returned to the hotel and looked at it with annoyance. Perhaps he could get it sponged and pressed in the hotel. It was not really too bad--perhaps it didn't actually need cleaning?

He undid the parcel and gave vent to an expression of annoyance. Really, the 24Hour Cleaners were too inefficient for words. This wasn't his. It wasn't even the name on the

It had been a dark blue suit he had left with them. Impertinent, inefficient muddlers.

He glanced irritably at the label. It had the name MacWhirter all right. Another MacWhirter? Or some stupid interchange of labels.

Staring down vexedly at the crumpled heap, he suddenly sniffed.

Surely he knew that smell particularly unpleasant smell . . . connected somehow

with a dog. Yes, that was it. Diana and her
dog. Absolutely and literally stinking fish!
He bent down and examined the suit.
There it was, a discolored patch on the shoulder
of the coat. On the shoulder
Now that, thought MacWhirter, is really
very curious
Anyway, next day, he would have a few
grim words with the girl at the 24Hour
Cleaners. Gross mismanagement!

XIV

After dinner, he strolled out of the hotel and
down the road to the ferry. It was a clear
night, but cold, with a sharp foretaste of
winter. Summer was over.

Saltcreek side. It was the second time that
he was revisiting Stark Head. The place had
a fascination for him. He walked slowly up
the hill, passing the Balmoral Court Hotel
and then a big house set on the point of a
cliff. Gull's Point he read the name on the

painted door. Of course, that was where the old lady had been murdered. There had been a lot of talk in the hotel about it, his cham-bermaid had insisted on telling him all about it and the newspapers had given it a promi-nence which had annoyed MacWhirter, who preferred to read of world-wide affairs and who was not interested in crime.

He went on, down hill again to skirt a small beach and some old-fashioned fishing cottages that had been modernized. Then up again till the road ended and petered out into the track that led up on Stark Head.

It was grim and forbidding on Stark Head. MacWhirter stood on the cliff edge looking down to the sea. So he had stood on that other night. He tried to recapture some of the feeling he had then the desperation, an-ger, weariness the longing to be out of it all. But there was nothing to recapture. All that had gone. There was instead a cold anger. Caught on that tree, rescued by coast

hospital, a series of indignities and affronts.

Why couldn't he have been let alone? He would rather, a thousand times rather, be out of it all. He still felt that. The only thing he had lost was the necessary impetus.

How it had hurt him then to think of Mona! He could think of her quite calmly now. She had always been rather a fool. Easily taken by anyone who flattered her or played up to her idea of herself. Very pretty. Yes, very pretty but no mind. Not the kind of woman he had once dreamed about.

But that was beauty, of course Some vague fancied picture of a woman flying through the night with white draperies flying out behind her... Something like the figurehead of a ship only not so bold.., not nearly so solid...

And then, with dramatic suddenness, the incredible happened! Out of the night came a flying figure. One minute she was not there, the next minute she was a white

figure running running to the cliff's edge.

A figure, beautiful and desperate, driven
to destruction by pursuing Furies! Run-ning
with a terrible desperation He
knew that desperation. He knew what it

He came with a rash out of the shadows

and caught her just as she was about to go
over the edge!

He said fiercely:

"No, you don't... ."

It was just like holding a bird. She strug-gled
struggled silently, and then, again like

a bird, was suddenly dead still.

He said urgently:

"Don't throw yourself over! Nothing's

worth it. Nothing. Even if you are desperately
unhappy"

She made a sound. It was, perhaps, a

far-off ghost of a laugh.

He said sharply:

"You're not unhappy? What is it then?"

She answered him at once with the low

softly-breathed word:

"Afraid."

"Afraid?" He was so astonished he let her
go, standing back a pace to see her better.

He realized then the truth of her words. It
was fear that had lent that urgency to her
footsteps. It was fear that made her small
white intelligent face blank and stupid. Fear

that dilated those wide-apart eyes.

He said incredulously:

"What are you afraid of?"

She replied so low that he hardly heard it.

voice, trying to remember all that he
heard. Rumor had been incorporated
fact.

"They detained your husband

Yes, she had said just that. He stared and

stared. He looked from her to the cliff edge.

"So that's why?"

"Yes. A quick death instead of "She
closed her eyes and shivered. She went on
shivering.

MacWhirter was piecing things together

logically in his mind.

He said at last:

"Lady Tressilian? The old lady who was murdered." Then, accusingly: "You'll be

Mrs. Strange the first Mrs. Strange."

Still shivering, she nodded her head.

MacWhirter went on in his slow careful

had

with

that's

right, isn't it? A lot of evidence against him

and then they found that that evidence had

been faked by someone... "

He stopped and looked at her. She wasn't

shivering any longer. She was just standing

looking at him like a docile child. He found

her attitude unendurably affecting.

His voice went on:

"I see Yes, I see how it was He
left you for another woman, didn't he? And

off. He said, "I understand. My wife left me
for another man "

She flung out her arms. She began stam-mering
wildly, hopelessly:

"It's n-n-not it's n-n-not l-like that.

N-not at all "He cut her short. His voice
was stem and commanding.

"Go home! You needn't be afraid any
longer. D'you hear? I'll see that you're not
hanged!"

XV

Mary Aldin was lying on the drawing-room
sofa. Her head ached and her whole body

felt worn out.

The inquest had taken place the day before, and after formal evidence of identification, had been adjourned for a week.

Lady Tressilian's funeral was to take place on the morrow. Audrey and Kay had gone into Saltington in the car to get some black clothes. Ted Latimer had gone with them.

Nevile and Thomas Royde had gone for a walk, so except for the servants, Mary was alone in the house.

Superintendent Battle and Inspector Leach had been absent today, and that, too, was

a relief. It seemed to Mary that with their absence a shadow had lifted. They had been

polite, quite pleasant, in fact, but the ceaseless questions, that quiet deliberate probing and sifting of every fact was the sort of thing that wore hardly on the nerves. By

now that wooden-faced Superintendent must have learned of every incident, every word, every gesture, even, of the past ten days. Now, with their going, there was peace. Mary let herself relax. She would forget everything everything. Just lie back and rest.

"Excuse me, Madam "

It was Hurstall in the doorway, looking apologetic.

"Yes, Hurstall?"

"A gentleman wishes to see you. I have put him in the study."

Mary looked at him in astoishment and some annoyance.

"Who is it?"

"He gave his name as Mr. MacWhirter, iss."

"I've never heard of him."

"No, iss."

"He must be a reporter. You shouldn't have let him in, Hurstall."

Hurstall coughed.

"I don't think he is a reporter, Miss. I

think he is a friend of Miss Audrey's."

"Oh, that's different."

Smoothing her hair, Mary went wearily across the hall and into the small study. She was, somehow, a little surprised as the tall man standing by the window turned. He did not look in the least like a friend of Audrey's.

However she said pleasantly:

"I'm sorry Mrs. Strange is out. You wanted to see her?"

He looked at her in a thoughtful considering way.

"You'll be Miss Aldin?" he said.

"Yes."

"I daresay you can help me just as well. I

want to find some rope."

"Rope?" said Mary in lively amazement.

"Yes, rope. Where would you be likely to keep a piece of rope?"

Afterwards Mary considered that she had been half-hypnotized. If this strange man had volunteered any explanation she might have resisted. But Andrew MacWhirter, unable to think of a plausible

explanation, decided, very wisely, to do without one. He just stated quite simply what he wanted. She found herself, semi-dazed, leading MacWhirter in search of rope.

"What kind of rope?" she had asked.

And he had replied:

"Any rope will do."

She said doubtfully:

"Perhaps in the potting shed "

"Shall we go there?"

She led the way. There was twine and an odd bit of cord, but MacWhirter shook his head.

He wanted rope a good-sized coil of rope.

"There's the box room," said Mary hesitatingly.

"Ay, that might be the place."

They went indoors and upstairs. Mary threw open the box-room door. MacWhirter stood in the doorway looking in. He gave a curious sigh of contentment.

"There it is," he said.

There was a big coil of rope lying on a chest just inside the door in company with old fishing tackle and some moth-eaten cushions.

He laid a hand on her arm and impelled Mary gently forward until they stood

looking down on the rope. He touched it

and said:

"I'd like you to charge your memory with

this, Miss Aldin. You'll notice that everything

round about is covered with dust. There's no dust on this rope. Just feel it."

She said:

"It feels slightly damp," in a surprised

tone.

"Just so."

He turned to go out again.

"But the rope? I thought you wanted it?"

said Mary in surprise.

MacWhirter smiled.

"I just wanted to know it was there. That's

all. Perhaps you wouldn't mind locking this

door, Miss Aldin and taking the key out?

Yes. I'd be obliged if you'd hand the key to

Superintendent Battle or Inspector Leach. It

would be best in their keeping."

As they went downstairs, Mary made an

effort to rally herself.

She protested as they reached the main

hall:

"But really, I don't understand "

"There's no need for you to understand."

He took her hand and shook it heartily. "I'm

very much obliged to you for your cooperation."

Whereupon he went straight out of the

front door.

Nevile and Thomas came in presently

and the car arrived back shortly afterwards

and Mary Aldin found herself envying

la., and Ta.cl fnr ha.ina hle tn lnnk n l l ite

cheerful. They were laughing and joking to-gether.

After all, why not? she thought.

Camilla Tressilian had been nothing to Kay.

All this tragic business was very hard on a

bright young creature.

They had just finished lunch when the

police came. There was something scared in

Hurstall's voice as he announced that Super-intendent

Battle and Inspector Leach were in

the drawing room.

Superintendent Battle's face was quite genial as he greeted them.

"Hope I haven't disturbed you all," he said apologetically. "But there are one or two things I'd like to know about. This glove, for instance, who does it belong to?"

He held it out, a small yellow chamois leather glove.

He addressed Audrey.

"Is it yours, Mrs. Strange?"

She shook her head.

"No no, it isn't mine."

"Miss Aldin?"

"I don't think so. I have none of that color."

"May I see?" Kay held out her hand.

"Perhaps you'd just slip it on."

"Miss Aldin?"

Mary tried in her turn.

"It's too small for you also," said Battle.

He turned back to Audrey. "I think you'll find it fits you all right. Your hand is smaller than either of the other ladies."

Audrey took it from him and slipped it on over her right hand.

Nevile Strange said sharply:

"She's already told you, Battle, that it isn't her glove."

"Ah, well," said Battle, "perhaps she made a mistake. Or forgot."

Audrey said: "It may be mine gloves are so alike, aren't they?"

Battle said:

"At any rate it was found outside your window, Mrs. Strange, pushed down into the ivy with its fellow."

There was a pause. Audrey opened her mouth to speak, then closed it up again. Her eyes fell before the Superintendent's steady gaze.

Nevile sprang forward.

"Look here, Superintendent "

"Perhaps we might have a word with you, Mr. Strange, privately?" Battle said gravely.

"Certainly, Superintendent. Come into the

He led the way and the two police officers followed him.

As soon as the door had closed Nevile said sharply:

"What's this ridiculous story about gloves
outside my wife's window?"

Baffle said quietly:

"Mr. Strange, we've found some very curious
things in this house."

Nevile frowned.

"Curious? What do you mean by curious?"

"I'll show you."

In obedience to a nod, Leach left the room
and came back holding a very strange implement.

Battle said:

"This consists, as you see, sir, of a steel
ball taken from a Victorian fender a heavy
steel bail. Then the head has been sawed off
a tennis racket and the bail has been screwed
into the handle of the racket." He paused.

"I think there can be no doubt that this is
what was used to Laxly Tressilian."

"Horrible!" said Nevile with a shudder.

"But where did you find this .this fight-mare?"

"The ball had been cleaned and put back

neglected to clean the screw. We found a
trace of blood on that. In the same way the
handle and the head of the racket were joined

together again by means of adhesive surgical
plaster. It was then thrown carelessly back
into the cupboard under the stairs where it
would probably have remained quite unnoticed
amongst so many others if we hadn't
happened to be looking for something of that
kind.'

"Smart of you, Superintendent."

"Just a matter of routine."

"No fingerprints, I suppose?"

"That racket which belongs by its weight,
I should say, to Mrs. Kay Strange, has been
handled by her and also by you and both
your prints are on it. But it also shows unmistakable
signs that someone wearing gloves handled
it after you two did. There was just one
other fingerprint left this time in inadvertence,
I think. That was on the surgical strapping
that had been applied to bind the racket
together again. I'm not going for the moment
to say whose print that was. I've got
some other points to mention first."

Battle paused, then he said:

"I want you to prepare yourself for a shock,
Mr. Strange. And first I want to ask you

your own idea to have this meeting here and
that it was not actually suggested to you by
Mrs. Audrey Strange?"

"Audrey did nothing of the sort. Au-drey-"

The door opened and Thomas Royde came
in.

"Sorry to butt in," he said, "but I thought
I'd like to be in on this."

Nevile turned a harassed face towards him.

"Do you mind, old fellow? This is all
rather private."

"I'm afraid I don't care about that. You
see, I heard a name outside." He paused.

"Audrey's name."

"And what the hell has Audrey's name got to do with you?" demanded Nevile, his temper rising.

"Well, what has it to do with you if it comes to that? I haven't said anything definite to Audrey, but I came here meaning to ask her to marry me, and I think she knows it. What's more, I mean to marry her."

Superintendent Battle coughed. Nevile turned to him with a start.

"Sorry, Superintendent. This interruption

"

Battle said:

"It doesn't matter to me, Mr. Strange.

I've got one more question to ask you. That

dark blue coat you wore at dinner the night of the murder, it's got fair hairs inside the collar and on the shoulders. Do you know how they got there?"

"I suppose they're my hairs."

"Oh, no, they're not yours, sir. They're a lady's hairs, and there's a red hair on the sleeves."

"I suppose that's my wife's Kay's. The others, you are suggesting, are Audrey's? Very likely they are. I caught my cuff button in her hair one night outside on the terrace, I remember."

"In that case," murmured Inspector Leach, "the fair hair would be on the cuff."

"What the devil are you suggesting?" cried Nevile.

"There's a trace of powder, too, inside the coat collar," said Battle. "Primavera Naturelle No. 1 a very pleasant-scented

powder and expensive but it's no good telling me that you use it, Mr. Strange, because I shan't believe you. And Mrs. Kay Strange uses Orchid Sun Kiss. Mrs. Audrey Strange does use Primavera Naturelle 1."

"What are you suggesting?" repeated Neville.

Battle leaned forward.

"I'm suggesting that on some occasion Mrs. Audrey Strange wore that coat. It's the only reasonable way the hair and the powder could get where they did. Then you've seen that glove I produced just now? It's her glove all right. That was the right hand, here's the left--" He drew it out of his pocket and put it down on the table. It was crumpled and stained with rusty brown patches.

Neville said with a note of fear in his voice:

"What's that on it?"

"Blood, /dr. Strange," said Battle firmly.

"And you'll note this, it's the left hand. Now Mrs. Audrey Strange is left-handed. I noted that first thing when I saw her sitting with her coffee cup in her right hand and her cigarette in her left at the breakfast table. And the pen tray on her writing-table had been shifted to the left-hand side. It all fits in. The knob from her grate, the gloves outside her window, the hair and powder on the coat. Lady Tressilian was struck on the right temple but the position of the bed made it impossible for anyone to have stood on the other side of it. It follows that to strike Lady Tressilian a blow with the right hand would be a very awkward thing to do but fits the natural way to strike for a

Neville laughed scornfully.

"Are you suggesting that Audrey Audrey would make all these elaborate preparations and strike down an old lady whom she had known for years in order to get her hands on that old lady's money?"

Battle shook his head.

"I'm suggesting nothing of the sort. I'm sorry, Mr. Strange, you've got to understand just how things are. This crime, first, last and all the time was directed against you. Ever since you left her, Audrey Strange has been brooding over the possibilities of re-venge. In the end she has become mentally unbalanced. Perhaps she was never mentally very strong. She thought, perhaps, of killing you but that wasn't enough. She thought at last of getting you hanged for murder. She chose an evening when she knew you had quarreled with Lady Tressilian. She took the coat from your bedroom and wore it when she struck the old lady down so that it should be bloodstained. She put your niblick on the floor knowing we would find your finger-prints on it and smeared blood and hair on the head of the club. It was she who instilled into your mind the idea of coming here when she was here. And the thing that saved

vn'l'n.the nne thine .he cnddn't nllnt

"I'm suggesting that on some occasion Mrs. Audrey Strange wore that coat. It's the only reasonable way the hair and the powder could get where they did. Then you've seen that glove I produced just now? It's her glove all right. That was the fight hand, here's the left "He drew it out of his pocket and put it down on the table. It was crumpled and stained with rusty brown patches.

Neville said with a note of fear in his voice:

"What's that on it?"

"Blood, Mr. Strange," said Battle firmly.

"And you'll note this, it's the lehand. Now Mrs. Audrey Strange is left-handed. I noted that first thing when I saw her sitting with her coffee cup in her fight hand and her cigarette in her left at the breakfast table. And the pen tray on her writing-table had been shifted to the left-hand side. It all fits in. The knob from her grate, the gloves outside her window, the hair and powder on

the coat. Lady Tressilian was struck on the
fight temple but the position of the bed
made it impossible for anyone to have stood
on the other side of it. It follows that to
strike Lady Tressilian a blow with the fight
hand would be a very awkward thing to
do--but it's the natural way to strike for a
left-handed person. "

Nevile laughed scornfully.

"Are you suggesting that Audrey Audrey

would make all these elaborate preparations
I and strike down an old lady whom she had

known for years in order to get her hands on
that old lady's money?"

Baffle shook his head.

"I'm suggesting nothing of the sort. I'm
sorry, Mr. Strange, you've got to understand
just how things are. This crime, first, last
and all the time was directed against you.
Ever since you left her, Audrey Strange has
been brooding over the possibilities of revenge.

In the end she has become mentally unbalanced. Perhaps she was never mentally very strong. She thought, perhaps, of killing you but that wasn't enough. She thought at last of getting you hanged for murder. She chose an evening when she knew you had quarreled with Lady Tressilian. She took the coat from your bedroom and wore it when she struck the old lady down so that it should be bloodstained. She put your niblick on the floor knowing we would find your fingerprints on it and smeared blood and hair on the head of the club. It was she who instilled into your mind the idea of coming here when she was here. And the thing that saved you was the fact that Lady Tressilian rang her

bell for Barrett and that Barrett saw you leave the house."

Neville had buried his face in his hands.

He said now:

"It's not true. It's not true! Audrey's never borne a grudge against me. You've got the whole thing wrong. She's the straightest, truest

creature without one thought of evil in
her heart."

Battle sighed.

"It's not my business to argue with you,
Mr. Strange. I only wanted to prepare you.
I shall caution Mrs. Strange and ask her to
accomPanY me. I've got the warrant. You'd
better see about getting a solicitor for her."

"It's preposterous. Absolutely preposterous.

"Love turns to hate more easily than you
think, Mr. Strange."

"I tell you it's all wrong--preposterous."

Thomas Royde broke in. His voice was
quiet and pleasant.

"Do stop repeating that it's preposterous,
Nevile. Pull yourself together. Don't you see
that the only thing that can help Audrey
now is for you to give up all your ideas of
chivalry and come out with the truth?"

explained Thomas briefly. He went on:

"Don't you see, Superintendent, that knocks
your motive out! Audrey has no cause to

"I mean the truth about Audrey and
Adrian." Royde turned to the police officers,
"You see, Superintendent, you've got the
facts wrong. Nevile didn't leave Audrey. She
left him. She ran away with my brother
Adrian. Then Adrian was killed in a car
accident. Nevile behaved with the utmost
chivalry to Audrey. He arranged that she
should divorce him and that he would take
the blame."

"Didn't want her name dragged through,
the mud," muttered Nevile sulkily. "Didn't
know anyone knew."

"Adrian wrote out to me, just before,"

hate Nevile. On the contrary, she has every
reason to be grateful to him. He's tried to
get her to accept an allowance which she
wouldn't do. Naturally when he wanted her
to come and meet Kay she didn't feel she
could refuse."

"You see," Nevile put in eagerly. "That cuts out her motive. Thomas is right."

Battle's wooden face was immovable.

"Motive's only one thing," he said. "I may have been wrong about that. But facts

are another. All the facts show that she's

Nevile said meaningly:

"All the facts showed that I was guilty two days ago!"

Battle seemed a little taken aback.

"That's true enough. But look here, Mr.

Strange, at what you're asking me to believe.

You're asking me to believe that there's someone who hates both of you someone who, if the plot against you failed, had laid a second trail to lead to Audrey Strange.

Now can you think of anyone, Mr. Strange, who hates both you and your former wife?"

Nevile's head had dropped into his hands again.

"When you say it like that, you make it all sound fantastic!"

"Because it/s fantastic. I've got to go by the facts. If Mrs. Strange has any explanation to offer "

"Did I have any explanation?" asked Nevile.

"It's no good, Mr. Strange. I've got to do my duty."

Battle got up abruptly. He and Leach left the room first. Nevile and Royde came close behind them.

They went on across the hall into the drawing room. There they stopped.

Audrey Strange got up. She walked forward to meet them. She looked straight at Battle, her lips parted in what was very nearly a smile.

She said very softly:

"You want me, don't you?"

Battle became very official.

"Mrs. Strange, I have a warrant here for your arrest on the charge of murdering Camilla Tressilian on Monday last, September twelfth. I must caution you that anything

you say will be written down and may be
used in evidence at your trial."

Audrey gave a sigh. Her small clear-cut
face was peaceful and pure as a cameo.

"It's almost a relief. I'm glad it's over!"

Nevile sprang forward.

"Audrey don't say

anything

don't

speak at all."

She smiled at him.

"But why not, Nevile? It's all true and

I'm so tired."

Leach drew a deep breath. Well, that was
that. Mad as a hatter, of course, but it would
save a lot of worry! He wondered what had
happened to his uncle. The old boy was
looking as though he had seen a ghost. Star
ing at the demented creature as though he
couldn't believe his eyes. Oh, well, it had
been an interesting case, Leach ought com-fortably.

And then, an almost grotesque anticlimax,

Hurstall opened the drawing room door and

announced:

"Mr. MacXXhirter."

MacXXhirter strode in purposefully. He went straight up to Battle.

"Are you the police officer in charge of the Tressilian case?" he asked.

"Then I have an important statement to make. I am sorry not to have come forward before, but the importance of something I happened to see on the night of Yonday last has only just dawned on me." He gave a quick glance round the room. "I can speak to you somewhere?"

Battle turned to Leach.

"Will you stay here with Mrs. Strange?"

Leach said officially:

"Yes, six."

Then he leaned forward and whispered

something into the other's ear.

Battle turned to MacXXbirter.

"Come this way."

I-Ie led the wv intrn the lihrrar

"Now, then, what's all this? My colleague tells me that he's seen you before last winter?"

"Quite right," said MacWhirter. "Attempted suicide. That's part of my story."

"Go on, Mr. MacWhirter."

"Last January I attempted to kill myself by throwing myself off Stark Head. This year, the fancy took me to revisit the spot. I walked up there on Monday night. I stood there for some time. I looked down at the sea and across to Easterhead Bay and I then looked to my left. That is to say I looked across towards this house. I could see it quite plainly in the moonlight."

"Yes."

"Until today I had not realized that that
was the night when a murder was committed." He leant forward.

"I'll tell you what I saw."

XVI

It was really only about five minutes before
Baffle returned to the drawing room, but to
those there it seemed much longer.

Kay had suddenly lost control of herself.

.qhe had cried out tn Anclev--

"I knew k was you. I always knew it was

you. I knew you were up to something

Mary Aldin said quickly:

"Please, Kay."

Nevile said sharply:

"Shut up, Kay, for God's sake."

Ted Latimer came over to Kay,

begun to cry.

who had

"Get a grip on yourself," he said kindly.

He said to Nevile angrily:

"You don't seem to realize that Kay has been under a lot of strain! Why don't you look after her a bit, Strange?"

"I'm all right," said Kay.

"For two pins," said Ted, "I'd take you away from the lot of them!"

Inspector Leach cleared his throat. A lot of injudicious things were said at times like these, as he well knew. The unfortunate part was that they were usually remembered most inconveniently afterwards.

Battle came back into the room. His face was expressionless.

He said: "Will you put one or two things together, Mrs. Strange? I'm afraid Inspector Leach must come upstairs with you."

Mary Aldin said:

"TII rrme tm"

When the two women had left the room

with the Inspector, Neville said anxiously:

"Well, what did that chap want?"

Battle said slowly:

"Mr. MacWhirter tells a very odd story."

"Does it help Audrey? Are you still deter-mined
to arrest her?"

"I've told you, Mr. Strange. I've got to do
my duty."

Neville turned away, the eagerness dying
out of his face.

He said:

"I'd better tdephone Trelawny, I sup-po
se."

"There's no immediate hurry for that, Mr.
Strange. There's a certain experiment I want
to make first as a result of Mr. MacWhirter's
statement. I'll just see that Mrs. Strange gets
off first."

Audrey was coming down the stairs, Inspector
Leach beside her. Her face still had
that remote, detached composure.

Nevile came towards her, his hands out-stretched.

"Audrey "

Her colorless glance swept over him. She
said:

"It's all right, Nevile. I don't mind. I
don't mind anything"

Thomas Royde stood by the front door,

almost as though he would bar the way out.

A very faint smile came to her lips.

"True Thomas," she murmured.

He mumbled:

"If there's anything I can do "

"No one can do anything," said Audrey.

She went out with her head high. A police car was waiting outside with Sergeant Jones in it. Audrey and Leach got in.

Ted Latimer murmured appreciatively:

"Lovely exit!"

Nevile turned on him furiously. Superintendent Battle dexterously interposed his bulk and raised a soothing voice:

"As I said, I've got an experiment to make. Mr. MacWhirter is waiting down at the ferry. We're to join him there in ten minutes' time. We shall be going out in a motor launch, so the ladies had better wrap up warmly. In ten minutes, please."

He might have been a stage manager, ordering a company on to the stage. He took no notice at all of their puzzled faces.

Zero Hour

I

It was chilly on the water and Kay hugged the little fur jacket she was wearing closer round her.

The launch chugged down the river below Gull's Point, and then swung round into the little bay that divided Gull's Point from the frowning mass of Stark Head.

Once or twice, a question began to be asked, but each time Superintendent Battle held up a large hand rather like a cardboard ham, intimating that the time had not come yet. So the silence was unbroken save for the rushing of the water past them. Kay and Ted stood together looking down into the water. Nevile was slumped down, his legs stuck out. Mary Aldin and Thomas Royde sat up in the bow. And one and all glanced from time to time curiously at the tall aloof fiorf MacWhirter hv the stem. He looked

at none of them, but stood with his back turned and his shoulders hunched up.

Not until they were under the frowning
shadow of Stark Head, did Battle throttle
down the engine and begin to speak his piece.

He spoke without self-consciousness and
in a tone that was more reflective than any-thing
else.

"This has been a very odd case one of
the oddest I've ever known, and I'd like to
say something on the subject of murder gen-erally.

What I'm going to say is not origi-nal
actually I overheard young Mr. Daniels,
the K.C., say something of the kind, and
I wouldn't be surprised if he'd got it from
someone else he's a trick of doing that!

"It's this! When you read the account of
a murder or say, a fiction story based on
murder, you usually begin with the murder
itself. That's all wrong. The murder begins a
long time beforehand. A murder is the culmi-nation
of a lot of different circctmstances, all
converging at a given moment at a given
point. People are brought into it from differ-ent

parts of the globe and for unforeseen
reasons. Mr. Royde is here from Malaya.
Mr. MacWhirter is here because he wanted

mit suicide. The murder itself is the end of

the story. It's Zero Hour."

He paused.

"It's Zero Hour now."

Five faces were turned to him

only five,
for MacWhirter did not turn his head. Five

puzzled faces.

Mary Aldin said:

"You mean that Lady Tressilian's death

was the culmination of a long train of circumstances?"

"No, Miss Aldin, not Lady Tressilian's death. Lady Tressilian's death was only incidental to the main object of the murderer. The murder I am talking of is the murder of Audrey Strange."

He listened to the sharp indrawing of breath. He wondered if, suddenly, someone was afraid

"This crime was planned quite a long time ago--probably as early as last winter. It was planned down to the smallest detail. It had one object, and one object only: that Audrey Strange should be hanged by the neck till she was dead

"It was very cunningly planned by some-one who thought himself very clever. Murderers are usually vain. There was first the

e 1 l'rt,IL', , - 1 ' , , , , , - : , , J = ' -1

Nevile Strange which we were meant to see through. But having been presented by one lot of faked evidence, it was not considered likely that we should consider a second edition of the same thing. And yet, if you come to look at it, all the evidence against Audrey Strange could be faked. The weapon taken from her fireplace, her gloves the left hand glove dipped in blood hidden in the ivy outside her window. The powder she uses dusted on the inside of a coat collar, and a few hairs placed there too. Her own fingerprint, occurring quite naturally on a roll of adhesive plaster taken from her room. Even the left-handed nature of the blow.

"And there was the final damning evidence of Mrs. Strange herself I don't believe there's one of you (except the one who knows) who can credit her innocence after the way she behaved when we took her into custody. Practically admitted her guilt, didn't she? I mightn't have believed in her being innocent myself if it hadn't been for a private experience of my own Struck me fight between the eyes it did, when I saw and heard her because, you see, I'd known

another girl who did just that very same
thing, who admitted guilt when she wasn't

guilty and Audrey Strange was looking at
me with that other girl's eyes

"I'd got to do my duty. I knew that. We
police officers have to act on evidence not
on what we feel and think. But I can tell you
that at that minute I prayed for a miracle
because I didn't see that anything but a miracle
was going to help that poor lady.

"Well, I got my miracle. Got it right away!

"Mr. MacWhirter, here, turned up with
his story."

He paused.

"Mr. MacWhirter, will you repeat what
you told me up at the house?"

MacWhirter turned. He spoke in short
sharp sentences that carried conviction just
because of their conciseness.

He told of his rescue from the cliff the
preceding January and of his wish to revisit
the scene. He went on.

"I went up there on Monday night. I stood
there lost in my own thoughts. It must have

been, I suppose, in the neighborhood of eleven o'clock. I looked across at that house on the point Gull's Point as I know it now to be."

He paused and then went on.

"There was a rope hanging from a window of that house into the sea. I saw a man climbing up that rope "

Just a moment elapsed before they took it in. Mary Aldin cried out:

"Then it was an outsider after all? It was nothing to do with any of us. It was an ordinary burglar!"

"Not quite so fast," said Battle. "It was someone who came from the other side of the river, yes, since he swam across. But someone in the house had to have the rope ready for him, therefore someone inside must have been concerned."

He went on slowly.

"And we know of someone who was on the other side of the river that night someone who wasn't seen between ten thirty and a quarter past eleven and who might have been swimming over and back. Someone who

might have a friend on this side of the water."

He added: "Eh, Mr. Latimer?"

Ted took a step backward. He cried out

shrilly:

"But I can't swim! Everybody knows I
can't swim. Kay, tell them I can't swim."

"Of course Ted can't swim!" Kay cried.

"Is that so?" asked Battle, pleasantly.

He moved along the boat as Ted moved in

the other direction. There was some clumsy

movement and a splash.

"Dear me," said Superintendent Battle

in deep concern. "Mr. Latimer's gone over-board."

His hand closed like a vise on Neville's

arm as the latter was preparing to jump in

after him.

"No, no, Mr. Strange. No need for you

I

to get yourself wet. There are two of my

men handy fishing in the dinghy there."

He peered over the side of the boat. "It's quite true," he said with interest. "He can't swim. It's all right. They've got him. I'll apologize presently, but really there's only one way to make quite sure that a person can't swim and that's to throw them in and watch. You see, Mr. Strange, I like to be thorough. I had to eliminate Mr. Latimer first. Mr. Royde, here, has got a groggy arm; he couldn't do any rope climbing."

Battle's voice took on a lurring quality.

"So that brings us to you, doesn't it, Mr. Strange? A good athlete, a mountain climber, a swimmer and all that. You went over on the 10.30 ferry all right but no one can swear to seeing you at the Easterhead l-Intel until a auarter tast eleven in stfite of

our story of having been looking for Mr.

Latimer then."

Nevile jerked his arm away. He threw
back his head and laughed.

"You suggest that I swam across the river

and climbed up a rope "

"Which you had left ready hanging from
your window," said Baffle.

"Killed Lady Tressilian and swam back
again? Why should I do such a fantastic
thing? And who laid all those clues against
me? I suppose I laid them against myself, t"

"Exactly," said Battle. "And not half a
bad idea either."

"And why should I want to kill Camilla
Tressilian?"

"You didn't," said Battle. "But you did
want to hang the woman who left you for

another man. You're a bit unhinged men-tally,
you know. Have been ever since you
were a child I've looked up that old bow
and arrow case by the way. Anyone who
does you an injury has to be punished and
death doesn't seem to you an excessive pen-alty
for them to pay. Death by itself wasn't
enough for Audrey your Audrey whom you
loved oh, yes, you loved her all right be-fore
your love turned to hate. You had to

think of an enoial kind of death, some

long-drawn-out specialized death. And when
you'd thought of it, the fact that it entailed
the killing of a woman who had been some-thing
like a mother to you didn't worry you
in the least "

Neville said and his voice was quite gentle:

"All lies! All lies! And I'm not mad. I'm
not mad."

Battle said contemptuously:

"Flicked you on the raw, didn't she, when she went off and left you for another man? Hurt your vanity! To think she should walk out on you. You salved your pride by pre-tending to the world at large that you'd left her and you married another girl who was in love with you just to bolster up that belief. But all the time you planned what you'd do to Audrey. You couldn't think of anything worse than this to get her hanged. A fine idea pity you hadn't the brains to carry it out better!"

Nevile's tweed-coated shoulders moved, a queer, wriggling movement.

Battle went on:

"Childish all that niblick stuff! Those crude trails pointing to you! Audrey must have known what you were after! She must have laughed up her sleeve! Thinking I didn't suspect you! You murderers are funny

little fellows! So puffed up. Always thinking
you've been clever and resourceful and really
being quite pitifully childish "

It was a strange queer scream that came
from Nevile.

"It was a clever idea it was! You'd never
have guessed. Never! Not if it hadn't been
for this interfering iackanapes, this pompous
Scotch fool. I'd thought out every detail

every detail! I can't help 'what went wrong.

How was I to know Royde knew the truth
about Audrey and Adrian? Audrey and
Adrian Curse Audrey she shall hang

you've got to hang her I want her to die

afraid to die to die I

hate her. I tell

you

I want her to die "

The
high
whinnying voice died away. Nevile slumped
down and began to cry quietly.

"Oh,
God,"
said Mary Aldin.

She was
white to the lips.

Battle said
gently, in a low voice:

"I'm sorry,
but I had to push him over the edge
.... There was precious little evidence, you
know."

Nevile was
still whimpering. His voice was like a
child's.

"I want
her to be hanged. I do want her to

Mary Aldin shuddered
Thomas Royde.

He took her hands in his.

and turned to

II

"I was always frightened," said Audrey.

They were sitting on the terrace. Audrey sat close to Superintendent Battle. Battle had resumed his holiday and was at Gull's Point as a friend.

"Always frightened all the time," said Audrey.

Battle said, nodding his head:

"I knew you were dead scared first moment I saw you. And you'd got that color-less, reserved way people have who are holding some very strong emotion in check. It might have been love or hate, but actually

it was fear, wasn't it?"

She nodded.

"I began to be afraid of Neville soon after we were married. But the awful thing is, you see, that I didn't know why. I began to think that I was mad."

"It wasn't you," said Battle.

him so particularly sane and normal always delightfully good-tempered and pleasant."

"Interesting," said Battle. "He played the part of the good sportsman, you know. That's why he could keep his temper so well at tennis. His role as a good sportsman was more important to him than winning matches. But it put a strain upon him, of course, playing a part always does. He got worse underneath."

"Underneath," whispered Audrey with a shudder. "Always underneath. Nothing you could get hold of. Just sometimes a word or a look and then I'd fancy I'd imagined

it Something queer. And then, as I say,
I thought I must be queer. And I went on
getting more and more afraid the kind of
unreasoning fear, you know, that makes you sick
"I told myself I was going mad but I
couldn't help it. I felt I'd do anything in the
world to get away! And then Adrian came
and told me he loved me and I thought it
would be wonderful to go away with him
and be safe.. "

She stopped.

"You know what happened? I
to meet Adrian he never came

went off

he was

killed I felt as though Neville had
managed it somehow "

"Perhaps he did," said Battle.

Audrey turned a startled face to him.

"Oh, do you think so?"

"We'll never know now. Motor accidents can be arranged. Don't brood on it, though, Mrs. Strange. As likely as not, it just hap-pened naturally."

"I I was all broken up. I went back to the Rectory Adrian's home. We were going to have written to his mother, but as she didn't know about it, I thought I wouldn't tell her and give her pain. And Nevile came almost at once. He was very nice and kind and all the time I talked to him I was quite sick with fear! He said no one need know about Adrian, that I could divorce him on evidence he would send me and that he was going to remarry afterwards. I felt so thankful. I knew he had thought Kay attrac-tive and I hoped that everything would turn out right and that I should get over this queer obsession of mine. I still thought it must be me.

"But I couldn't get rid of it quite. I never felt I'd really escaped. And then I met Nevile in the Park one day and he explained

that he did so want me and Kay to be friends

and suggested that we should all come here
in September. I couldn't refuse, how could
I?

After all the kind things he'd done." "Will you walk into my parlor?" said the
spider to the fly," remarked Superintendent
Battle.

Audrey shivered.

"Yes, just that "

"Very clever he was about that," said
Battle. "Protested so loudly to everyone that
it was his idea, that everyone at once got the
impression that it wasn't."

Audrey said:

"And then I got here and it was like a kind of nightmare. I knew something awful

was going to happen I knew Nevile meant

it to happen and that it was to happen to me. But I didn't know what it was. I think, you know, that I
nearly did go off my head!

I was just paralyzed with fright like you are
in a dream when something's going to happen

and you can't move "

"I've always thought," said Superintendent

Battle, "that I'd like to have seen a snake
fascinate a bird so that it can't fly away but
now I'm not so sure."

Audrey went on.

"Even when Lady Tressilian was killed, I
didn't realize what it meant. I was puzzled.

I didn't even suspect Nevile. I knew he didn't
care about money it was absurd to think
he'd kill her in order to inherit fifty thou-sand
pounds.

"I thought over and over again about
Mr. Treves and the story he had told that
evening. Even then I didn't connect it with
Nevile. Treves had mentioned some physical
peculiarity by which he could recognize the
child of long ago. I've got a scar on my ear
but I don't think anyone else has any sign
that you'd notice."

Battle said: "Miss Aldin has a lock of white hair. Thomas Royde has a stiff right arm which might not have been only the result of an earthquake. Mr. Ted Latimer has rather an odd-shaped skull. And Nevile Strange "

He paused.

"Surely there was no physical peculiarity about Nevile?"

"Oh, yes, there was. His left hand little pounds ger is shorter than his right. That's very unusual, Mrs. Strange very unusual in-deed."

"So that was it?"

"That was it."

"And Nevile hung that sign on the lift?"

"Yes. Nipped down there and back whilst

Royde and Latimer were giving the old boy drinks. Clever and simple doubt if we could

ever prove that was murder."

Audrey shivered again.

"Now, now," said Battle. "It's all over now, my dear. Go on talking."

"You're very clever I haven't talked so much for years!"

"No, that's what's been wrong. When did it first dawn on you what Master Nevile's game was?"

"I don't know exactly. It came to me all at once. He himself had been cleared and that left all of us. And then, suddenly, I saw him looking at me a sort of gloating look. And

I knew. That was when "

She stopped abruptly.

"That was when what ?"

Audrey said slowly:

"When I thought a quick way out would be best."

Superintendent Battle shook his head.

"Never give in. That's my motto."

"Oh, you're quite right. But you don't know what it does to you being afraid for so long. It paralyzes you you can't think you can't plan you just wait for something awful to happen. And then, when it does happen" she gave a sudden quick smile

"you'd be surprised at the relief,t No more waiting and fearing--it's come. You'll think I'm quite demented, I suppose, if I tell you that when you came to arrest me for murder I didn't mind at all. Nevile had done his worst and it was over. I felt so safe going off with Inspector Leach."

"That's partly why we did it," said Battle.

"I wanted you out of that madman's reach.

And besides, if I wanted to break him down,
I wanted to be able to count on the shock of
the reaction. He'd seen his plan come off, as
he thought so the jolt would be all the
greater."

Audrey said in a low voice:

"If he hadn't broken down, would there
have been any evidence?"

"Not too much. There was MacWhirter's
story of seeing a man climb up a rope in the
moonlight. And there was the rope itself confirming
his story, coiled up in the attic and
still faintly damp. It was raining that night,
you know."

He paused and stared hard at Audrey as
though he were expecting her to say some-thing.

As she merely looked interested he went

on:

"And there was the pin-stripe suit. He

stripped, of course, in the dark on that rocky point on the Easterhead Bay side, and thrust his suit into a niche in the rock. As it happened he put it down on a decayed bit of fish washed up by the flood tide two days ago. It made a stained patch on the shoulder and it smelt. There was some talk, I found out, about the drains being wrong in the hotel. NeVile himself put that story about. He'd got his rain coat on over his suit, but the smell was a pervasive one. Then he got the wind up about that suit afterwards and at the first opportunity he took it off to the cleaners and, like a fool, didn't give his own name. Took a name at random, actually one he'd seen in the hotel register. That's how your friend got hold of it and, having a good head on him, he linked it up with the man climbing up the rope. You step on decayed fish but you don't put your shou/der down on it unless you have taken your clothes off to bathe at night, and no one would bathe for pleasure

on a wet night in September. He fitted the whole thing together. Very ingenious man, Mr. MacWhirter."

"More than ingenious," said Audrey.

"M-m, well, perhaps. Like to know about him? I can tell you something of his history."

Audrey listened attentively. Battle found her a good listener.

She said:

"I owe a lot to him and to you."

"Don't owe very much to me," said Superintendent Battle. "If I hadn't been a fool I'd have seen the point of that bell."

"Bell? What bell?"

"The bell in Lady Tressilian's room. Always did feel there was something wrong about that bell. I nearly got it, too, when I came down the stairs from the top floor and saw one of those poles you open windows

Audrey still looked bewildered.

"That was the whole point of the bell, see to give Nevile Strange an alibi. Lady

T. didn't remember what she had rung for
of course she didn't because she hadn't rung
at all. t Nevile rang that bell from outside
in the passage with that long pole, the wires
ran along the ceiling. So down comes Barrett
and sees Mr. Nevile Strange go downstairs
and out, and she finds Lady Tressilian
alive and well. The whole business of the
maid was fishy. What's the good of doping
her for a murder that's going to be committed
before midnight? Ten to one she won't have
gone off altogether by then. But it fixes the

murder as an inside job, and it allows a little
time for Nevile to play his role of first suspect
then Barrett speaks and Nevile is so
triumphantly cleared that no one is going to
inquire very closely as to exactly what time
he got to the hotel. We know he didn't cross
back by ferry, and no boats had been taken.
There remained the possibility of swimming.
He was a powerful swimmer, but even then
the time must have been short. Up the rope

he's left hanging into his bedroom and a good deal of water on the floor, as we noticed (but without seeing the point I'm sorry to say). Then into his blue coat and trousers, along to Lady Tressilian's room we won't go into that wouldn't have taken more than a couple of minutes, he'd fixed up that steel ball beforehand then back, out of his clothes, down the rope and back to Easterhead."

"Suppose Kay had come in?"

"She'd been mildly doped, I'll bet. She was yawning from dinner on, so they tell me. Besides he'd taken care to have a quarrel with her so that she'd lock her door and keep out of his way."

"I'm trying to think if I noticed the ball was gone from the fender. I don't think I did. When did he put it back?"

"Next morning when all the hullabaloo arose. Once he got back in Ted Latimer's car, he had all night to clear up his traces and fix things, mend the tennis racket, etc.

By the way, he hit the old lady backhanded, you know. That's why the crime appeared to be left handed. Strange's backhand was always his strong point, remember!"

"Don't don't" Audrey put up her hands. "I can't bear any more."

He smiled at her.

"All the same it's done you good to talk it all out. Mrs. Strange, may I be impertinent and give you some advice?"

"Yes, please."

"You lived for eight years with a criminal lunatic that's enough to snap any woman's nerves. But you've got to snap out of it now, Mrs. Strange. You don't need to be afraid any more and you've got to make yourself realize that."

Audrey smiled at him. The frozen look

had gone from her face; it was a sweet, rather timid, but confiding face, with the

wide-apart eyes full of gratitude.

"What's the best way to set about that, I

wonder?"

Superintendent Battle considered.

"Think of the most difficult thing you

can, and then set about doing it," he advised.

III

Andrew MacWhirter was packing.

He laid three shirts carefully in his suitcase,

and then that dark blue suit which he

had remembered to fetch from the cleaners.

Two suits left by two different MacWhirters

had been too much for the girl in charge.

There was a tap on the door and he called,

"Come in."

Audrey Strange walked in. She said:

"I've come to thank you are you pack-Ing?"

"Yes. I'm leaving here tonight. And sailing

the day after tomorrow."

"For South America?"

"For Chile."

She said, "I'll pack for you."

He protested, but she overbore him. He

watched her as she worked deftly and methodically.

"There," she said when she had finished.

"You did that well," said MacWhirter. There was a silence. Then Audrey said:

"You saved my life. If you hadn't happened

to see what you did see "

She broke off.

Then she said:

"Did you realize at once, that night on
the cliff when you stopped me going
over when you said, 'Go home, I'll see that
you're not hanged' did you realize then that
you'd got some important evidence?"

"Not precisely," said MacWhirter. "I had
to think it out."

"Then how could you say. what you did
say?"

MacWhirter always felt annoyed when he
had to explain the intense simplicity of his
thought processes.

"I meant just precisely that that I intended
to prevent you from being hanged."

The color came up in Audrey's cheeks.

"Supposing I had done it."

"That would have made no difference."

"Did you think I had done it, then?"

"I did not speculate upon the matter
overmuch. I was inclined to believe you were
innocent, but it would have made no difference
to my course of action."

"And then you remembered the man on
the rope?"

MacWhirter was silent for a few minutes.

Then he cleared his throat.

"You may as well know, I suppose. I did
not actually see a man climbing up a rope

indeed I could not have done so, for I
was up on Stark Head on Sunday night, not
on Monday. I deduced what must have hap-pened
from the evidence of the suit and my
suppositions were confu'med by the finding
of a wet rope in the attic."

From red Audrey had gone white. She
said incredulously:

"Your story was all a lie?"

"Deductions would not have carried weight with the police. I had to say I saw what happened."

"But you might have had to swear to it at my trial."

"Yes."

"You would have done that?"

"I would."

Audrey cried:

"And you you are the man who lost his job and came down to throwing himself off a cliff because he wouldn't tamper with the truth!"

"I have a great regard for the truth. But I've discovered there are things that matter more."

"Such as?"

"You," said MacWhirter.

Audrey's eyes dropped. He cleared his throat in an embarrassed manner.

"There's no need for you to feel under a great obligation or anything of that kind. You'll never hear of me again after today. The police have got Strange's confession and they'll not need my evidence. In any case I hear he's so bad he'll maybe not live to come to trial."

"I'm glad of that," said Audrey.

"You were fond of him once?"

"Of the man I thought he was."

MacWhirter nodded.

"We've all felt that way, maybe."

He went on.

"Everything's turned out well. Superintendant
Battle was able to act upon my story
and break down the man "

Audrey interrupted. She said:

"He worked upon your story, yes. But I
don't believe you fooled him. He deliberately
shut his eyes."

"Why do you say that?"

"When he was talking to me he mentioned
it was lucky you saw what you did

in the moonlight and then added something

--a sentence or two later about it being a
rainy night."

MacWhirter was taken aback.

"That's true. On Monday night I doubt if

I'd have seen anything at all."

"said Audrey.

"It doesn't matter,

"He knew that what you pretended to have seen was what had really happened. But it explains why he worked on Nevile to break him down. He suspected Nevile as soon as Thomas told him about me and Adrian. He knew then that if he was right about the kind of crime he had fixed on the wrong person what he wanted was some kind of evidence to use on Nevile. He wanted, as he said, a miracle--you were Superintendent Battle's answer to prayer."

"That's a curious thing for him to say," said MacWhirter dryly.

"So you see," said Audrey, "you are a miracle. My special miracle."

MacWhirter said earnestly:

"I'd not like you to feel you're under an obligation to me. I'm going right out of your

life '

"Must you?" said Audrey.

He stared at her. The color came up, flooding her ears and temples.

.qhicl'

"Won't you take me with you?"

"You don't know what you're saying!"

"Yes, I do. I'm doing something very difficult but something that matters to me more than life or death. I know the time is very short. By the way, I'm conventional, I should like to be married before we go!"

"Naturally," said MacWhirter, deeply shocked. "You don't imagine I'd suggest

anything else."

"I'm sure you wouldn't," said Audrey.

MacWhirter said:

"I'm not your kind. I thought you'd marry
that quiet fellow who's cared for you so long."

"Thomas? Dear true Thomas. He's too
true. He's faithful to the image of a girl he
loved years ago. But the person he really
cares for is Mary Aldin, though he doesn't
know it yet himself."

MacWhirter took a step towards her. He
spoke sternly.

"Do you mean what you're saying?"

"Yes . . . I want to be with you always,
never to leave you. If you go, I shall never
find anybody like you, and I shall go sadly
all my days."

MacWhirter sighed. He took out his wal-let

and carefully examined its contents.

He murmured:

"A special license comes expensive. I'll
need to go to the bank first thing tomorrow.

,

"I could lend you some money," murmured
Audrey.

"You'll do nothing of the kind. If I marry
a woman, I pay for the license. You understand?"

"You needn't," said Audrey softly, "look
so stern."

He said gently as he came towards her,
"Last time I had my hands on you, you
felt like a bird struggling to escape. You'll
never escape now "

The publishers hope that this
Large Print Book has brought

you pleasurable reading.

Each title is designed to make
the text as easy to see as possible.

G.K. Hall Large Print Books
are available from your library and
your local bookstore. Or, you can
receive information by mail on
upcoming and current Large Print Books
and order directly from the publishers.

Just send your name and address to:

G.K. Hall & Co.
70 Lincoln Street
Boston, Mass. 02111

or call, toll-free:

18003432806

A note on the text

Large print edition designed by
Bernadette Montalvo.

Composed in 18 pt Plantin
on a Xyvision 300/Linotron 202N
by Marilyn Arm Richards

of G.K. Hall & Co.

About this Title

This eBook was created using ReaderWorks®Publisher 2.0, produced by OverDrive, Inc.

For more information about ReaderWorks, please visit us on the Web at
www.overdrive.com/readerworks