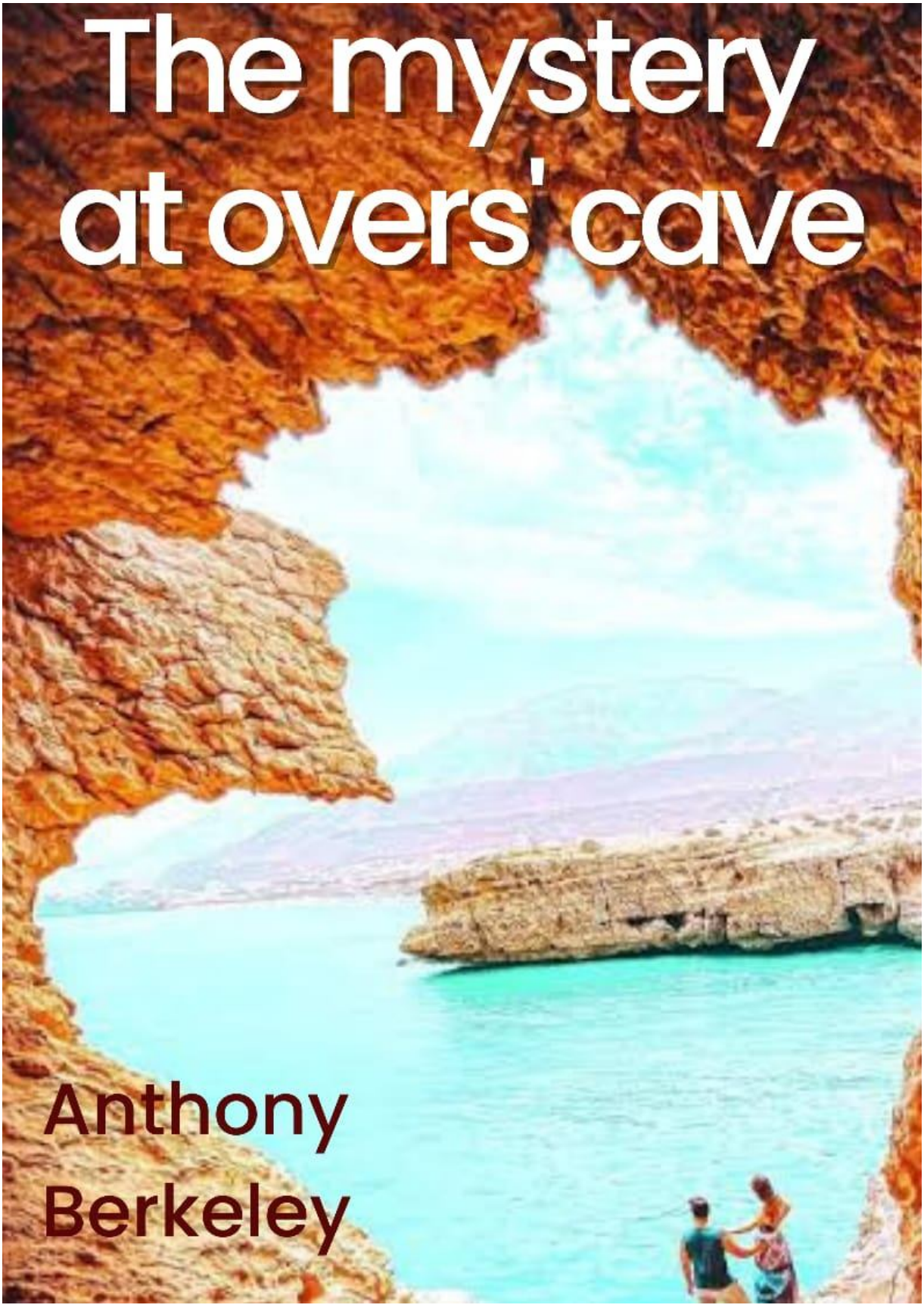
The mystery at overs' cave
Anthony Berkeley

THE MYSTERY AT LOVERS' CAVE

By

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CHAPTER I.
OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

"If," said Roger Sheringham, helping himself to a third piece of toast, "your brain had as many kinks in it as your trousers have few, Anthony, you would have had the intelligence to find out our train from St. Pancras this morning before you ever arrived here last night."

"There's a telephone here and an enquiry office at St. Pancras, I believe," retorted his cousin. "Couldn't the two be connected in some way?"

"You write to me and ask me to waste my valuable time in amusing you on your holiday," Roger pursued indignantly. "I not only consent but very kindly allow you to choose the place we shall go to and book our rooms for us; I even agree to harbour you here for a night before we start and submit to your company and your chattering at my own breakfast-table (a thing peculiarly offensive to any right-minded man and destroying at one blow the chief and abiding joy of bachelorhood). I do all this, I say, and what is my reward? You refuse point-blank even to find out the time of our train from St. Pancras!"

"I say, did you see this?" exclaimed Anthony, glancing up from the *Daily Courier*. "Kent all out for forty-seven on a plumb wicket at Blackheath! Whew!"

"If you were to turn to the centre of the paper," replied Roger coldly, "I think you might find some rather more interesting reading matter than the performances of Kent on plumb wickets at Blackheath. The editorial page, for instance."

"Meaning there's another of your crime articles in?" Anthony asked, flicking back the pages. "Yes, I've been reading some of them. They're really not at all bad, Roger."

"Thank you very much indeed," Roger murmured gratefully. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings! Anyhow, you understood them, did you? That's good. I was trying to write down to the standard of intelligence of the ordinary *Courier* reader. I appear to have succeeded."

"This is rather interesting," Anthony remarked, his eyes on the required page.

"Well, yes," said Roger modestly, folding up his napkin. "I did rather flatter myself that I'd—"

"This article on 'Do Shingled Heads Mean Shingled Hearts?' By Jove, that's an idea, isn't it? You see what he's getting at. Boyishness, and all that. He says—"

"I think you've mistaken the column," Roger interrupted coldly. "The one you're looking for is on the right, next to the correspondence."

"Correspondence?" repeated Anthony vaguely. "Oh, yes; I've got it. 'Clergymen Who Gabble. Sir: I attended the burial service of my great-aunt by marriage last Thursday and was exceedingly distressed by the slipshod way in which the officiating clergyman read the—'"

“I don’t think I’ll go for a holiday with you, Anthony, after all!” observed Roger suddenly, rising to his feet with such vehemence that his chair fell violently to the floor behind him.

“You’ve knocked over your chair,” said Anthony, quite seriously.

At this point, very fortunately, the telephone-bell rang.

“Hullo!” said Roger into the mouth-piece, more loudly than was strictly necessary.

“Hullo!” answered a voice. “Is that Mr. Sheringham?”

“No! He left for Derbyshire early this morning.”

“Oh, come!” chided the voice gently. “Not before eleven o’clock, surely. He wouldn’t go without his breakfast, would he?”

“Who’s speaking?”

“Burgoyne, *Daily Courier*. Seriously, Sheringham, I’m very relieved that I’ve caught you. Listen!”

Roger listened. As he did so his face gradually cleared and a look of intense excitement began to take the place of the portentous frown he had been wearing.

“No, I’m afraid it’s out of the question, Burgoyne,” he said at length. “I’m just off for a fortnight in Derbyshire with a cousin of mine, as you know. Rooms booked and everything. Otherwise I should have been delighted.”

Expostulatory sounds made themselves heard from the other end of the wire.

“Well, I’ll think it over if you *like*,” Roger replied with a great show of reluctance, “but I’m very much afraid— Anyhow, I’ll let you know definitely in a quarter-of-an-hour. Will that do?”

He listened for a moment, then hung up the receiver and turned to Anthony with a beaming face. “Our little trip’s off I fear,” he said happily.

“*What?*” exclaimed Anthony. “But—but we’ve booked our rooms!”

“*You*’ve booked them,” Roger corrected. “And there’s nothing to prevent you from occupying them. You can sleep in one and brush your hair in the other, can’t you? Of course I shall be delighted to reimburse you for any expense you may have incurred through your misunderstanding that I would accompany you, though I must take this opportunity of pointing out, without prejudice, that I am not legally liable; and should my heirs or fellow-directors dispute the claim, my solicitors will have instructions not to—”

“What are you talking about?” Anthony shouted. “Why do you want to back out at the last minute like this? What’s happened? Whom were you talking to then?”

Roger resumed his seat at the breakfast-table and poured himself out another cup of coffee.

“To take your questions in inverse order,” he said at length, and with a slight diminution of his bantering air, “that was the editor of the *Daily Courier*, a very great man and one before whom politicians tremble and duchesses stand to attention. You may remember that I had some truck with him last summer over that Wychford

business. He wants me to go down at once to Hampshire as Special Correspondent to the *Courier*."

"To Hampshire?"

"Yes. I don't know whether you saw a little paragraph in the papers yesterday about a woman who fell over the cliffs at Ludmouth Bay and was killed. The idea now appears to be that it might not have been an accident after all, and there've been one or two important developments. They want me to follow up those articles I've been doing by covering the business for them, to say nothing of putting in a little amateur sleuth-work if the chance arises. It's a job after my own heart!"

"But I heard you say that it was out of the question, because you were going away with me?"

Roger smiled gently. "There's a way of doing these things, little boy, as you may find out when you get a little older. But, seriously, you've got the first claim on me; if you're dead set on this Derbyshire trip, I'll come like a shot and chuck the other."

"Of course not!" Anthony said warmly. "I wouldn't dream of it. What do you take me for? Run off and sleuth to your heart's content. I may even buy the *Courier* once or twice to see how big an idiot you're making of yourself."

"If you can drag your eyes away from the cricket page! Well, it's jolly sporting of you to take it like this, Anthony, I must and will say. I know how maddening it is to have one's plans upset at the last minute."

"I dare say I shall be able to survive it," Anthony opined philosophically, stuffing tobacco into his pipe. "I'm not much of a whale for my own company, it's true, but I'll probably fall in with somebody or other up there; one often does. Baccy?"

"Thanks." Roger took the extended pouch and transferred some of its contents to the bowl of his own pipe with a somewhat absent air. Suddenly his face cleared and he smote the table lustily. "I've got it! Why on earth shouldn't you come too? It ought to be interesting enough and I'd be jolly glad of your company. Of course!"

"But the other rooms have been booked," Anthony demurred.

"For goodness' sake, stop harping on the bookedness of those rooms! You're getting positively morbid about them. They can be cancelled, can't they? Would you *like* to come down with me?"

"Yes, I would."

"Then go out and cancel them by wire, and I'll send the woman a cheque from Ludmouth; so that's settled. I'll ring up the *Courier* and say I'll go, and then I shall have to fly down there and see them before I start. There's a train for Bournemouth at twelve-ten, I know, because I caught it a fortnight ago. Greene will have got my bag packed by now, so after you've wired come back here and collect the luggage and go on to Waterloo. Take two first singles to Ludmouth and I'll meet you in front of the little place where you book for Sandown Park five minutes before the train goes. Shoot!"

"What's your second name, Roger?" Anthony asked admiringly. "Pep or Zip?"

As he made his way down the main stairs of the building in which Roger Sheringham's bachelor flat was situated, Anthony Walton smiled slowly to himself. The little holiday he had fixed up with Roger was going to be even more amusing than he had expected.

Although there were more than ten years between the cousins (Roger was now thirty-six, Anthony a bare twenty-five), they had always been good friends, and that also in spite of the fact that they had scarcely a taste or a feeling in common. It is often remarked, and even by people whom one would certainly expect to know better, that opposites make a happy marriage. Nothing could be more ludicrously untrue, but they do frequently make a happy male friendship. This one was a case in point.

Anthony, big, broad-shouldered, good-natured and slow-witted, had got his blue for rugger at Oxford, and now regularly left his father's office, where he sat and amiably did nothing for the rest of the week, each Saturday morning to play for the Harlequins. It was his secret opinion that games were the only things that mattered in this world. In the matter of brains he was no match for the keen-witted if slightly volatile Roger, and his slow deliberation was in equal contrast with that gentleman's dynamic energy; nor did he possess enough imagination to be impressed in the slightest degree by his cousin's fame as a novelist with an already international reputation, though he did afford him a qualified respect as the owner of a half-blue for golf obtained at Oxford nearly fifteen years ago.

With his usual methodical care Anthony set about carrying out the string of orders which had been entrusted to him. Seven minutes before the train was due to leave he took up his position, tickets in hand, at the appointed spot on the vast surface of Waterloo Station. Punctually two minutes later Roger appeared and they passed through the barrier together, followed by a staggering porter with their combined traps. The train was not full, and an empty first-class smoker was obtained without difficulty.

"We're going to enjoy ourselves on this little trip, Anthony, my son," Roger remarked as the train began to move, settling himself comfortably in his corner and beginning to unfold a large wad of newspapers which he had brought with him. "Do you know that?"

"Are we?" Anthony said equably. "I shall enjoy watching you on the trail, certainly. It must be a strange sight."

"Yes, and now I come to think of it, you're by way of being rather indispensable there yourself, aren't you?"

"Me? Why?"

"As the idiot friend," Roger returned happily. "Must have an idiot friend with me, you know. All the best sleuths do."

Anthony grunted and began somewhat ostentatiously to turn the pages of *The Sportsman* with which he had prudently armed himself. Roger applied himself to his

bundle of papers. For half-an-hour or more no word was spoken. Then Roger, throwing aside the last newspaper from his batch, broke the silence.

"I think I'd better give you the facts as far as I can make them out, Anthony; it'll help to stick them in my own memory too."

Anthony consulted his wrist-watch. "Do you know you haven't spoken for thirty-six minutes and twelve seconds, Roger?" he said in tones of the liveliest astonishment. "I should think that's pretty nearly a record, isn't it?"

"The name of the dead woman was Vane," Roger continued imperturbably; "Mrs. Vane. She appears to have gone out for a walk with a girl cousin who was staying with her, a Miss Cross. According to this girl's story, Mrs. Vane sent her back as they were approaching the village on their way home, saying that she wanted to call round and see a friend on some matter or other. She never got there. A couple of hours later a fisherman turned up at the police-station and reported that he had seen something on the rocks at the foot of the cliffs as he was rowing out to some lobster-pots half-an-hour earlier, though it had apparently not occurred to him to go and see what it was. A constable was sent off to investigate, and he and the fisherman climbed down the cliffs, which seem to be fairly well broken up at that point. At the bottom they found Mrs. Vane's body. And that was that."

"I believe I did see something about it," Anthony nodded. "Wasn't it an accident?"

"Well, that's what everybody thought, of course; and that was the verdict at the inquest yesterday, Accidental Death. But this is the important development. The *Courier's* local correspondent caught a glimpse of Inspector Moresby, of all people, prowling about the place this morning! He telephoned through at once, and—"

"Inspector Moresby? Who's he?"

"Oh, you must have heard of him. He's one of the big noises at Scotland Yard. I suppose he's been mixed up in nearly every big murder case for the last ten years. Anyhow, you see the idea. If Moresby's on the job, that means that something rather important's going to happen."

"By Jove! You mean she was murdered?"

"I mean that Scotland Yard seems to think she was," Roger agreed seriously.

Anthony whistled softly. "Any clues?"

"None that I know of, though of course they must be working on something. All the local man can tell us is that Mrs. Vane was a charming woman, quite young (twenty-eight, I think Burgoyne said), pretty, attractive, and very popular in the neighbourhood. Her husband's a wealthy man, a good deal older than herself and a scientist by hobby; in fact quite a fairly well-known experimentalist, I understand."

"Sounds queer!" Anthony ruminated. "Who on earth would want to murder a woman like that? Did you gather whether any motive had come to light?"

Roger hesitated for a moment. "What I did gather is that the girl cousin benefits to the extent of over ten thousand pounds by Mrs. Vane's death," he replied slowly.

"Oho! That sounds rather rotten, doesn't it?"

“It does,” Roger agreed gravely.

There was another little pause.

“And you’ve got to write about it for the *Courier?*” Anthony remarked almost carelessly.

“Yes; as far as we know we’re the first in the field. It’ll be a decent little scoop if we’re the only people to come out with the news about Moresby to-morrow morning. I shall have to fly off and have a chat with him the moment we arrive. Luckily I know him slightly already.”

“Take your seats for lunch, pleece,” observed a head popping suddenly into the carriage from the corridor. “Lunch is now being served, pleece.”

“I say, Roger,” Anthony remarked, as they rose obediently, “what put you on to this crime business? Before that Wychford affair, I mean. You never used to be keen on it. What made you take it up?”

“A certain knotty and highly difficult little problem which I had the felicity of solving about two years ago,” Roger replied modestly. “That made me realise my own powers, so to speak. But I can’t tell you names or anything like that, because it’s a most deadly secret. In fact, you’d better not ask me anything about it at all.”

“Right-ho, I won’t, if it’s a secret,” Anthony promised.

Roger looked slightly disappointed.

CHAPTER II.
GIRLS AND MURDER

Ludmouth village is nearly a mile away from its station. On arriving at the latter Roger and Anthony put their traps in the combined ticket-office, porter's room, luggage depot and cloakroom, and proceeded to make enquiries regarding hotels.

"'Otel?" repeated the combined porter, station-master and ticket-inspector, scratching the top of his head with an air of profound cogitation. "Why, there ain't no 'otel 'ereabouts. Leastaways, not what you might call an 'otel, there ain't."

"Well, a pub, then," rejoined Roger a trifle irritably. The journey had been a long and tiresome one, and since changing at Bournemouth they had seemed to progress at the rate of ten miles an hour. For one who was as eager to get going as Roger had been all that day, few things could have been more maddening than the journey as habitually performed between Bournemouth and Ludmouth. It is not to say that the train does not go fast when it is going, but stations seem to demoralise it completely; it sits down and ruminates for a matter of twenty minutes in each one before it can bring itself to go on to the next. "What's the name of the best pub in Ludmouth?"

The combination chuckled hoarsely. "The best pub?" he echoed with considerable amusement. "The *best* pub, hey? Oho! Hoo!"

"I've said something funny," Roger pointed out to Anthony. "You see? The gentleman is amused. I asked the name of the best pub, so no wonder he's convulsed with mirth."

Anthony inspected the combination with some attention. "I don't think he's laughing at you at all. I think he's just seen a joke that Gladstone made in 1884."

"There ain't nobbut one!" roared the combination. "So when you says the *best* pub I—"

"Where is the one pub in Ludmouth?" asked Roger patiently.

"Why, in the village, o' course."

"Where is the village of Ludmouth and its one pub?" Roger pursued with almost superhuman self-restraint.

This time a more lucid reply was forthcoming, and the two strode out into the hot sunshine and down the country road in the direction indicated, leaving behind them a combination of porter, station-master and ticket-inspector guffawing at irregular intervals as some fresh aspect of this cream of jests appeared to occur to him.

It was a warm walk into the village, and they were glad enough to plunge into the gloom of the little old-fashioned inn which stood in the middle of the small cluster of houses which constitutes the nucleus of the village. A smart rap or two on the counter brought the landlord, a large man of aspect not unlike a benevolent ox and perspiring almost audibly.

"Can't serve you, gents, I'm afraid," he rumbled cheerfully. "Leastaways lemonade you can have, or ginger-beer, for the matter of that; but nothing else."

"That so?" said Roger. "Then produce two large tankards of beer, the biggest tankards and the wettest beer you've got, for we came not as travellers but as residents."

"You don't mean you want to stay 'ere as well? You want rooms?"

"Rooms we shall want, certainly; but what we want just at the moment is beer—and don't forget what I told you about the size of those tankards."

"Oh, well, that's a different matter, that is," agreed the landlord. "I can let you have a couple of quart tankards, if they're any use to you."

"Any *use?* You watch!"

With much wheezing and creaking the landlord filled the two huge tankards, and the two fell upon them gratefully. Then Roger replaced his on the counter and wiped his mouth.

"So this is the only inn hereabouts, is it?" he asked with a careless air.

"Yes, sir; it is that. Ludmouth's a small village, you see, as far as the village goes."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, there's far more big 'ouses round and gentry and suchlike than there is of us villagers, and naturally they don't want public-'ouses."

"Oh, I see. Yes, quite so. By the way, I believe there's a friend of mine somewhere about here called Moresby. You seen or heard of him by any chance?"

"Mr. Moresby?" beamed the landlord. "Why he's staying 'ere, he is. Took 'is room this very mornin', he did. Well, fancy that!"

"Fancy it indeed! You hear that, Anthony? Dear old Moresby staying under the very same roof-tree! What do you think of that, eh?"

"Good enough," Anthony agreed.

"I should say so." He took another pull at his tankard. "Been having some excitement down here, landlord, haven't you? Lady fell over a cliff, or something?"

"Mrs. Vane, sir? Yes. Very sad business, very sad indeed. A wonderful nice lady she was too, they say, though I can't say as how I knew 'er meself. A bit of a stranger in these parts, she was, you see. 'Adn't been married to the doctor more nor five years."

"The doctor? Her husband is a doctor, is he?"

"Well, in a manner o' speaking he is. He's always called Dr. Vane, though he don't do no doctoring. Plenty o' money he's got now and always 'as 'ad since he settled 'ere twenty or more years ago, but a doctor he was once, they do say, an' Dr. Vane he's always called."

"I see. And where does he live? Near here?"

"A matter of a mile or so out Sandsea way; big 'ouse standin' in its own grounds back from the cliffs. You couldn't miss it. Very lonely, like. You might take a stroll out there and see it if you've got nothing to do."

“By Jove, yes, we might, mightn’t we, Anthony?”

“I should think so,” said Anthony cautiously.

“But first of all about these rooms. How many have you got vacant, landlord?”

“Well, besides Mr. Moresby’s, there’s four others altogether. If you’d like to step up in a minute or two and see ’em, you could choose which ones you’d like.”

“We won’t bother. We’ll take them all.”

“What, all four of ’em?”

“Yes; then we can have a bedroom and a sitting-room apiece, you see.”

“But there’s a sitting-room downstairs I could let you ’ave. A proper sitting-room.”

“Is there? Good! Then we’ll take that too. I love proper sitting-rooms. That’ll be five rooms altogether, won’t it? I should think that ought to be enough for us. What would you say, Anthony?”

“I think that might be enough,” Anthony assented.

“You see, landlord? My friend agrees with me. Then that’s settled.”

“It’ll cost you more, sir,” the landlord demurred in some bewilderment.

“Of course it will!” Roger agreed heartily. “Ever so much more. But that can’t be helped. My friend is a very faddy man—a very faddy man indeed; and if he thinks we ought to have five rooms, then five rooms we shall have to have. I’m very sorry, landlord, but you see how it is. And now I expect you’d like us to pay you a deposit, wouldn’t you? Of course. And after that, there are our bags and things to be got from the station, if you’ve got a spare man about the place; and you might tell him from me that if the red-faced man who hands them over begins to make curious noises all of a sudden, he needn’t take offence; it only means that he’s just seen a joke that someone told him the year Queen Victoria was born. Let’s see now; a deposit, you said, didn’t you? Here’s ten pounds. You might make me out a receipt for it, and be careful to mention all five rooms on the receipt or I shall be getting into trouble with my friend. Thanks very much.”

The landlord’s expression, which had been growing blanker and blanker as this harangue proceeded, brightened at the sight of the two five-pound notes which Roger laid on the counter; words may be words, but money is always money. He had not the faintest idea what it was all about and it was his private opinion that Roger was suffering from rather more than a touch of the sun, but he proceeded quite readily to make out the required receipt.

Roger tucked it away in his pocket-book and, professing a morbid interest in the late Mrs. Vane, began to ask a number of questions regarding the exact spot where she had fallen over the cliff and how best to get there. This information having been obtained and the conveyance of the bags arranged for, he shook the puzzled landlord heartily by the hand and drew Anthony out into the road.

“Well, I suppose you know what you’re doing,” remarked that young man, as they set off briskly in accordance with the landlord’s instructions, “but I’m blessed if I do. Why on earth did you book four bedrooms?”

Roger smiled gently. “To prevent all the other little journalists from sharing our advantage in staying under the same roof as Inspector Moresby of Scotland Yard, Cousin Anthony. A dirty trick, no doubt; but nevertheless a neat one.”

“Oh, I see. Very cunning. And where are we off to now? The cliffs?”

“Yes. You see, I want to get hold of Moresby as soon as I possibly can, and it seems to me that if he only arrived here this morning he’ll still be hanging round those cliffs; so the best thing I can do is to make for them too.”

“Seems a sound scheme. And after that?”

“Well, I ought to try to get an interview with one of the people at the house, I suppose, though I don’t much fancy the idea of tackling the doctor himself.”

“Dr. Vane? No, dash it, you can hardly butt in on him.”

“That’s what I feel. He has a secretary, I believe, though I don’t know what her name is, and of course there’s the girl cousin, Miss Cross. She’s the person one ought to make for, I think.”

Anthony frowned. “Seems rather rotten to me.”

“To interview her? Not necessarily, at all. She might have something to say that she’d very much like published. She knows that the uncompromising fact about that ten thousand pounds is going to be talked about pretty hard if there’s any question of Mrs. Vane’s death not being an accident; naturally she’d like an opportunity of putting an indirect answer of her own forward.”

“I never thought of that,” Anthony confessed, his frown disappearing.

“Nor did I, till this minute,” Roger said candidly. “Still, it’s true enough. And there’s a little job for you, Anthony. I shan’t want you with me while I’m talking to Moresby; it’s going to be difficult enough to get anything out of him in any case, but your presence would probably dry him up altogether. So you might stroll along the cliffs, locate the Vanes’ house, and see if you can discover unobtrusively any information as to the girl’s movements or where I might be likely to catch her—outside the house, of course, if possible. What about that?”

“Yes, I could do that for you. And meet you later on?”

“Yes; just stroll back along the top of the cliffs again and I shall be sure to run into you. Well, there’s the sea not three hundred yards ahead, and nothing but nice, open downs along the top of the cliffs up there. We turn off to the right, I suppose, and you go straight along while I make for the edge just over there. I expect I shall be through in something under an hour. So long!”

As Anthony made his way leisurely over the springy turf in the direction in which he judged his objective to lie, he pondered with no little interest over the object of their journey down to this charming part of the world and its possible outcome. There was in his make-up none of that eager curiosity regarding his fellow-creatures, their minds and the passions which sway them that had led Roger, after the way had once been opened to him, to explore the vast field of criminology with all its intense and absorbing interest for the student of the human animal. Indeed the notion of nosing

out hidden facts and secret horrors ("like a bally policeman," as he had contemptuously phrased it to Roger over their lunch on the train) had at first actually repelled him; it was not until Roger had been at considerable pains to point out the moral duty which every living person owes to the dead that his eyes were opened to any wider conception of the idea. And even then, though admitting that there must be detectives just as much as there must be hangmen, he was quite firm in his gratitude to Providence that he at any rate was not one of them; nor could Roger, expatiating on the glories of a clever piece of deductive reasoning, the exquisite satisfaction of logical proof, the ardour of the chase with a human quarry (but none the less a quarry that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred deserved not a jot of mercy) at the end of it, move him an inch from this position.

It was this state of mind which had caused him to receive with ominous disapproval Roger's pointed information about the girl cousin and her ten thousand pounds. A girl, to Anthony's mind, should not be mentioned in the same breath as the word murder. Girls were things apart. Murder concerned men; not girls. Girls might be and very often were murdered, but not by other girls. If it were distasteful to hunt down a man suspected of murder, how impossible would it not be to harry a wretched girl in the same circumstances?

As his thoughts progressed with his steps, an idea began to form in Anthony's mind. He would not only seek out the whereabouts of Miss Cross, as Roger had asked him; he would contrive to speak to her for a minute or two and, if possible, drop a veiled warning as to the things that might be expected to happen—that were, in fact, even now happening—together with an equally veiled hint that at any rate he, Anthony Walton, was prepared to extend to her any help within his power, should she wish to accept it. After all, that was the least a chap could do. It was the only decent thing. Ten to one she wouldn't need anything of the sort, but the offer—yes, of course it was the only decent thing to do. Girls were weak, helpless things. Let them know they've got a man behind them (even a perfect stranger if the case is serious enough to warrant it) and it makes all the difference in the world to 'em. Naturally!

In the glow of this resolution Anthony had unconsciously directed his steps toward the sea, so that he was now striding along the very edge of the cliffs. Coming to his senses with a jerk, he pulled up short and looked inland. Not five hundred yards to his right there stood, in a large fenced area which evidently stretched to the road half-a-mile away, a big red house. As the landlord of the inn had said, there was no mistaking it. Anthony gazed at it for a few moments without moving; now that he was face to face with it, the task of penetrating its purlieus and demanding speech with an unknown lady in order to warn her against dangers which quite probably did not exist at all, suddenly took on a somewhat formidable aspect.

His eyes left its red roof and began, probably with an instinctive idea of looking for help, to sweep the remainder of the view, arriving in due course at the edge of the cliff just in front of him. At this point Anthony started violently, for seated on a small

grassy ledge not a dozen feet below the cliff top, which was crumbled away at the point to form a steep but not impossible slope down, was a girl who was occupied in gazing as hard at Anthony as he had been gazing at the house. As his glance at last fell upon her she also started, coloured faintly, and hurriedly transferred her eyes to the horizon in front of her.

On an impulse Anthony stepped forward and raised his hat.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I am looking for Dr. Vane's house. Could you tell me if that is it?"

The girl twisted half round to face him. She wore no hat, and the sun glinted on her dark hair, unshingled and twisted in two coils on either side of her head; the eyes with which she looked at Anthony were large and brown, and the simple little black frock she was wearing suited her lithe, graceful body so well that one would have said she should never wear anything else.

"I thought you must be," she said calmly. "Yes, it is. Did you want to see anyone in particular?"

"Well, yes; I— That is, I rather wanted to see Miss Cross."

The girl suddenly stiffened. "I am Miss Cross," she said coldly.

CHAPTER III.
INSPECTOR MORESBY IS RELUCTANT

The village of Ludmouth lies about half a mile back from the sea. At the nearest point to the village, where Roger and Anthony had left the road to strike across open country, the water had broken in upon the stern lines of the high cliffs which form the coast-line for several miles in either direction. The result is a tiny little inlet, almost completely circular in shape, which has been dignified by the name of Ludmouth Bay.

At either horn of this minute bay, which could hardly have been more than a couple of hundred yards wide, the cliffs rise almost sheer to a height of at least a hundred feet, to sink gradually down as they follow the bay's curve into a strip of sandy beach at the innermost edge, whence a steep track leads up to the village on the high ground behind. It is a charmingly picturesque spot and, lying as it does a little way off the beaten track, has not yet been spoiled (except for occasional excursion parties on bicycles from the neighbouring town of Sandsea, half-a-dozen miles away to the West) by the ubiquitous tripper; for the roads on all sides are too steep and too dangerous for char-à-bancs—a matter of much comfort to those of the inhabitants who keep neither public-houses nor banana shops.

The cliffs which stretch toward Sandsea face the open sea with considerably less frowning austerity than those to the East; they slope slightly backward instead of dropping sheer, and are so irregular and split up into huge boulders, clefts and rocky knobs, as to be by no means impossible for a determined man to climb. About a third of the way down their face they bear a narrow ledge, which proceeds more or less level for a considerable distance and has been turned, by means of a flight of steps cut in the rock at either end, into a pathway. At one time this pathway had been in some favour among the lads of the village as a place from which to fish when the tide was high; but customs change even in Ludmouth, and nowadays anyone in search of solitude could usually be sure of finding it here. To add to its advantages in this respect, a bulge in the rock just above served to hide it completely for nearly its whole length from the eyes of anybody standing on the top of the cliff overhead. Inspector Moresby, sitting on a low boulder at a spot where the ledge widened out to a depth of nearly a dozen feet, could be observed from nowhere except the open sea.

Inspector Moresby was as unlike the popular idea of a great detective as can well be imagined. His face resembled anything but a razor, or even a hatchet (if it must be compared with something in that line, it was far more like a butter-knife); his eyes had never been known to snap since infancy; and he simply never rapped out remarks—he just spoke them. Let us not shirk the fact: a more ordinary-looking and ordinarily behaved man never existed.

To proceed to details, the inspector was heavily-built, with a grizzled walrus moustache and stumpy, insensitive fingers; his face habitually wore an expression of

bland innocence; he was frequently known to be jovial, and he bore not the least malice toward any of his victims.

At the moment of our introduction to him he was gazing with an appearance of extreme geniality, his chin on his knuckles and one elbow perched on either knee, at a small rowing-boat half-a-mile out at sea; but his expression was not inspired by any feeling of affectionate regard for the boat's horny-handed occupant. He was, indeed, quite unaware of the boat's existence. He was engaged in wondering very intensely how a lady could have managed to fall accidentally off this ledge at the particularly broad part where he was now sitting; and why, if the lady had not fallen off accidentally but had been committing suicide, she should have done so with a large button from somebody else's coat tightly clenched in her right hand.

Quite an interesting problem, Inspector Moresby had decided; interesting enough, at any rate, to call him over semi-officially that morning from Sandsea, where he had been in the middle of his annual holiday with his wife and two children, to look into the matter a little further pending instructions from Scotland Yard and the county police authorities.

The sound of footsteps advancing along the path from the East caused him to glance up sharply, his face just a shade less genial than usual. The next moment a stockily-built man, hatless and wearing a pair of perfectly shapeless grey flannel trousers and a disreputable old sports coat, and smoking a short-stemmed pipe with an enormous bowl, came into sight round a bend in the path, walking rapidly.

The newcomer slowed up at sight of the inspector and glanced at him with an air of elaborate carelessness. A look of equally elaborate incredulity appeared on his face, then he smiled widely and hurried forward with outstretched hand.

"Great Scott, Inspector Moresby! Well, fancy seeing you here, Inspector! You remember me, don't you? My name's—"

"Mr. Sheringham! Of course I remember you, sir," returned the inspector warmly, shaking the other's hand with great heartiness. "Shouldn't be likely to forget you after enjoying your books so much, you know, let alone the way you astonished us all at the Yard over that business at Wychford. Let's see now, it was with Mr. Turner of the *Courier*, wasn't it?"

"That's right. The 'Hattan Garden jewel case,' as the papers called it. Well, Inspector, and what are you doing in this peaceful part of the world?"

"I'm on my holiday," replied the inspector with perfect truth. "Staying over at Sandsea with the wife and children."

"Oh, yes," said Roger innocently.

"And how do you come here, sir? Holidaying too?"

Roger winked broadly. "Me? Oh, no. I'm down here in pursuit of a new profession that's just been thrust upon me."

"Indeed, sir? What's that?"

"Well, to put it quite bluntly, I'm down here to ask Inspector Moresby on behalf of the *Courier* what he's got to tell me about a lady who fell off the cliff somewhere about here a day or two ago, and why such an important person as he should be so interested in an ordinary accident."

The inspector rubbed his chin with a rueful grin. "And I'd just strolled over here from Sandsea to get away from the crowds for a bit!" he deplored innocently. "I've only got to yawn at the wrong time, and there's half-a-dozen gentlemen of your new profession round the next minute asking what the significance is."

"Going to have a nice nap before you go back to Sandsea?" Roger asked with a twinkle in his eye.

"A nap?"

"Yes; at least, I don't suppose you booked that room at the Crown just to brush your hair in, did you?"

The inspector chuckled appreciatively. "Got me there, sir! Well, I may be staying over here for a day or two, yes. Even accidents can have their interesting side, you know, after all."

"Especially an accident that isn't an accident, eh? Come on, Inspector; you can't put me off like that, you know. I'm developing a nose like a bloodhound's for this sort of thing, and it's busy telling me very hard that you've got something up your sleeve. What's the idea? Can't you give me a pointer or two?"

"Well, I don't know that perhaps I mightn't. I'll think it over."

"Can't you do it now? Just a few words to send the *Courier* before the other johnnies turn up. I'll get 'em to splash your name all over it, if that's any good to you. Come now!"

The inspector considered. He was never averse to having his name splashed about in an important paper like the *Courier* if the circumstances warranted it. As long as the bounds of discretion were not overstepped a little publicity never did a police officer any harm, and it has frequently done him a great deal of good.

"Well, without saying too much, I don't mind telling you that there *are* one or two suspicious circumstances, Mr. Sheringham," he admitted at length. "You see, the lady was supposed to have been alone at the time when she fell over here."

"At this very spot, I take it?" Roger put in.

"At this very spot. But I'm not at all sure—not at *all* sure!—that she was alone. And that's really all I can say at present."

"Why do you think she wasn't?"

"Ah!" The inspector looked exceedingly mysterious. "I can't go so far as to tell you that, but I think you can let your readers know that I'm not speaking altogether at random."

"'Inspector Moresby, who has the matter in hand, intimated that he has discovered an important clue. While not at liberty to disclose the precise nature of this, he assured me that important developments may be expected shortly,'" Roger intoned solemnly.

"Something like that," the inspector laughed. "And of course I needn't point out to a gentleman like you how improbable it would be for anyone to fall over accidentally just here where this ledge is so deep."

Roger nodded. "Suicide, by any chance?"

"May have been," agreed the inspector in a perfectly expressionless voice.

"But you're quite sure it wasn't!" Roger smiled. "Eh?"

The inspector laughed again. "I'll be able to let you know a bit more later on, no doubt, sir. In the meantime—" He paused significantly.

"In the meantime you'd be very much obliged if I'd stop these awkward questions and leave you in peace again? I get you, Inspector. Very well. But you don't mind if I just have a look round here before I go, do you?"

"Of course not, Mr. Sheringham," said the inspector heartily. "By all means."

It was with a mild feeling of resentment, however, in spite of the inspector's friendly reception of him, that Roger embarked upon a cursory examination of the ledge on which they were standing. It was more in the nature of a demonstration than anything else, for he knew perfectly well that there would be nothing for him to find; Inspector Moresby would have seen to that. No doubt it was perfectly right and proper to withhold from him the clues which he had most certainly discovered—no doubt at all. But Roger did think the man might have treated him somewhat differently from an ordinary reporter, especially after his reference to Wychford. It was annoying in a way; decidedly annoying. And still more annoying was the fact that he had nothing whatever to be annoyed about. In the inspector's eyes he was a reporter, and that was all there was to it; he had come down here as a reporter, he was acting as a reporter, he *was* a reporter. Hell!

As he had expected, the ledge yielded nothing at all.

"Humph!" he observed, straightening up from a boulder behind which he had been peering. "Nothing much here. And no signs of a struggle either."

"There wouldn't be, on this rocky surface," the inspector pointed out kindly. "Too hard to take impressions, you see."

"Yes, that idea occurred to me," Roger remarked a trifle coldly. He walked over to the western end of the ledge, where it narrowed down rapidly into a pathway not more than four or five feet wide, and began to stroll along it.

He had scarcely covered half-a-dozen paces before the inspector's voice pulled him up with a jerk. "Not that way, if you want to get back, sir. I shouldn't go that way if I were you; it's very much longer. You'll find the way you came a good deal shorter."

Roger started slightly. "Oho, old war-horse!" he murmured to himself. "So the ears are pricking, are they?" He turned about and scrutinised the inspector with interest. "Now I wonder just exactly why you don't want me to go this way, Inspector?"

"It's no matter to me, sir," returned the inspector very innocently. "I was just trying to save you a bit of a walk round, that's all."

“I see. But do you know, I think I should like a bit of a walk round,” Roger remarked with some care. “I feel it would do me good. Clear my brain, and all that. Good-bye, Inspector; see you later, no doubt.” And he set off again, though more slowly this time, in the confident expectation of being called back once more.

He was not disappointed.

“I see I shall have to tell you,” said the inspector’s resigned voice behind him. “But you understand, I don’t want this mentioned yet awhile, sir. I’m not scaring my bird just at present if I can help it—always provided there is one, of course. Come with me, and I’ll show you.”

He led the way a few yards farther along the path and paused in front of a wide patch of dry mud. Plainly marked in the mud were the imprints of two pairs of feet, both women’s, one pair decidedly larger than the other; the deep impressions of the high heels were clean and distinct.

“Oho!” said Roger softly, staring hard.

“Yes, that’s why I said the lady wasn’t alone,” the inspector pointed out. “I’ve ascertained pretty certainly that she came along from this end, you see, and these marks were made yesterday morning or thereabouts. It’s a bit of luck that they haven’t been obliterated since, but everyone else seems to have come and gone from the other end as it’s so near the steps. I’ve tried the shoes she was wearing, by the way, and they fit exactly in the smaller impressions. That’s nothing like so important as the story-books make out, of course (I dare say there are at least twenty pairs of shoes even in this small place which would fit one or other of those prints); but it’s a point worth mentioning for all that.”

Roger turned eagerly from his contemplation of the mud. “This is jolly significant, Inspector; anyone can see that. But it doesn’t absolutely destroy the accident theory, does it? Not alone. No, I’m ready to bet you’ve got something else up your sleeve as well.”

“Well, perhaps I have, sir,” twinkled the inspector, who was not feeling inclined to talk about coat-buttons just at the moment. “Perhaps I have. But you must take it from me that this is all I can tell you for the moment, and that last bit isn’t for publication yet awhile either, you won’t forget.”

They turned and walked back to the ledge again.

“Where was the body found?” Roger asked. “In the water?”

“No, a couple of feet above high-water mark. You see that big rock down there—the one with the seaweed half-way over the top and a bunch of yellow limpets on this side? Well, wedged between that and the smaller one this side of it.”

“I see,” said Roger thoughtfully, gauging the distance from the edge of the ledge. A person tumbling straight over the edge would miss it by feet; quite a respectable little jump would be needed to reach it. A jump, or—a push! Furthermore, there was, straight down below the ledge, a deep pool among the rocks into which anybody just tumbling over must inevitably have fallen. Mrs. Vane’s body had cleared the pool and

landed on the boulders beyond it. The inference was obvious; any question of an accident was now almost definitely ruled out. It was a matter of suicide or murder.

Roger turned to the inspector. “There’s been a post mortem, I suppose?”

“Yes. This morning.”

“Were any bones broken?”

The inspector smiled. “Oh, yes; plenty. She hadn’t been murdered anywhere else and put there, if that’s what you’re getting at.”

“It did cross my mind,” Roger smiled back. “I needn’t ask whether anyone saw anything from the sea?”

“No, I was making enquiries on those lines this morning, myself. Unfortunately there don’t seem to have been any boats out here at all just then. But the old fisherman who subsequently discovered the body seems to think he heard a scream coming from this direction about an hour beforehand; in fact, he says that’s probably what made him look over here as he was rowing past. But he didn’t pay any attention to it at the time, thinking it was some dratted girl being tickled—his own words, by the way.”

“That’s interesting,” observed Roger, the light in his eye belying his laconic words. “By the way, I suppose you’ve been down to those rocks?”

“No, sir, I’m afraid I haven’t,” said the inspector a little guiltily. “I should have done, I know, but I’m not built for climbing down from here, and I don’t seem to have had time to get round there in a boat. In any case, I’m pretty sure there’d be nothing to find. The constable who recovered the body brought her hand-bag and her parasol, and he said he’d had a good look round. Strictly between ourselves, Mr. Sheringham, I was going to assume that his eyes are as good as mine; but don’t put anything about that in the *Courier*.”

“I’ll have to think that over,” Roger laughed. “Anyhow, I’m a man of stern duty: I’m going to see if I can scramble down and poke round. I know there won’t be anything to find, but it’s the sort of thing that gives one a lot of satisfaction afterward to have done.”

“Well, don’t you stumble and pitch on the rocks too,” said the inspector humorously. “Somebody might come along and accuse me of things.”

The way down was not nearly so difficult as it looked from above. Everywhere the face of the cliff was so seamed and fissured that foothold was easy, while half-way down a great piled-up pyramid of boulders provided a kind of giant’s staircase tolerably simple to negotiate. Within five minutes of leaving the inspector, Roger was standing on the big rock beside which Mrs. Vane’s body had been found.

For some minutes he poked about, peering into pools and religiously exploring the recesses of every cranny, while the inspector kept up a running commentary upon the habits of crabs, lobsters and other sea-going creatures which lurk in dark holes awaiting an opportunity to deal drastically with exploratory hands; then he stood up and swept a brief glance round before beginning the climb back.

“No,” he called up to the inspector, who had just finished recounting an anecdote about the grandfather of a friend of his who had been stung to death by a jellyfish while paddling among the rocks off Sandsea. “Nothing here! Now tell me a story about the great-aunt of another friend of yours who fell down a hundred feet when rock-climbing in Cumberland. I shall be ripe for something like that in about five minutes, when I’m clinging on to that last bit of cliff up there with my teeth and eyebrows.”

The obliging inspector instantly embarked on the anecdote required, and at the same moment Roger, in mid-stride between two boulders, noticed something white glistening below him. Action was almost instinctive.

“Hullo!” exclaimed the inspector in concern, breaking off his narrative abruptly. “Hurt yourself?”

Roger picked himself up slowly and brushed a little green slime off his trousers with his hands. “No, thanks,” he called back cheerfully. “Not a bit!” And he went on brushing himself with his hands.

He couldn’t use his handkerchief, because that was lying in his breast pocket, wrapped about the piece of paper on top of which he had skilfully stage-managed his fall.

CHAPTER IV.
ANTHONY INTERVIEWS A SUSPECT

Anthony had not had very much experience with women. In the brief instant after the girl had spoken it occurred to him with some force that his ideas on the subject might require drastic revision. Women were not necessarily weak, helpless creatures. Names such as Joan of Arc, Boadicea, Florence Nightingale, Queen Elizabeth, occurred to him with startling rapidity. Were they weak, helpless creatures? They were not. Nor was the girl who was standing in front of him and regarding him now with cold, haughty eyes. Anybody less weak and helpless, anybody more obviously capable of looking after herself could hardly have existed.

"I am Miss Cross," she repeated in frigid tones. "What do you want?"

Anthony's tongue seemed to have become jammed. His mission, which had seemed a moment before so altogether right and proper, suddenly took on the aspect of the most fatuous thing ever conceived by misguided human mind. Even to connect this beautiful, proud creature with the mere idea of bare self-interest appeared a kind of blasphemy.

"Oh, I—I wanted to speak to you for a minute," he managed to stammer. "But it doesn't matter." At this point Anthony ought to have turned about and run off at top speed with his tail between his legs, making a noise like a flat pancake. But he couldn't. By some curious action of nature his feet seemed to have taken root in the ground.

"Are you connected with the police?" the girl asked with incredible scorn.

"Great Heavens, no!" cried Anthony, genuinely shocked. "I should think not! Great Scott, no! Good Lord, no!"

The girl's uncompromising attitude relaxed slightly. "Then why did you want to see me?" she asked, as if very few people except the police ever wanted to see *her*.

"Well, it was just about something I thought I ought to tell you," Anthony mumbled. "But it doesn't matter. I see that now. It doesn't matter a bit."

Curiosity could be seen struggling with resentment in the girl's face. Strangely enough, curiosity won.

"You don't mean to tell me that you've come all this way out to speak to me, and now you've got here you've decided that it doesn't matter?" she said, and actually a faint hint of the merest shadow of a suspicion of a smile flitted for a quarter-of-a-second into and out of her eyes.

"Now I've seen you, I'm quite sure it doesn't matter, Miss Cross," Anthony said simply.

"Well, thank Heaven my appearance seems to impress somebody favourably," murmured the girl wearily, more to herself than the other, and for an instant the

mantle of pride she had been wearing seemed to drop from her and she looked utterly forlorn and miserable.

Anthony was emboldened into a sudden decision. “I’ll tell you why I came, Miss Cross, after all. I just came to say that if you wanted any help in the present circumstances, I should be very proud to— That is to say, I should like you to know that—I mean—” He ceased floundering, for the girl’s eyes were regarding him steadily with an expression in their depths which he was finding peculiarly disconcerting.

“I’m afraid I don’t understand you,” she said haughtily. “I was not aware that I needed any ‘help.’”

“No, of course not,” Anthony stammered. “Naturally not! I was only thinking that—”

“And I must decline to discuss my private affairs with a stranger! So if there is nothing else—” She paused, obviously waiting for him to go.

Anthony felt himself becoming annoyed. He knew that his recent embarrassment had made him look a fool and he resented the fact; he knew that his motive in seeking speech with this girl had been a completely altruistic one and here she was treating it as a piece of unwarrantable impertinence, and he resented that still more.

“In that case,” he said stiffly, “there is nothing more to be said, and I must apologise for bothering you. Though I think you should understand,” he added on the impulse of the instant by way of a parting shot as his temper momentarily got the better of his manners, “I think you should understand that possibly your private affairs will soon be becoming of some interest to the public at large, Miss Cross.”

The girl coloured violently and for a moment seemed incapable of speaking. Her eyes blazed, she clinched her small fists by her sides and her dark head was flung back as if to meet an actual attack.

“If you’ve come here to insult me—” she choked out.

“But I haven’t!” said Anthony in considerable alarm at this unexpected result of his thrust. “I simply meant that I’ve come down here with a friend of mine who’s working for the *Daily Courier* and he said something about getting you to give him an interview. I thought you ought to know.”

As abruptly as it had arisen the girl’s anger disappeared and something very like fear took the place of the fire in her eyes. She stared at Anthony widely.

“A—a *reporter?*” she muttered. “Good Heavens, has it come to that now?”

Men are curious creatures. A moment ago Anthony was severely annoyed and wanted nothing better than to make this extremely crushing young lady severely annoyed too. The instant he had succeeded in doing so, he had been filled with alarm. Now that he had changed her mood once more, from anger to fear, he began to feel the worst kind of inhuman brute imaginable.

“No, but look here,” he said eagerly, “there’s nothing to be alarmed about. They always do it, you know. Interviews and all that. He’s an awfully nice chap too. Roger

Sheringham, the novelist, you know. Cousin of mine, as a matter of fact. I dare say he won't try to see you at all if you don't want him to. Sure he won't! I'll tell him, shall I? Dash it all, there are crowds of other people he can interview if he must interview somebody. I was against it at the time, to tell you the truth, but he thought you might want to be interviewed for some reason or other. I'll tell him, Miss Cross. Don't you bother about that. I'll see it's all right."

It was doubtful if the girl had understood a single word beyond the general drift of what Anthony was saying. She continued to stare at him; but mechanically, as if paying attention only to her own thoughts. When next she spoke her voice was under control again, though her words were a little halting.

"Then am I to understand that—that the London papers are taking an interest in—in my cousin's death?" she asked.

"I'm afraid they are," said Anthony humbly, apologising for the London paper *en masse*.

The girl shifted her gaze and contemplated the horizon with unseeing eyes, busy again with her thoughts. Anthony, judging he had received permission to exist a little longer, made advantageous use of his reprieve by contemplating her.

She really was extraordinarily pretty, he had no difficulty in deciding. He liked her slimness and grace, he liked the way her head was set on her neck, he liked the way her black hair curled over her ears, he liked her wrists and her small feet, he liked—But why reduce Margaret Cross to a catalogue? There was nothing about her Anthony did not like. When he got back to his lodgings he would probably think this over and the realisation would suddenly strike him that this was the one girl in the world for him—expressly designed and manufactured by a thoughtful Providence for the sole purpose of delighting, harassing, maddening and ultimately very greatly gratifying one Anthony Walton, bachelor. The realisation had already struck him exactly twenty-three times before and twenty-three times he had mistaken the intentions of Providence; but this time it was the *real* thing. It always was.

Anthony continued his contemplation, each second more raptly than before.

Suddenly the girl appeared to come to a decision. She turned to him with an impulsive movement, and to his relief Anthony saw that she was smiling.

"Will you come and sit down here a minute, Mr.—?"

"Walton!" Anthony supplied hastily.

"Mr. Walton. I owe you an enormous apology, I'm afraid. It was very kind indeed of you to think of coming along to give me warning. I was a pig to you."

"Not a bit," Anthony averred, scrambling eagerly down the little bank to join her on the little grassy ledge a dozen feet down from the cliff's lip. "It was most natural. I ought to apologise if anyone should. Frightfully tactless."

"Not at all!" said the girl warmly. "It was entirely my fault. But if you'll forgive me, we'll say no more about it. Now let's sit down here and make ourselves comfortable, because I'm going to take you at your word."

"Do, please," Anthony said earnestly, as he seated himself on the warm, springy turf at her side. "I should be awfully proud."

The girl clasped her arms round her knees and stared out to sea. Anthony, glancing at her covertly, noted with approval the firm and resolute lines of her profile. She could not be more than one- or two-and-twenty, he decided, but even he could read an experience beyond her years of the world, its trials and its anxieties in the tiny lines of care about her mouth and the faint markings on her white forehead.

"You said something about my needing help," she said slowly, as if choosing her words with care. "Well, why should I be silly and pretend I don't? I do need it. You don't know me, and I don't know you; but I feel I can trust you, and there's nobody else to whom I can speak. Not a single soul. I suppose you know that—that—"

"Yes," Anthony interrupted gently. "I think I know all the facts."

"I supposed so, or you wouldn't have said that." She fixed her big, sorrowful brown eyes on Anthony's face. "But what you don't know, Mr. Walton, is that a police inspector from Scotland Yard was with me for nearly two hours this morning, asking me the most *horrible* questions!"

A cold hand seemed to lay itself over Anthony's heart. "I say, was he really?" he muttered. "No, I didn't know that."

The girl nodded. She opened her mouth to speak again, but her lips trembled and she turned her head quickly away. A little quiver shook her body. Then suddenly the control that had borne her up all this time, ever since that dreadful interview in the morning, gave way before Anthony's silent sympathy. She buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"He seems to think—oh, the most awful things!" she sobbed.

Anthony stared at her in dismay. It was bad enough that she should have burst into tears at all, without the terrible significance of her last words. He was certain that Margaret Cross was not the sort of person to give way to tears unless matters had reached an acute crisis; the fact that she had done so impressed him with the seriousness of the situation even more than had her decision to confide in himself, a complete stranger. She must be not only utterly alone in the world; she was very nearly at the end of her tether as well.

Masculine sympathy with distressed femininity is nearly always inarticulate (distrust it when it is not!), but fortunately it has resource at its command far superior to mere words. Anthony did not stop to think. He acted instinctively. Putting his arm about her he drew her toward him without a word and laid her head on his shoulder. Almost gratefully she buried her face in the hollow of it like a small child seeking consolation from its mother and continued to weep. Anthony had the wisdom to let her go on doing so without attempting a single word of clumsy consolation—though indeed it is doubtful whether he would have been able to do so had he wished, for he was vaguely feeling himself almost sanctified by contact with something rather holy and, for such an outwardly unemotional Briton, there was a most unusual lump in his

throat as he looked down on the sleek dark head sheltering against his rough coat and felt the sobs shaking the slim body he held in his arms.

By degrees the girl's weeping subsided. Her form ceased to quiver and she gently disengaged herself from Anthony's encircling arm.

"I'm a fool," she said, looking at him with rather a watery smile. "Is my nose disgustingly red?"

"Not a bit!" Anthony lied stoutly, considerably relieved by the smile. "It's ripping."

Margaret dived into her bag and produced a little mirror. Sounds of dismay issued from her, and a powder-puff was hastily brought into action.

"That's better," she observed a minute or two later, scrutinising her image with close attention. She turned and faced Anthony with a frank smile that was a tacit acknowledgment of the bond between them. "Will you ever forgive me for making such an idiot of myself?"

"Look here," Anthony said slowly, "I don't want to butt in on anything you don't want to tell me, but wouldn't you like to tell me the whole story? You know I'm only too anxious to do anything I possibly can to help you, and matters seem to be a bit—well, a bit more serious even than I'd thought. If you would like to let me know the whole circumstances—?"

He paused, and the girl nodded understandingly. "You mean it's no good asking you to help me unless you know what I'm up against?" she said thoughtfully. "Well, that stands to reason. Of course I'll tell you. I was going to before as a matter of fact, only I—" She left the sentence unfinished and, hunching her knees, resumed her former pose and gazed out to sea.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" Anthony asked, producing his pipe.

"Of course not. In fact I rather feel I need a cigarette myself. No, don't you bother!" she added quickly, as Anthony felt in his pockets. "I've got some of my own particular brand here, and I hardly ever smoke anything else."

She produced a cigarette-case from her bag, and Anthony held a match for her, lighting his own pipe from it afterward. She drew one or two deep inhalations and sighed contentedly.

"Well, about myself; there's really very little to tell you. Four months ago I was in London, broke to the wide—as I had been off and on for the last seven years. My father was an officer in the regular army; he was killed in France in 1917, when I was fifteen years old. I inherited about two hundred pounds from him and, of course, a pension; the pension was just enough to keep body and soul together if one lived on rice and cold water, but not much more." She paused for a moment as if in thought.

"Unfortunately," she went on with a touch of cynicism, "it appears that my father had 'married beneath him.' I don't remember my mother at all (she died when I was a baby), but I believe that she was the daughter of a fraudulent bucket-shop proprietor in Liverpool who had served two terms of imprisonment and my father was more or

less entrapped into marriage with her when he was a young subaltern. He never hinted a word of all this to me, by the way; don't think that. He was a dear. But it's been rubbed into me pretty thoroughly since by other charming people."

"I say," Anthony put in in acute distress, "please don't tell me anything you'd rather not. I mean—!"

"Why not?" asked the girl in a hard voice. "Why shouldn't I tell you everything? That police inspector seems to know all about it. Probably it will be in all the papers to-morrow."

"But—" Anthony shifted his position and relapsed into uncomfortable silence.

"Well, the consequence was that my father had been cut off by his family. They wouldn't have anything more to do with him. Nor would they with me. One of his brothers sent five hundred pounds to daddy's solicitors to provide for my education and keep me till I was old enough to earn my own living, but that was as far as any of them would go. I'm not complaining; in the circumstances it was remarkably generous of him. That money, with my own two hundred, kept me till I was eighteen, after that I had to earn my own living. You've probably heard that girls had some difficulty in getting jobs after the war. It's perfectly true. I was trained as a shorthand-typist, but unfortunately nobody seemed to want a shorthand-typist. But I got work all right. I had to. During the last three years I've been a governess, a shop-assistant, a waitress and a parlour-maid."

"Good God!" Anthony breathed.

The girl laughed suddenly with genuine amusement. "Oh, you needn't pity me for the last. That was the best of the lot. I can't think why I didn't try it sooner. Governessing was the worst I think; but they do work waitresses rather hard, I must admit. Well, that sort of thing went on for three years, as I told you; and then I was dismissed from my proud position of parlour-maid by an irate lady because her husband wanted to kiss me and was tactless enough to try with the door open. I boxed his ears for her, but apparently that wasn't enough, so I was turned out, with a month's wages in my bag. I'd just come to an end of them and was beginning to wonder rather desperately where the next was to come from, when I got a letter from Elsie—Mrs. Vane, you know."

Anthony nodded. "Your cousin?"

"Yes; her mother was my mother's sister. I'd never seen her in my life—hardly even heard of her, in fact—but to my astonishment she said that she'd heard I was having rather a rough time and, as she had plenty of money of her own, would like to extend a helping hand, so to speak. Anyhow, the upshot was that she invited me to come and live here, nominally as her companion and with a quite generous salary."

"Jolly decent of her," Anthony commented.

The girl glanced at him rather queerly. "Yes, wasn't it? And very extraordinary too. But there was something more extraordinary to come. A day or two after I had arrived she broke the news to me quite casually that she had made a new will that

morning leaving all her money and everything else unconditionally to me—ten thousand pounds or more, to say nothing of her jewellery. As you can imagine, I was absolutely astounded."

"I should think so. But how topping of her!"

"Very," said the girl drily. "But you see the position it puts me in—combined with my excellent grandfather. Rather—difficult, to say the least, isn't it? And the trouble is that I've simply nobody to advise me. The solicitor who managed my affairs is dead; George—Dr. Vane—is—well, he's not the sort of person one could talk to about this sort of thing; nor is Miss Williamson, his secretary. I'm absolutely alone." She tossed her cigarette out over the sea and laughed a little bitterly. "So now perhaps you can understand why I'm ready to take into my confidence the very first person who comes along—though even that doesn't excuse my howling on his shoulder, I'm afraid."

"It's a perfectly damnable position," growled Anthony. "I'd like to wring that inspector's neck. But one thing's perfectly clear. You must talk all this over with my cousin. He'll help you if anyone can, and I'm sure he won't use anything you tell him for the *Courier* without your consent."

The girl nodded slowly. "Ye-es, perhaps that would be best. Roger Sheringham, you said, didn't you? I've read some of his books. I think he must be rather a nice person."

"He is. He'd talk the hind-leg off a dead mule, but he's a thoroughly decent chap. Got a half-blue at Oxford, you know. Well, look here, I was to meet him on these cliffs about this time; supposing if I dash off and collect him and bring him along right away? I don't think we've any too much time to waste, you know."

"You're awfully kind, Mr. Walton," said the girl gratefully. "I shall lie awake for hours to-night cursing myself for being such a perfect pig to you when you first arrived."

CHAPTER V.
ROGER TAKES UP THE CUDGELS

On the whole Roger was feeling not a little pleased with himself as he emerged on the top of the cliffs once more after his interview with Inspector Moresby. That the inspector had one or two facts up his sleeve (and probably highly important facts at that) was not a matter for doubt; on the other hand Roger had gleaned considerably more information than he had really expected. There was too at that moment reposing in his breast pocket the piece of paper he had picked up within a couple of yards of the spot where the body had been found, about the existence of which the inspector had not the slightest suspicion. Two people could play at the same game of withholding information! He began to walk rapidly in the direction in which he had arranged to meet Anthony.

Fifty yards ahead of him the ground rose to form a little hillock; once over that Roger felt that it would be safe enough to examine his find without fear of interruption. His hand was actually inside his pocket as he breasted the rise when the figure of Anthony appeared suddenly over the top. On seeing him Anthony broke into a run.

"Hullo, Anthony!" said Roger mildly. "You seem in a hurry."

"Look here," Anthony began breathlessly and without preamble. "Look here, I've seen Miss Cross and it's jolly serious. That infernal inspector's been up there and nearly frightened the life out of her. I want you to come along and speak to her. And let me tell you, Roger, that things are getting a bit thick. Anybody who's hinting things about that girl ought to be taken out and shot. The poor kid's—"

"Here, wait a minute!" Roger interrupted. "Let's get this straight. You've seen Miss Cross, have you?"

"Yes, and she's—"

"And she's a remarkably pretty girl, isn't she?"

Anthony stared. "How the devil did you know that?"

"Merely a simple piece of deductive reasoning," replied Roger modestly. "Now then, start at the beginning and tell me exactly what happened."

Rather more coherently this time, Anthony complied. He gave an account of his meeting with the girl, told how she had broken down (glossing as delicately as possible over the subsequent proximity of her dark head and his shoulder) and went on to give his highly interested listener a detailed synopsis of the story she had told him in order to spare her the pain of having to recount it a second time. This recital lasted them almost to the very spot where she was waiting, and Anthony had only just time to reiterate in a fierce undertone the promise he had given that they would do all in their power to help her and to demand that a similar promise should be given by

Roger himself within the first five minutes of the interview, before her black dress sprang into view on the little ledge just below them.

Roger was conducted down the bank and ceremoniously introduced and the three of them disposed themselves on the soft turf to discuss the situation.

"Now I want you to understand, Miss Cross," Roger said briskly after a few general remarks had been made, "that my cousin and I are entirely on your side." Roger had been as favourably impressed at first sight with this slender, courageous-looking, proud-spirited girl as had Anthony, and he was at no pains to attempt to disguise the fact. "There's no use pretending that this isn't a bad business. It is—more so than you know: and it may become even worse than that in the very near future."

"What do you mean, Mr. Sheringham?" asked the girl with anxiety. "How more so than I know?"

Roger deliberated. "Well I don't see that there can be any harm in telling you," he said gravely. "You're bound to know sooner or later. But please don't tell anybody else just yet awhile.—I'm afraid there can be very little doubt that your cousin's death was not an accident."

"You don't mean that—that—?" The girl broke off, white to the lips.

"I'm very much afraid so," Roger said gently. There was no need to mention the ugly word 'murder'; its implication was sufficiently obvious.

"Good God!" Anthony breathed, aghast. "Has that been definitely proved?"

"As definitely as matters. She wasn't alone when she met her death, for one thing, though it isn't known who was with her. And there are one or two other details too into which I needn't go now, small enough in themselves but uncommonly convincing in the mass. Anyhow, you can see that it's a really bad business. So if I put one or two questions to you, Miss Cross, you won't think me unnecessarily impertinent, will you?"

"Of course not," said the girl earnestly. "And I can't tell you how grateful I am for your kindness. But you won't—you won't put too much about me in the *Courier*, will you?"

"You can rely on my discretion," Roger smiled. "I'll see that you're not worried in that sort of way so far as I'm concerned at any rate; and I'll drop a word or two in season to any others of my kidney who follow me down here. Well now, first of all I want you to tell me exactly what happened on this walk you had with your cousin. Can you do that?"

The girl frowned in an effort of memory. "Yes, I think so. It was quite simple. We walked along the cliffs about a mile toward Sandsea and then turned round and came back; just before we got as far as this Elsie said she wanted to go over and speak to a Mrs. Russell, a neighbour, about some treat for the village children that they were getting up between them. She knew this was a favourite place of mine, so she asked me to wait for her here, and we could go back to the house for tea together."

"One minute," Roger interrupted. "Where does Mrs. Russell live?"

"About half-way between our house and the village."

"I see. So it was really out of her way to come back and pick you up here?"

"Yes, it was a little; but Elsie always liked walking along these cliffs. She nearly always went into the village this way instead of by the road."

"The road lying on the other side of the house from here, of course. Then is the Russells' house on the same road?"

"Yes, but the road winds toward the cliffs farther along, so it wouldn't take her so much out of her way to come back to me here as if it didn't."

"No, I see that. Yes?"

"Well, she didn't come back. I must have waited for nearly an hour and a half. Then, as it was past tea-time, I walked over to the house alone."

"Now, sitting down here, you couldn't see anybody walking along the cliff top, or they you, unless they happened to walk right over the top of this bank at the back here?"

"No."

"As a matter of fact, *did* anybody pass while you were here?"

"No, not a soul."

Roger frowned. "That's a pity. That means you can't actually prove that you were here during that time, can you?"

"If Miss Cross says she was here," Anthony put in warmly, "then she was here. That ought to be good enough for anyone."

"Except a court of law, Anthony. Courts of law are nasty, suspicious things, I'm afraid. By the way, did Mrs. Vane ever get to the Russells' house, Miss Cross?"

"No, she didn't; that's the extraordinary thing. In fact nobody seems to have seen her at all from the time she left me to the time her body was found."

"It's a nasty gap," Roger commented thoughtfully. "Isn't it rather curious that she should have been about here all that time without being seen? Aren't there usually plenty of people in the neighbourhood?"

"No, as a matter of fact there aren't. It's usually fairly deserted up here. Ours and the Russells' are the only two houses out this way, you see. And there's another point about that; anybody walking along the edge of the cliff can't be seen from the road except in one or two places, because of the high ground between, if you remember noticing it."

"Yes, that is so; you're right. Hullo, what's that bell?"

"That will be our dinner-bell," said the girl with a faint smile. "A most efficient one, isn't it?"

"Highly. Well, Miss Cross," Roger said, scrambling to his feet, "I don't think there's any need to keep you any longer just now, though there are one or two more things I shall want to ask you. Could you meet us here at say half-past ten to-morrow morning for more cross-examination, do you think?"

"Of course, Mr. Sheringham. I shall be only too pleased. And you will try to—to—"

"To throw a little fresh light on that hour and a half?" Roger suggested as he shook hands. "I promise you I will. That's the crux of the whole thing, isn't it? I'll do all I can, Miss Cross, you can be sure."

They climbed the little bank and Anthony, by a curious lapse of memory, appeared to forget that he had already shaken hands on the lower level; at any rate he did so again, even more warmly than before.

"It's a nasty business," Roger remarked as the two of them set out on their walk back to the inn. "Nastier than I let out. I didn't tell the little lady that the other person with Mrs. Vane was a woman, by the way."

"Was she?" said Anthony gloomily. "Hell!"

"Yes, I'll tell you what I managed to find out down there. Not much, but decidedly interesting. Mrs. Vane must have— By jove, I was nearly forgetting!"

"What?"

"Something I picked up near where the body was found—a bit of writing-paper. I haven't been able to look at it yet. It may be nothing, but on the other hand it may be something uncommonly important. Anyhow, let's have a look at it." And digging into his breast-pocket, Roger drew out his handkerchief and its precious contents.

"Looks a bit sodden," Anthony remarked, as the little ball of bluish-grey paper emerged from its covering.

"Naturally, as it's been in the water off and on for sixty odd hours or so," said Roger, straightening out the sodden little tangle with infinite care. It was a ticklish business, for the least false move would tear the flimsy stuff and it had to be unwrapped half-an-inch at a time.

"Can you make anything out?" Anthony asked eagerly, as the sheet was at last laid out flat on the palm of Roger's hand.

"It's a bit of ordinary notepaper," Roger murmured, peering down at it intently. "Good quality. Watermark a big crown and some kind of inscription. Ought to be easy enough to trace."

"Yes, but is there any writing on it?"

"There *has* been, but that's about as much as one can say. See these faint pen-marks? But I should think it's pretty well impossible to make out what was written on it."

"Then it's no use?" Anthony asked disappointedly.

"I wouldn't say that. An expert might be able to make them out. I suppose there *are* ways of testing this sort of thing. We'll see, anyhow. But we mustn't build any hopes on it. Ten to one it had nothing to do with Mrs. Vane at all, and even if it did it's another ten to one that it had nothing to do with what we're after. However, we'll take it back and see if it's possible to do anything with it."

Roger took off his hat and laid the paper carefully inside to shield it from the wind, and they resumed their journey.

"What did you think of Miss Cross?" Anthony asked very airily, gazing at the easy feats of a neighbouring gull with an appearance of intense interest.

"Oh, all right," Roger said with malicious indifference. "Perfectly ordinary sort of girl, I thought, didn't you?"

"Personally, she struck me as being rather an exceptional one," Anthony said coldly.

"Did she? Ah, well! Bit long in the nose, wasn't she?"

"Long in the nose!" exclaimed the indignant Anthony. "Why, her nose is absolutely—" He caught sight of Roger's grin and broke off abruptly. "Damn you!" he growled, flushing vividly.

"Ah, you young people!" Roger continued to grin. "Ah, youth, happy youth! Ah—"

"Roger, you ass, be serious for a minute. Do you think that girl's in any danger?"

"I do indeed," Roger said with a quick change to gravity. "At least, I don't know about danger, but I certainly think she's in a very awkward position. Very awkward indeed."

"But you don't think—you don't think there can be anything in—well, what the inspector seems to be thinking, do you?"

"You mean, that she pushed her cousin over the cliff?" amplified Roger, who was not a person to mince matters. "No, I don't think I do. I liked her, I must say—though that isn't anything to go by, is it?"

"It's a devil of a lot. And you really will do all you can to help clear her, Roger?"

"Of course I will. Haven't I told her so half-a-dozen times over?"

"Thanks, old man," said Anthony simply.

It was a slightly awkward moment. To tide it over Roger embarked upon a voluble account of his conversation with Inspector Moresby, what he had discovered and what he had not, which took them right up to the door of their inn.

"And that's the first thing we've got to discover, fair coz," he was saying vehemently as they crossed the threshold. "What old Moresby's got up his sleeve. And that's what I'm jolly well going to get out of him somehow, by hook, or even, if it comes to the point, by crook. And what's more, I think I see a way of going about it. So now for our four bedrooms and a little cold water. By Jove, Anthony, it's hot isn't it? What about a tankard apiece before we go upstairs?"

"How you do think of things!" was Anthony's strongly approving comment.

They adjourned briskly into the cool little bar.

"Mr. Moresby back yet, do you know?" Roger asked the landlord in a casual voice as he set the mighty tankard down on the counter after an initial gulp at its contents.

"No, sir," replied that mountainous man. "He said he'd be back for 'is supper round about eight o'clock."

"Well, we shall be ready for ours about that time too. You might as well serve all three in our sitting-room. And send me up a bottle of gin, half-a-dozen bottles of ginger-beer, a bottle of whisky, a couple of syphons of soda and a corkscrew. Can you manage that?"

"Yes, sir," said the landlord benevolently. "That I can."

"Excellent! I suppose it would be too much to ask if you've got any ice as well?"

"I have an' all, sir," replied the landlord with conscious pride. "I gets it three times a week from Sandsea in this 'ot weather. There's some come in this morning you can have, and welcome."

"But this is sheer epicureanism!" Roger cried.

"Yes, sir," said the landlord. "There's been two gents in this evening asking for rooms. London gents, by the look of 'em. I told 'em I 'adn't got any."

"That's right, landlord," Roger said with approval. "Speak the truth and shame the devil, you know."

"Yes, sir," said the landlord, and turned away to serve another customer.

"I say," Anthony asked hopefully as they climbed the stairs a few minutes later, "I say, are we going to make old Moresby tight?"

"Certainly not," said Roger with dignity. "I'm surprised at you, Anthony. Do I look the sort of person to interfere with the sobriety of the police in the execution of their duty?"

"Well, what's all that gin and stuff for, then?"

"To pour libations to the great and *puissante* Goddess of Bluff! Now then, Anthony, how many bedrooms would you like to sleep in to-night? One, two or three?"

CHAPTER VI.
AN UNWELCOME CLUE

Inspector Moresby, it has been said, was a genial man. He had no hesitation in falling in with Roger's suggestion that the three of them should sup together. Even a Scotland Yard detective is human, and Inspector Moresby very much preferred to spend his moments of leisure in the congenial company of his fellows than alone.

In the same way he had no hesitation in accepting a little gin before a meal. In yet once more the same way he had not the slightest hesitation in drinking some gin and ginger-beer with his supper because, as anyone knows, gin and ginger-beer with a lump of ice clinking invitingly against the glass is the greatest of all drinks on a hot day and has the Olympian nectar beaten to a standstill; thus far has civilisation progressed. And after a meal when, pleasantly tired and a pleasant hunger pleasantly allayed, one sprawls in a horsehair armchair and contemplates a case of stuffed birds, an iced whisky and soda by one's side is almost a *sine qua non*. Inspector Moresby *was* a genial man.

Roger had behaved with exemplary tact. Not a word about their common mission to Ludmouth had passed his lips. Instead, he had set out to be as entertaining as he possibly could; and when Roger set out to be entertaining he could prove a very good companion indeed. He had recounted numberless anecdotes about the humours of his own early struggles and experiences, and the inspector had been amused; he had recounted further anecdotes of the great people he had met and knew, all of whom he called by their Christian names, and the inspector had been impressed; he had kept a judicious eye on his victim's glass—or rather, succession of glasses, and the inspector had become mellowed. Roger loved the inspector, and the inspector loved Roger.

Roger chose his moment and struck.

"Look here, Inspector," he said quite casually, "about this Mrs. Vane business, by the way. I wish you'd look on me not as a reporter but as an amateur criminologist, extraordinarily interested in the way the police go about the solving of a mystery like this and only too ready to put any small brains I may have at their assistance. I do happen to be writing this thing up for a newspaper, it's true; but that's only by the way. I'm not a reporter by instinct or profession or anything else, and I only jumped at the chance of becoming one because it would give me first-hand information about a very interesting little mystery. Do you see what I mean?"

The inspector's eyes twinkled. "I think so, sir. You want me to take you into my confidence, don't you?"

"Something like that," Roger agreed. "And I must tell you that the balance won't be entirely on your side. I've got something rather important to offer you—a clue I found this afternoon under your very nose down among those rocks. I don't want to

hold it up or anything like that; but candidly, I don't want to give it away for nothing either. Can't we arrange a swap, so to speak?"

The inspector's eyes twinkled more merrily than ever. "I've been waiting for something like this ever since I came up here, Mr. Sheringham; though I didn't expect you to put it quite that way. I thought you'd just got me here to try to pump me in the ordinary way, as hundreds of new journalists have tried already before they found out it wasn't any use."

"Oh!" said Roger somewhat crestfallen. "Did you? But about this clue, I—"

"Lord, the number of clues I've had offered me in my time!" observed the inspector reminiscently. "Thousands of 'em! And not a single one worth a twopenny rap."

"Oh!" said Roger again. "Then there's nothing doing, I take it, in the confidence line?"

The inspector continued to chuckle for a moment; it pleased him mildly to score off Roger and he thought the latter deserved it. Even Anthony, in spite of his disappointment, could hardly repress a smile at that confident gentleman's discomfiture.

Then the inspector proceeded to relent. "However, I'm not saying there isn't any sense in what you said. There is. I know you're not an ordinary journalist. I know what you did at Wychford and I've seen by your articles in the *Courier* that you really are interested in this sort of thing for its own sake. So as long as I have your word that you won't publish anything that I want held up, perhaps I don't mind letting you in on a thing or two that I should keep back from anyone else, and even talking the case over with you as well. Though mind you, it's highly unprofessional conduct, as they say, and I should get into real hot water at the Yard if they ever came to hear of it."

"I say, that's awfully sporting of you, Inspector!" Roger cried with vast relief. "I quite thought you were going to turn me down. Yes, I promise you the Yard shan't hear of it, and of course I won't publish anything without your consent. It's a purely personal interest, you know."

"And you too, Mr. Walton? You agree to that?"

"Rather, Inspector! It's extraordinarily decent of you."

"Then let's hear about this clue of yours first of all, Mr. Sheringham, if you please."

Roger rose and went to the sideboard, from a drawer of which he produced the piece of paper, now almost dry. "I found this a couple of rocks away from where the body was lying. It may have nothing to do with the affair at all, of course, but there's always a chance. There's been writing on it, but it's quite obliterated. Can you make anything of it?"

The inspector took the bit of paper and bent over it; then he held it up to the light.

"I'll keep this, if I may," he said. "As you say, there's probably nothing in it, but I'll send it up to our man at the Yard and I think he'll be able to read it all right; at any

rate, we can't afford to neglect its possibilities." He laid the paper down on a table nearby and leaned comfortably back in his chair again. "So now you can fire away, Mr. Sheringham. I know you've got half a hundred questions on the tip of your tongue."

"At least that," Roger laughed, as he resumed his seat. "And I certainly would like to polish off a few of them in rather a hurry. I must get through to London on the telephone pretty soon and dictate my article, and I can take notes for it as we go along." He rummaged in a side-pocket and produced a pencil and note-book. "Now first of all, are you sure in your own mind that it's a case of murder and not accident or suicide?"

"Well, between ourselves, sir, I am. As sure, that is, as anyone can be in my line without absolutely convincing proof. But don't say that in your article. I shouldn't get further than 'suspicious circumstances' in that yet awhile."

Roger nodded. "Yes, I quite see that. By the way, that scream rather clinches it, doesn't it? I mean, if one allows that the distance of the body from the edge of the cliffs rules out any question of accident, the scream, equally seems to rule out suicide. A suicide wouldn't scream."

"That was my line of thought exactly," the inspector agreed.

"And you've also established the fact that she wasn't alone. Have you got any ideas who the second woman was?"

"I've got my suspicions," said the inspector guardedly. "I was up at the house for a goodish bit this morning," he went on, delicately shifting the ground of discussion. "Have you been along there?"

"No, not to the house, though I heard you had."

"You ought to go; I think you'd find it interesting. The household, I mean."

"As a matter of fact, I haven't felt quite hardened enough to my new profession yet. I don't think I could butt in on Dr. Vane and ask him for an interview just at present. Can't you tell me about them and save me the trouble?"

"Well, I daresay I could. There's not really much to tell you. But the doctor's a queer stick. Big man, he is, with a great black beard, and spends most of his time in a laboratory he's had fitted up at the back of the house. Research work of some kind. Bit brusque in his manner, if you understand me, and doesn't seem any too cut up by his wife's death—or doesn't show it if he is, perhaps I ought to say."

"Oh, he doesn't, doesn't he?"

"But I gather that the two of them didn't hit it off any too well together. That seemed the idea among the servants, anyhow. I had all of them up and questioned them this morning, of course. Then there's his secretary, a dry stick of a woman with pince-nez and short hair, who might be any age between thirty and fifty, and a cousin of Mrs. Vane's who's been living there for the last few months called Miss Cross. That's the girl who's come into all the money, as I expect you've heard."

"And the girl who was the last person apparently except one to see Mrs. Vane alive," Roger nodded. "Yes, I've seen her, had a chat with her in fact."

"Oh, you have, have you? And what did you think of her, Mr. Sheringham?"

"I don't know," Roger hedged. "What did you?"

The inspector considered. "I thought she was quite a nice young lady," he said carefully, "though perhaps a bit deeper than one might think—or than she'd like you to think, maybe. Did you get any information from her?"

"Look here, Inspector," Anthony burst out suddenly, "just tell me this, will you? Do you really honestly think that—"

"Shut up, Anthony, and don't be tactless!" Roger interposed hastily. "Did I get any information out of her, Inspector? Nothing more than you got yourself, I fancy. She told me that you'd been putting her through it."

"She's a very important person in the case," said the inspector with an apologetic air. "Last one to see Mrs. Vane alive, as you said just now."

"I didn't say that exactly," Roger remarked drily; "but let it pass. And you got no further impression from her than that she was a nice young lady and might be a bit deep?"

"Well I didn't say that, sir," ruminated the inspector. "No, I wouldn't say that at all. I got the impression that she wasn't over-fond of that cousin of hers, for one thing."

"Wasn't fond of her cousin?" Roger cried in surprise. "But Mrs. Vane had been extraordinarily kind to her. Taken her to live with them, paid her a generous salary probably for doing nothing, made a will in her favour! Why, she owed Mrs. Vane a tremendous lot!"

"Are we always over-fond of people we owe a tremendous lot to?" asked the inspector pointedly.

"I'm sure," Anthony began stiffly, "that Miss Cross—"

"Shut *up*, Anthony!—But why are you so sure about this, Inspector? You must have something more to go on than just an impression."

"I have, sir. What I learned from the servants. Mrs. Vane and Miss Cross used to quarrel quite a lot, I understand. It seems to have been a matter of common talk among the servants."

"Of course, if you take any notice of the gossip of servants," said Anthony with fine scorn, "I daresay you'd—"

"Anthony, *will* you shut up or have I got to send you to bed? For goodness' sake, help yourself to another drink and keep quiet."

"You've seen Miss Cross too, Mr. Walton, I take it?" observed the inspector mildly.

"Yes, I have," Anthony said shortly.

"A very pretty young lady," commented the inspector with vague application.

“Oh, by the way!” Roger exclaimed suddenly. “I was very nearly forgetting the most important question of all.”

“And what’s that, Mr. Sheringham?”

“Why, to ask you what you’ve got up your sleeve in the way of clues. You admitted this afternoon there were some things you wouldn’t tell me.”

“One,” acknowledged the inspector with a smile. “That’s all. A coat-button.” He felt in his pocket and produced a light-blue bone button with a white pattern, about an inch and a half in diameter, which he held out on the flat of his palm. “This was found clenched in the dead woman’s hand.”

Roger whistled softly. “I say, that is a clue and no mistake! The first really definite one there’s been, except those footprints. May I have a look at it?” He took the button from the other’s outstretched hand and examined it intently. “It wasn’t one of her own, by any chance?”

“No, sir; it wasn’t.”

“Have you found out whose it is?” Roger asked, looking up quickly.

“I have,” replied the inspector contentedly.

Anthony’s heart almost stopped beating. “Whose?” he asked in a strained voice.

“It’s a button off a sports-coat belonging to Miss Cross.”

For a moment there was a tense silence. Then Roger asked the question that was burning a hole in his brain.

“Was Miss Cross wearing the coat when she went out for her walk with Mrs. Vane?”

“She was, sir,” replied the inspector with a more serious air than he had yet displayed. “And when she got back to the house that button was missing from it.”

CHAPTER VII.
SIDELIGHTS ON A LOATHSOME LADY

"I tell you I don't *care!*" Anthony almost shouted. "To say that girl had anything to do with the wretched woman's death is too damned silly for words!"

"But I'm not saying so," Roger pointed out patiently. "I don't think she had, in spite of everything. What I am saying is that we can't dismiss the possibility of it in this cocksure way just because she's got a pretty face. The inspector isn't—"

"Blast the inspector!" observed Anthony savagely.

"Blast him by all means, but, as I was saying, he isn't by any means a fool, and it's quite obvious what his opinion about Mrs. Vane's death is at present. After all, you must face the fact that the evidence is absolutely overwhelming."

"If his opinion is that Miss Cross murdered her cousin, then he *is* a fool," growled Anthony finally; "and a damned fool at that."

It was the following morning, and the two men were walking along the top of the cliffs to keep their appointment with Margaret Cross. The inspector had betaken himself to bed on the previous evening soon after the bursting of his bombshell, and the discussion between Anthony and Roger had lasted well into the small hours of the morning, broken only by an interval of half-an-hour while Roger telephoned through to the *Courier*. It was still raging.

Anthony had refused point-blank to consider even the possibility that Margaret had not spoken the exact truth in every detail or had wilfully suppressed any material fact, while as for the only logical deduction to be drawn from the facts as they were then known, he would rather have been torn in pieces by red-hot pincers than admit it within the category of bare feasibilities. To Roger, who was no less anxious that the girl's name should be cleared, but had a livelier conception of the difficulties in the way of doing so, this attitude was a little trying. To Anthony's final remark he forbore to reply, only sighing gently to himself. It required an effort of will, but no good purpose would be served by quarrelling with Anthony, and Anthony was very ready to quarrel with someone. They traversed the rest of the journey in difficult silence.

Margaret Cross was waiting for them by the little ledge, her face anxious and bearing the marks of a sleepless night.

"Oh, I am glad to see you!" she exclaimed as she shook hands with Roger. "Really I feel as if you were the only friend I'd got in the world."

"Don't forget me, Miss Cross," Anthony smiled, shaking hands with her in his turn.

"No, of course not," said the girl in a voice that was neither enthusiastic nor chilling—just indifferent; and she snatched away the hand that Anthony was manifestly attempting to press and, turning ostentatiously back to Roger, began to question him eagerly as to whether anything fresh had transpired.

Over Anthony's face passed an expression such as might have been seen on the face of a dog which has put out a paw to toy with a fly and discovered it to be a wasp—hurt and yet puzzled. As Margaret Cross continued to display to him only her back the puzzled part of his expression gave way to resentment; as she made no effort to include him in her eager conversation, but on the contrary quite pointedly ignored him, resentment and chagrin alike were swallowed up by sheer annoyance. As ostentatiously as herself, he strolled a few paces away and began to amuse himself by throwing stones over the edge of the cliff. Anthony was sulking.

Had he been a little wiser, he might have felt flattered. As it was, how could he be expected to guess that to a young lady who is accustomed to pride herself not a little on her self-reliance and strength of mind, the thought of having been such a sloppy little idiot as to weep on the shoulder of a complete stranger and actually grovel before the protective feel of his unknown arm about her, might possibly be a singularly ignominious one? In which case, of course (so the older and wiser Anthony might have complacently assumed), her resentment, directed naturally against himself as the witness of her humiliation, would be only complimentary. But Anthony was neither older nor wiser.

"I say, Anthony, come and listen to this!" called Roger, who had a shrewd idea of the way in which the wind was blowing.

Very nonchalantly Anthony strolled across. "Yes?" he said in a voice that was neither rude nor frigid—just bored.

"I've been telling Miss Cross about the coat-button. It may not be quite playing the game with the inspector, but I really think it's only fair that she should know." He turned to the girl. "And you say you must have lost it on that walk?"

"Yes, I must have lost it on the walk," the girl said in puzzled tones, "but where, I haven't the least idea. All I know is that it was on when I started, and I noticed that it was off when I got back. It might have dropped simply anywhere. How it got into Elsie's hand I can't imagine. Mightn't she have picked it up and been meaning to give it back to me?"

"That does seem the only possible explanation," Roger agreed. He did not think it necessary for the moment to point out that as Mrs. Vane's subsequent steps would hardly have covered any of the ground that she and Margaret had passed over together, the explanation was not very probable.

"Oh, Mr. Sheringham, I do wish I could get away from this dreadful atmosphere of suspicion!" cried the girl suddenly, her strained nerves overcoming for the moment her self-control. "It's really getting almost unbearable! Every fresh fact that comes to light only makes it worse. I shall really begin to think of jumping over the cliff myself if something doesn't happen soon. And they're evidently beginning to talk in the village already. Mrs. Russell cut me dead outside her own house this morning."

"Dear Mrs. Russell!" Roger murmured. "Wouldn't I like to flay the hag. Christian charity, I suppose she calls that. But look here, don't you give way before any

nonsense like that, Margaret, my dear." Roger invariably addressed every unmarried lady below the age of thirty by her Christian name after the briefest possible acquaintance, it accorded with his reputation for mild Bohemianism, and it saved an awful lot of trouble. "We're going to see you through this, Cousin Anthony and I. So keep your chin up and let all the old cats go to the devil!"

Margaret turned away for a moment, biting her lip. "I don't know how to thank you," she said in rather a shaky voice. "I really can't think what I should have done if I hadn't met you two, Mr. Sheringham."

"Roger!" exclaimed Roger briskly. "For Heaven's sake do call me Roger, Margaret! Only people who owe me money call me 'Mr. Sheringham.' It has a nasty, sinister sound."

"Very well, then," the girl smiled. "Thank you—Roger!"

Roger drew a breath of relief as he saw the threatened tears disappear before his calculated nonsense. "And this is Anthony," he went on with mock seriousness. "Let me introduce you. Anthony, Margaret. Margaret, Anthony. Now shake hands and tell each other what a lovely day it is."

"How do you do, Anthony?" Margaret said gravely, a little smile dancing in her brown eyes; and somehow she managed to convey the impression that she was sorry for having made a pig of herself ten minutes before, that this was her apology and that would he please forgive her?

"How do you do, Margaret?" said Anthony, taking the slim fingers in his great paw; and the slight pressure he gave them said perfectly plainly that it wasn't his place to forgive anything; wouldn't she rather forgive him instead for sulking in that childish way, for which he was heartily sorry?

So that was all right.

"Why stand up when we can sit down?" Roger remarked, observing the results of his tactfulness with some satisfaction; and he set a good example by throwing himself at full length on the springy turf. The others followed suit.

"Now what we've got to do," he went on, lying on his back and puffing hard at his pipe, "is to form an offensive and defensive alliance of three. Your job, Margaret, will be to get us any information we want about the household and so on, and mine to put that information to the most advantageous use."

"What about Anthony?" asked Margaret.

"Oh, he's the idiot friend. He came down on purpose to be it. We mustn't do him out of that, or he'd be awfully disappointed."

"Poor Anthony!" Margaret laughed. "Roger, I think you're horrid."

"Not horrid," Anthony said lazily. "Just an ass. But pretend not to notice it, Margaret. We always try to ignore it in the family."

"Reverting to the topic in hand," Roger observed, unperturbed, "there's one thing that I really must impress on both of you. Rather a nasty thing, but we've got to face

it. From the facts as we know them at present, there's simply only one deduction to be drawn; if we want new deductions, we must have new facts."

"I see what you mean," Margaret said slowly. "Yes, and I see that it's quite true too. But how on earth are we to get any new facts?"

"Well, let's see if a little judicious questioning will bring anything to light." Roger paused for a moment as if considering. "I suppose you were very fond of your cousin, Margaret?" he said after a second or two in an almost careless voice.

It was Margaret's turn to pause and consider. Then: "No!" she said almost harshly. "I don't see why I shouldn't tell you, though I realise that it doesn't make my position any better. I detested her!"

"You detested her?" Roger repeated, raising himself on his elbow to look at her in his astonishment. "But I thought she'd been so kind to you? I thought she was such a charming woman?"

Margaret laughed bitterly. "Quite a number of people think that. Elsie took good care that they should. Isn't there a saying about speaking only good of the dead? Well, I never have been a conventional person. Elsie was one of the most loathsome people who can ever have existed!"

"Oho!" said Roger softly. "She was, was she? Talk about new facts! This looks like opening up a whole new field of enquiry. Perpend, lady! Why was Elsie 'one of the most loathsome people who can ever have existed'?"

"It is rather a sweeping charge, isn't it?" said Margaret soberly. "Well, I'll tell you the whole story and you can judge for yourself. When Elsie met George she was in rather the same position as I was in myself a few months ago—broke to the wide. But she didn't let him know that. She pretended to belong to a good family and to have plenty of money of her own. In fact, she deliberately set out to deceive him. George believed every word she said, fell in love with her and married her—which, of course, was what she'd been aiming at."

"You mean she married Dr. Vane for his money?"

"Purely and simply! I know, because she used to boast of it to me, and advise me to do the same. Boast of it! How she'd taken him in and hoodwinked him from beginning to end. She got a tremendous marriage settlement out of him, too. All the money she left me. Ten thousand pounds settled on her absolutely. Of course she hadn't a penny of her own. She often used to tell me how well she'd done for herself. Oh, Elsie was a true daughter of her grandfather—*our* grandfather, I should say!"

"I see," said Roger thoughtfully. "Yes, that does shed a somewhat different light on the lady. And she took you to live with her so that you could have the chance of meeting another wealthy man and hoodwinking him similarly?"

"Indeed she didn't! That's what she used to tell me, but nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that there were several reasons why she wanted me with her. In the first place, she wanted someone whom she could order about in a way that no servant would stand for a minute, someone who would do things for her that she

would never have dared to ask any servant to do. Oh, Roger, you can't imagine the things I've had to do since I came here! Menial things that she couldn't have made anybody else in the world do for her. And yet nothing outrageous, if you understand—nothing that I could flare up at and flounce out of the house over. Oh, it's extraordinarily difficult to explain. You see, you probably haven't any idea what a beast one woman can be to another in a subordinate position without ever doing anything that you could actually call *beastly*."

"I think I have, though, for all that," Roger murmured sympathetically.

Margaret knitted her brows. "Well, suppose we'd been out for a walk together in the rain and come in rather tired and rather wet and rather muddy. The first thing she'd do would be to send me upstairs with her wet coat and hat and tell me to bring down a pair of dry shoes. I should go down and find her sprawling in a chair in the drawing-room in front of the fire, but otherwise just as I'd left her. She'd want me to change her shoes for her, probably even pull her gloves off for her as well. Then she'd find out that her stockings were wet too, and I should be sent to get a dry pair—and probably change those for her as well. Then she'd decide she didn't like those shoes with those stockings, and off I'd have to go to get another pair. As soon as I'd done that, I'd be sent up again for something else that she'd pretend to have forgotten all about, and then for something more after that. In other words, she kept me on the go the whole time: I was hardly ever allowed to have a single second to myself."

Roger nodded understandingly. "I know the type."

"Well, that was one thing she wanted me for. Another was that she was a horrid little bully, and she must have someone to bully. You can't bully servants; they give notice. There's nobody like a poor relation for bullying. And all with a sweet smile you know, that seemed to make it even more unbearable if anything."

"But why did you stick it?" Anthony asked indignantly.

Margaret flushed slightly. "Because I was a coward, I suppose. I'd had about enough of roughing it by then, and I *was* comfortable at any rate. Besides, there was that ten thousand pounds she was dangling over me. If you'd ever known what it's like not to be able to afford a penny bun or a cup of tea, you might realise what a tempting bait ten thousand pounds can be and what a lot you'll put up with to qualify for it. Very mercenary, isn't it? But Elsie knew all right. She'd been through it herself."

"I'm sorry, Margaret," Anthony said in some confusion. "I was an ass to say a thing like that. Of course I understand."

"As a matter of fact," Margaret went on more calmly, "I *was* going to cut and run for it. I'd discovered the game wasn't worth the candle after all. But I hadn't fixed any date or made up my mind what to put my hand to next, and then—and then *this* happened."

There was a little silence.

"Can you give me a few more details about your cousin?" suddenly asked Roger, who seemed to have been pursuing a train of thought of his own. "A little bit more about her character, and what she looked like, and all that sort of thing?"

Margaret considered. "Well, she was little and fragile to look at, with rather a babyish face, fair hair, and a slight lisp which she cultivated rather carefully. She used to pose as the helpless, appealing little woman, though anybody less helpless than Elsie, so far as her own interests were concerned, I've never met. Her idea (as she told me perfectly frankly) was that men liked the helpless, appealing type; and judging by results, she wasn't far wrong. As for her character, I don't see what else there is to tell you. She was a hypocrite, a bully, utterly selfish, mean, and bad all through." Margaret gazed out to sea, breathing heavily, her cheeks flushed. Evidently she was calling to mind some of the humiliations and unkindnesses she had suffered at the dead woman's hands. Anthony watched her with deepening indignation.

"Did her husband know her real character?" Roger asked thoughtfully.

Margaret removed her eyes from the horizon and began to pluck with aimless fingers at the turf by her side. "I don't know!" she said slowly, after a momentary hesitation. "As a matter of fact I've often wondered that. Sometimes I think he must have, and sometimes I'm quite sure he didn't. Elsie was clever, you see. I don't suppose she showed her real self to anybody but me. And I shouldn't say that George was very observant. He was always perfectly courteous to her."

"Is he very upset about her death?"

"Outwardly, not a bit; but what he's feeling inside him I haven't the least idea. George never shows his feelings. He might be made of stone for all the emotion he ever displays. Besides, he spends nearly all his time shut up in his laboratory, just as he always has all the time I've been here."

"You can't say whether they got on well together, then?"

"Not a word! All I can tell you is that he was always courteous to her, and she—" Margaret uttered a cynical laugh. "Well, it was going to pay her to keep on good terms with him, so I've no doubt she did."

"I see. There's nothing further you can tell me about her?"

"Well, there is one thing," the girl said a little doubtfully, "but it's so very vague that I'm not sure whether I ought to mention it. It's this. I couldn't help feeling once or twice that there was somebody Elsie was *afraid* of."

"Afraid of? Hullo, that's interesting! Who?"

"That I haven't the least idea. In fact the whole thing is quite probably moonshine. I've really got nothing definite to go on at all. It's just a sort of impression I formed."

"Well, impressions are often valuable. And you can't say anything more definite than that?"

"I'm afraid I can't. Probably I ought not to have mentioned it at all, but it might give you a line of enquiry perhaps."

"I should think so. That's just the kind of thing I want to know." Roger plucked a handful or two of grass and scattered them over the edge of the cliff. "Margaret," he said suddenly, "what's your opinion about it all? Your perfectly private, not-for-publication opinion?"

"I think there's a great deal more in it than meets the eye," said the girl without hesitation.

"So do I, by Jove!" Anthony concurred.

"Yes, there's no doubt about that," Roger said thoughtfully. "But it's all so infernally vague. If one could only get hold of a definite thread to follow up, however tiny! You've widened the area of enquiry enormously with what you've told us about your cousin, but even now we're quite in the dark. All we know is that, instead of nobody having a grudge against her, any number of people might. Isn't there one single definite pointer you can get hold of for us? Somebody might have a cause for hating her, say, or a reason for wanting her out of the way. Rack your brains!"

Margaret racked them obediently and for some minutes there was silence, broken only by the cries of the swooping gulls and the splash of the waves against the rocks at the bottom of the cliffs.

"There's only one person I can think of who had cause for hating Elsie," she said slowly at last. "Or rather, *did* hate her, I'm quite certain—whether with cause or without, I don't know. Mrs. Russell!"

Roger popped up on his elbow. "Mrs. Russell?" he repeated eagerly. "Why did she hate Mrs. Vane?"

"She had an idea that Elsie and Mr. Russell were a little too friendly. A good deal too friendly, not to mince matters!"

"Oho! The plot thickens. And were they?"

"I don't know. They were very friendly, certainly. Whether they were *too* friendly, I can't say."

"But it's possible?"

"Quite—as far as Elsie is concerned. She had neither morals nor scruples."

"And Mr. Russell? What sort of a man is he?"

"Oh, jolly and red-faced and beefy, you know. The sort of man you see in those old hunting prints."

"Just the sort to whom her type might appeal, in fact. So I should imagine it was quite possible as far as he was concerned too, eh?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

Roger smote the turf with an enthusiastic fist. "By Jove, Margaret, I believe you've hit on something here. Mrs. Russell was simply eaten up with jealousy, of course. And there's no motive like jealousy!"

"Aren't we getting on a little too fast?" asked the girl dubiously.

"Not a bit! Now tell me—what sort of a woman is this Mrs. Russell?"

“Oh, she’s rather fat too; very downright and decided. A lot of people would call her rude, but I rather liked her. Not at all good-looking now, though she may have been once. Pince-nez, hair going a little grey, about forty-five years old, I suppose.”

“In other words, exactly the sort of woman to be furiously jealous of a young and pretty one throwing sheep’s eyes at her husband!” Roger summed up, not without satisfaction.

“I say!” Anthony exclaimed excitedly. “You said she was big, didn’t you? Has she got rather large feet?”

“Yes, I fancy she has. Why?”

The two men exchanged significant glances. Then Roger sprang to his feet.

“Good for you, Anthony! You mean that second lot of footprints, don’t you? Well, good-bye, my children. Amuse each other till lunch-time.”

“Where are you going, Roger?” cried Margaret.

“To look into this matter of the lady with the large feet and the jealous disposition,” Roger called back, disappearing at full speed over the bank.

CHAPTER VIII.
INTRODUCING A GOAT-FACED CLERGYMAN

Roger had no definite plan in his mind as he walked with quick strides along the cliff-top in the direction of Ludmouth. His impulsive flight from the other two had been dictated by two instinctive feelings—that he wanted to be alone to ponder over the significance of this fresh information, and that Anthony and Margaret would probably be not at all averse to a little dose of each other's undiluted company. His first idea, equally instinctive, had been to make a bee-line for the Russells' house and pour out a torrent of eager questions into the lady's astonished ears. Second thoughts warned him against any such precipitation. He sat down on a convenient little hummock facing the sea, pulled out and re-lit his pipe and began to think.

It did not take him many minutes to see that, if this new lane of enquiry were not to prove a blind alley, there were two questions of paramount importance first requiring a satisfactory answer. Of these one was concerned with Mrs. Russell's shoes: did they fit the second lot of footprints in that patch of mud on the cliff-path, or not? If they did, that did not actually prove anything, but Mrs. Russell remained a suspected person; if they did not, then she must be exonerated at once. The second, and far more important, was this—who had been at the Russells' house during the time when Mrs. Vane might have been expected to call?

Roger was still considering the interesting possibility depending on the answer to this question, when a gentle voice behind him cut abruptly into his reverie.

"A charming view from this point, sir, is it not?" observed the gentle voice.

Roger turned about. A little elderly clergyman, with silvery hair and a face like a benign but beardless goat, was peering at him benevolently through a large pair of horn spectacles. "Oh, Lord, the local parson!" Roger groaned to himself—not because he disliked parsons, local or otherwise, but because parsons are inclined to talk and Roger, at that particular moment in his existence, surprisingly enough was not. Aloud he said, courteously enough, "It is indeed; particularly charming."

The little old parson continued to beam, the sunlight glittering on his huge spectacles. He did not go nor did he very definitely stay—he hovered.

"He's going to talk," Roger groaned to himself again. "He wants to talk. He's aching to talk—I know he is! My pipe to the Coliseum he's going to talk!"

Roger's deduction was not amiss. It was only too plain that the little old clergyman had every intention of talking. He had, to be accurate, on seeing Roger's back in the distance, come nearly a quarter-of-a-mile out of his way for the express purpose of talking. He began to talk.

"I don't remember seeing you in our little village. Perhaps you have walked over from Sandsea?"

"No," said Roger patiently. "I'm staying in Ludmouth."

"Ah! At Mrs. Jameson's, no doubt? I did hear that she was expecting a visitor."

"No, at the Crown."

"Oh! Oh, dear me! Surely I am not talking to Mr. Roger Sheringham, am I?" twittered the little clergyman.

"That is my name, sir, yes," Roger admitted, with a mental side-note upon village gossip, its velocity and the surprising quarters it reaches.

"My dear sir!" The little parson's beam grew brighter than ever. "You must permit me to shake hands with you. No, really you must! This is indeed a gratifying moment. I have read all your books, every one; and I cannot tell you how I enjoyed them. Well, fancy, now!"

Roger was never in the least embarrassed by this kind of encounter. He shook hands with his admirer with the greatest heartiness.

"It's very kind of you to say so," he smiled. "Very kind indeed. I won't pretend I'm not gratified. Any author who pretends to be indifferent to appreciation of his books is a hypocrite and a liar and an anointed ass."

"Quite so," agreed the little clergyman in some bewilderment. "Quite so, no doubt. Well, well, well!"

"How did you know I was staying at the Crown, sir?"

"Oh, these things get about in a little community like ours, Mr. Sheringham; very rapidly indeed, if I may say so. And having read your books, to say nothing of your recent articles in the *Courier*, including even this morning's— Ah, a sad business that brings you down here, Mr. Sheringham! Very sad indeed! Dear me, poor lady, poor lady!"

Roger's annoyance at the interruption to his thoughts, already considerably lessened, vanished completely. If this garrulous old man had anything of interest to tell, without doubt he could be induced to tell it. Perhaps the encounter could be turned to good account; in any case it would be no bad thing to be *persona grata* with the vicar. He indicated with the stem of his pipe the hummock on which he had been sitting.

"Won't you sit down, sir?" he asked with a fittingly serious face. "Yes, indeed it is; extraordinarily sad."

The little clergyman seated himself with a nod of gratitude and Roger dropped on to the warm turf by his side.

"Do you know, there is a most distressing rumour going about in the village, I understand," remarked the former deprecatingly, but none the less gossipingly. "Something about foul play. That is nothing new, of course; your article this morning hinted quite plainly at it. But they have got to the stage in the village of importing actual names into their suspicions. Do you know that? Most regrettable; *most* regrettable."

"It's what you'd expect, isn't it?" said Roger a trifle shortly; he had stayed to pump the other, not to be pumped himself. "What name or names have they imported?"

"Really, Mr. Sheringham," the parson hesitated, "I'm not sure whether I ought—"

"I've only got to walk into the bar at the Crown and ask the nearest loafer, if you don't wish to tell me," Roger pointed out with an air of indifference.

"That is true. Yes, that is very true, I'm afraid. Yes, I fear you have. Well, perhaps in that case— Well, they are talking about Miss Cross, you know; Mrs. Vane's cousin. Most regrettable; *most* regrettable! Surely *you* don't think, Mr. Sheringham, that—"

"I agree with you," Roger interrupted brusquely, forestalling the unwelcome question. "Most regrettable! But surely you, as their vicar, could—?" He broke off meaningly.

The little clergyman looked at him in surprise. "Me?" he said innocently. "Oh, but you are making a mistake. *I* am not the vicar here. Oh, dear, no! Meadows, my name is: Samuel Meadows. Wait a moment; I have a card somewhere." He began to fumble violently in all his pockets. "Oh, dear, no; I am not the vicar. I have retired into private life. A small legacy, you understand. Just a resident here, that is all; and of only a few weeks' standing. Oh, dear, no; my parish was in Yorkshire. But Ludmouth is so— Ah, here we are!" With an air of mild triumph he produced a card from the pocket which he had first searched, and held it out to Roger. "Perhaps if you were passing one day—? I should be extremely honoured."

"Very kind of you indeed," said Roger politely, his interest in the little cleric now completely evaporated. He struggled to his feet. "Well, I must be getting along."

"You are going back to Ludmouth?" queried the other with gentle eagerness, rising also. "So am I. We might perhaps walk in together."

"I'm sorry, but I'm going the other way," returned Roger firmly. "Good morning, Mr. Meadows. See you again soon, I expect." And he set briskly off in the direction of Sandsea.

Behind the first undulation he took cover and watched his late interlocutor make for the road and pass slowly out of sight. Then he came out of hiding and walked rapidly over to the little house which lay half-way between that of Dr. Vane and the village—the house which sheltered the frivolous Mr. Russell and his jealous lady.

A perfectly respectable parlour maid answered his ring and looked at him enquiringly.

"Is Mrs. Russell in?" Roger asked. "I should like to speak to her for a moment."

"No, sir; I'm afraid she isn't. And Mr. Russell is out too."

"Oh! That's a nuisance." Roger rubbed his chin a moment in thought; then he came to a sudden decision. "You read the *Courier* sometimes I expect, don't you?" he asked unexpectedly.

"Yes, sir," replied the maid in a puzzled voice. "Cook takes it in, she does."

"She does, does she? Good for Cook! Well, look here, I've come down to Ludmouth specially for the *Courier*, to send them news about that accident you had here the other day."

The girl's face cleared. "Mrs. Vane? Oh, yes, sir! Then you're a—a reporting gentleman, sir?"

"A reporting gentleman!" Roger laughed. "Yes, rather; that describes me to a T. Well, now," he went on very confidentially, "the fact of the matter is this. I ran along to ask Mrs. Russell one or two questions, and I'm in too much of a hurry to wait for her. Now, do you think you could answer them for me instead?"

"Oh, yes, sir," fluttered the maid. "I think I could. What would it be that you want to know?"

"Well, now; Mrs. Vane was coming here that afternoon, wasn't she? And she never came. Now, I suppose you were in all the afternoon yourself, weren't you?"

"Me, sir? Oh, no. I was on my holidays. I only got back yesterday."

"I see. Rotten, coming back to work again, isn't it? But the cook would have been in, of course?"

"No, sir; she was out too. It was her afternoon off. There was nobody in that afternoon but Mrs. Russell herself."

"Aha!" observed Roger all to himself. Aloud he said mechanically, "I see," and began to rack his brains furiously for a tactful way of getting hold of a pair of Mrs. Russell's shoes. It was not an easy problem.

Usually a problem tended to lose its interest for Roger if it were too easy, but for this one the time-limit was not sufficient. On the spur of the moment he could only see one thing to do, so he did it.

"Can you lend me a pair of Mrs. Russell's shoes for an hour or so?" he asked blandly.

"Her *shoes?*" repeated the astonished maid.

"Yes; any pair of outdoor ones. I'll let you have them back before she notices they're gone." And he jingled significantly the loose silver in his trouser-pocket.

"Not—not *foot-prints?*" twittered the maid, thrilled to the bone.

Roger made up his mind in a flash. After all, why not tell the truth? There was no doubt that the maid would appreciate it, and a spy in the enemy's camp might be useful.

"Yes," he nodded. "But keep this to yourself, mind. Don't tell a soul!"

"Not even Cook?" breathed the excited girl.

"Yes, you can tell Cook," conceded Roger gravely, knowing the paramount necessity of permitting a safety-valve. "But you'll be responsible for it going no further. Promise?"

"Oo, yes, sir! I promise."

"Well, cut up and get me a pair of her shoes, then."

The girl needed no second invitation. She cut.

In less than a minute she was back again. “Here you are, sir. I put a bit of newspaper round them, so as nobody could see what you’re carrying. But you’ll bring them back, won’t you, sir?”

“Oh, yes; some time this afternoon. In fact, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll bring them to the back-door. How about that?”

“Yes, that would be better, sir. Thank you.”

“And if anybody else wants to know what I came for, say I’m a reporter for the *Courier* wanting to see Mrs. Russell; that’ll do as well as anything else. Here!”

A ten-shilling note changed hands, and Roger turned to go. A stifled sound from the girl caused him to look round.

“Yes?” he said enquiringly.

“Oo, sir! Mrs. Russell! You don’t think as how she *done* it, do you?”

“Done what?” asked Roger gravely.

“P-pushed Mrs. Vane over the cliff! They hated each other like wild cats, they did. Many and many’s the time I’ve heard the missis giving it to the master about Mrs. Vane. ‘If I get hold of her, *I’ll* give her what-for!’ she says. ‘I’ll spoil her looks for her! I’ll show her she can’t—’”

“No, no!” Roger interrupted hastily. “Good gracious, no! You mustn’t think anything like that. I want the shoes for—for quite a different reason.” And he fled for the front gate.

The maid looked after him with an air of distinct disappointment.

The newspaper parcel under his arm, Roger made at top-speed for the point on the cliffs where the second stair-way emerged. It was only a matter of form to try the shoes he was carrying into that second lot of footprints; he knew beyond any shadow of doubt that they were going to fit. Within a quarter-of-an-hour of leaving the lady’s own front door his confidence was justified: her shoes fitted as perfectly into the tracks as if they had made them—which Roger had very little doubt they had! With a crow of triumph he turned round and scurried up the stairs again two at a time. The Ludmouth Bay Mystery was as good as ended.

Half-way across the open ground toward the house he caught sight of a large and portly figure turning in at the front gate from the road. Judging correctly that the mistress of the household was returning, he changed his direction abruptly and made for the little ledge, whistling loudly (and quite unnecessarily, as Anthony pointed out later with some heat. “Dash it all, man, I haven’t known the girl for twenty-four hours yet. That sort of thing makes a chap look such an ass!”) as he approached within view of it.

“Victory! Victory!” he exclaimed dramatically to the startled couple beneath him, waving the shoes above his head. “And here are the spoils—your prize, fair lady! You might return them to the owner for me some time, will you? Or rather, to the owner’s parlour maid for preference. Catch!” And tossing the shoes down on to the ledge below, he took a standing jump and hurtled through the air in their wake.

“Roger, you’ve discovered something!” Margaret cried, as the victorious one landed with a thud perilously near her feet. “What?”

“I say, you haven’t got to the bottom of it, have you?” demanded Anthony excitedly.

Roger folded his arms and, striking a Napoleonic attitude, grinned down most un-Napoleonically at the other members of the alliance. “I have solved the Mystery of Ludmouth Bay, my children!” he announced. “Not alone *I* did it, for you, Margaret, put me on the right track, and yon pair of shoes also played their part. But the important thing is that the mystery is solved, and you can hold up your head again, Margaret, my dear, or your hands or your feet or anything else you jolly well like; nobody will say you nay.”

“Oh, Roger, do explain! Not—not Mrs. *Russell?*”

The grin died slowly out of Roger’s face. His imagination was his trade, yet it had simply never occurred to him that the rescue of Margaret meant the snaring of somebody else—that through his activities Mrs. Russell now stood in the perilous position from which Margaret had been plucked only just in time.

“I’m afraid so,” he nodded seriously. “And by the way, there’s one very obvious thing we overlooked about you, Margaret,” he went on, glancing at the neat little feet upon which he had so nearly landed. “However much the rest of the evidence might seem to compromise you, you were never in any real danger; that second lot of footprints was obviously never made by you, you see. Well, I’ll tell you what I’ve been doing.”

He dropped on to the turf, pulled out his pipe and began his story.

“I say, that’s great!” exclaimed Anthony in high glee, when he had finished.

“Oh, poor Mrs. Russell!” was Margaret’s comment, and Roger glanced at her with quick understanding. It was an echo of his own thoughts of a few minutes before.

They began to discuss the situation.

“Well, Anthony,” Roger remarked half-an-hour later. “Time we were getting back for lunch. And I want to hear what Moresby’s got to say, too.”

“Moresby’s going to get the shock of his young life,” observed Anthony grimly. “And I’m going to be in at the death.” Inspector Moresby, one gathered, had infringed upon Anthony’s code of things that aren’t done when he had the presumption to follow up a train of evidence to its logical conclusion—Margaret; henceforward there was no good in him.

“Well, in that case come along,” Roger replied, scrambling up. “Margaret, you’ll deliver those shoes at the back-door some time this afternoon, will you? Thanks very much. Well, now, about meeting you again, I should think—”

“Oh, we’ve fixed all that,” Anthony interrupted very airily.

It was about five minutes after this that Anthony delivered his views upon whistling already recorded. At the same time he had something to say on the subject of grins, and still more upon that of winks. Grins, winks and whistles, it appeared,

shared with Inspector Moresby the murkiest depths of Anthony's hatred and contempt.

Lunch was waiting for them when they arrived back, hot and thirsty, at the inn—huge plates of cold beef, a salad, a white loaf and pleasantly salt butter, raspberry tart and cream. Inspector Moresby was also waiting for them, his face completely obscured at the moment of their entering the room by the bottom of one of their host's satisfactory tankards (one cannot realise too strongly the fact that, when not standing at street corners or arresting unarmed the most dangerous criminals, members of the British Police Force are utterly and completely human).

"Ah, here you are, gentlemen," he observed heartily, emerging from the tankard. "They asked me if we were going to take our meals together in here, and I took the liberty of telling them we were. It's a bit lonely eating down there alone, if you've no objection."

"None at all," responded Roger, no less heartily. "Only too pleased, Inspector. And I see you had the forethought to order up three of the best. Excellent! Well, you'd better get ready to drink my health."

"What have you been doing then, sir?" asked the Inspector humorously. "Solving the mystery?"

"I have," said Roger, and plunged into his story once more.

"So what do you think of that?" he concluded, not without a certain triumph.

The Inspector wiped his moustache carefully. "It's ingenious," he said. "Quite ingenious. But I shouldn't pay too much importance to footprints if I were you, Mr. Sheringham. Footprints are the easiest thing in the world to fake."

"It's ingenious because we're dealing with the deeds of an ingenious criminal. That's all. Anyhow, can you produce anything that can't be explained by the theory?" Roger challenged.

"Yes, sir, I can," replied the inspector imperturbably. "That bit of paper you picked up yourself. Our expert made it out all right. The original's coming on by special messenger, but I got a code telegram half-an-hour ago, and I've written out for you what was on the paper. How are you going to explain that by your theory?"

Roger took the piece of paper the other was holding out to him and read it eagerly, Anthony craning over his shoulder. It was inscribed as follows:—

Monday.

"Elsie darling, for Heaven's sake meet me once more before you do anything rash. You must let me explain. You *can't* do what you threaten when you think what we've been to each other. Meet me at the usual place to-morrow, same time. *Please*, darling!

"COLIN."

"P. S. Destroy this."

CHAPTER IX.
COLIN, WHO ART THOU?

Roger handed the letter back with a little smile. “How can I explain this by my theory? Well, obviously enough, surely. ‘Colin’ must be Mr. Russell.”

“Ah, but is he? Somehow I feel pretty sure he isn’t. Anyhow, that’s a point we can soon settle. I bought a directory of the neighbourhood yesterday—always do when I’m working on a case in the country. I’ll run down and get it.”

“In the meantime,” said Roger, as the inspector’s heavy footsteps echoed down the stairs, “we might as well get on with our lunch. I wish I’d taken on a small bet with him about the identity of friend Colin.”

“I shouldn’t have said there was much doubt about it,” observed Anthony, helping himself largely to salad. “It all fits in, doesn’t it?”

Two minutes later the inspector returned, an open book in his hand. He laid it down on the table-cloth beside Roger and indicated an entry in it with a large thumb.

“There you are, sir,” he said, with a commendable absence of triumph. “‘Russell, John Henry, Rose Cottage.’ That’s your gentleman.”

“Humph!” said Roger, a little disconcerted. “But look here,” he added, brightening, “Colin might have been a pet-name, or something like that.”

The inspector took his place at the table. “It isn’t likely,” he said, shaking out his napkin. “If it had been signed Tootles, or Fuzzy-wuzzy, it might have been a pet-name all right. But Colin! No, that doesn’t sound like a pet-name to me.”

“Then this appears to complicate matters pretty considerably,” Roger remarked with some asperity.

“On the contrary, sir,” retorted the inspector cheerfully, applying himself to his cold beef with every sign of satisfaction, “perhaps it’s going to simplify them a lot.”

Roger knew that the inspector was confidently expecting to be asked to explain this dark observation; he therefore went on with his meal in silence. Somewhat to his surprise the inspector volunteered no explanation of his own accord, his attention appearing to be entirely divided between his plate and the directory, down the columns of which he continued to run a careful thumb.

“There are two Colins in this neighbourhood,” he announced at last. “Smith, Colin, plumber, East Row, Ludmouth, and Seaford, Colin James, architect, 4 Burnt Oak Lane, Milbourne (that’s a village a couple of miles inland). Neither of them looks like our man. But I hardly expected to find him in here.”

“Why not?” asked Anthony.

“Because he’s probably a young man, living with his parents (isn’t that a young man’s note, Mr. Sheringham, eh?); in which case of course, he wouldn’t be mentioned. No, I shall have to spend the afternoon making enquiries. In the meantime, I’d be much obliged if you two gentlemen would not say anything about this. I

stretched a point in showing you what was on that paper, and I want you to reciprocate by keeping quiet about it. I don't want *anybody* told, you understand," he added, with a significant look at Anthony; "male *or* female! You can promise me that, can't you?"

"Naturally," Roger said with a slight smile.

"Of course," Anthony said stiffly.

"Then that's all right," observed the inspector with great heartiness. "I shan't be able to do anything until my man comes down with the original document, of course; but he ought to be here any time now. And by the way," he added to Roger, "it may interest you to hear that I'm officially in charge of the case now. I got my authorisation from headquarters this morning."

Roger picked up his cue. "I'll mention that in my report to-night, Inspector."

"Well, you can if you want to, sir, of course," said the inspector with an air of innocent surprise.

As if by tacit agreement, the talk for the rest of the meal turned upon general topics.

As soon as his pipe was alight the inspector rose to go. Roger waited until he had left the room, then rose from his chair and darted in his wake, closing the sitting-room door behind him.

"Inspector," he said in a low voice, as he caught him up on the landing, "there's one question I must ask you. Are you intending to arrest Miss Cross?"

The inspector looked at him quizzically. "Are you speaking as a newspaper-man or as a friend of the lady's, sir?"

"Neither. As Roger Sheringham, private and inquisitive citizen."

"Well," the inspector said slowly, "to a newspaper-man I should answer, 'Don't ask me leading questions'; to a friend of the lady's, 'I don't understand what you're talking about'; and to Mr. Sheringham, private citizen and personal friend of my own, if I may say so, 'No, I'm not!' "

"Ah!"

"For one thing, you see," the inspector added with a smile, "the evidence against her isn't quite complete yet."

"But look here, you don't mean to say you still think that she may have—"

The inspector waved aside the awkward question with a large hand. "I'm not going to say what I think about that, even to you, Mr. Sheringham. But one word of warning I will give you, to pass on to your cousin or not as you think fit—things aren't always what they seem."

"Ah!" Roger observed. "In other words, I suppose, ladies strongly under suspicion on circumstantial evidence aren't necessarily guilty after all. Is that what you mean?"

"Well, sir," replied the inspector, who seemed not a little pleased with his conundrum, "that's all I've got to *say*. What I *mean*, you must decide for yourself."

"Inspector, you're hopeless!" Roger laughed, turning back to the sitting-room.

Anthony was brooding darkly over his empty cheese-plate.

"I say, Roger," he said at once, looking up, "does that damned inspector still think that Margaret had anything to do with it?"

"No, I don't imagine so, really. He may, but I'm more inclined to think that he's pulling our legs about her—yours especially. And you are a bit of a trout over Margaret, aren't you, Anthony? You rise to any fly that he dangles over you."

Anthony made a non-committal growling sound, but said nothing. Roger began to pace the little room with restless steps.

"Dash that infernal letter!" he burst out a few minutes later. "There's no doubt that it does complicate matters most awkwardly. Though it doesn't rule out my bright solution of before lunch by any means. The inspector ought to have seen that. What she was doing with friend Colin doesn't affect in the slightest degree the bad blood between her and Mrs. Russell. We mustn't get confused by issues that lie outside the main chance."

There was another pause.

"I must see Margaret!" Roger announced suddenly, stopping short in his stride. "You muttered something this morning about having arranged a meeting. For when?"

"Well, we didn't actually *arrange* anything," Anthony replied with preternatural innocence. "She happened to say that she'd probably be going out to that ledge this afternoon about three o'clock with a book, and I just mentioned that—"

"Cease your puling!" Roger interrupted rudely. "It's a quarter to three now. Get your hat and come along."

Five minutes later they were walking briskly up the rise from the road to the top of the cliffs, the wind blowing coolly about their heads. It is perhaps not uninteresting to note in passing that Anthony wore a hat and Roger did not. And one might go on to add at the same time that Anthony's grey flannel trousers were faultlessly creased, while in Roger's not a vestige of a crease could be seen. From this sort of thing the keen psychologist draws any number of interesting deductions.

"I say, you don't mind me coming along, Anthony, do you?" Roger was asking with an appearance of great anxiety.

"Of course I don't. Why should I?"

"Oh, I don't know. Isn't there some old saying about the difference between a couple and a trio in connection with company? I mean—"

"Oh, dry up, for Heaven's sake! You're not funny, Roger."

"That," Roger maintained firmly, "is a matter of opinion. Well, let us talk very seriously about gulls. There are no less than seven hundred and forty distinct species of gulls known to the entomologist, of which one hundred and eighty-two may be found by the intrepid explorer around the rocky coasts of these Islands. Perhaps the most common variety is the *Patum Perperium*, or Black-hearted Wombat, which may be distinguished by—"

"What *are* you talking about?" demanded his bewildered listener.

“Gulls, Anthony,” replied Roger, and went on doing so with singular ardour right up to the ledge itself.

“Hullo, Margaret,” he greeted its occupant pleasantly. “Anthony and I have been talking about gulls. Do you think you could invite us to tea this afternoon with you?”

“To tea? Whatever for?”

“Well, it’s such a long way back to our own. Yours is so much easier.”

“Don’t take any notice of him, Margaret,” Anthony advised. “He’s only being funny. He’s been funny ever since we left the Crown.”

“Yes, and about gulls, too,” Roger added with pride. “Extraordinarily difficult things to be funny about, as you’ll readily understand. But I’m quite serious about tea, Margaret. I want to have a chance of studying the occupants of your household at close quarters.”

“Oh, I see. But why?”

“No particular reason, except that I ought to have as close a view as possible of everybody mixed up with the case. And I must confess that I’m rather interested to have a look at this doctor-man of yours; he sounds interesting. Can it be done?”

The girl wrinkled her brow. “Ye-es, I should think so. Yes, of course it can! I’m keeping house for the time being, you know. I’ll just take you in with me, and that’s all there’ll be to it.”

“Good! You needn’t say what we are or anything about us. Just introduce us as two friends of yours who are staying down here.”

“Yes, I understand, Miss Williamson will be there, of course, but I don’t know about George; as often as not he has a tray sent into the laboratory for him. Still, you can take the chance.”

“Thanks, we will,” Roger said, descending to the little ledge. “And now, as we’ve got an hour or so to spare, I propose that we devote it to an elevating discussion upon some subject as remote as possible from the business in hand. How say you, my children?”

“Right!” agreed Anthony, who had taken the opportunity of propping himself with his back to the rock as near as possible to Margaret’s side as was consistent with the convention that a young man shall not sit directly on top of a young woman to whom he is not engaged. “Anything you like—except gulls!”

During the next excellent hour Roger, lying on his back in the shade a couple of yards away and staring up into the blue sky, could not possibly have seen a tentative hand emerge from Anthony’s pocket, grope about the turf in an apparently aimless way for at least ten minutes and then pluck up the courage at last to fasten firmly upon another, and very much smaller, hand which had been lying quite still by its owner’s side the whole time. He could not possibly have seen—but he quite definitely knew all about it.

CHAPTER X.
TEA, CHINA AND YOUNG LOVE

"By the way, I ought to warn you. Miss Williamson isn't exactly an ordinary secretary: she's rather an important person. She does any secretarial work George wants, of course, which is very little, but her chief job is to help him in the laboratory. She took a science degree at Cambridge—and I must say," Margaret added with a little laugh, "she looks it."

It was nearly half-past four, and the three of them were sitting in Dr. Vane's drawing-room, waiting for tea and for the other members of the household. Margaret and Anthony showed distinct signs of nervousness, though for what exact reason was not really apparent to either of them; Roger was as collected as ever. The five-odd minutes which had elapsed since they entered the room had been spent happily by him in examining with no little interest the really fine collection of china which filled two large glass-fronted cabinets and overflowed on to two or three shelves and, in the case of a few plates, even the walls themselves. Roger's knowledge of china was not a large one, but he had a sufficiently good smattering to enable him to talk intelligently on the subject with a collector.

"Don't be catty, Margaret," he said now, examining a Dresden ornament depicting four persons at a whist-table, the lace of the little ladies' gowns and of the miniature fans they fluttered being picked out with almost incredible daintiness. "I say, surely your cousin never amassed this collection, did she?"

"No. It's George's. The only hobby he's got apart from his test-tubes and things. Why?"

"I thought it didn't seem to fit in very well with the synopsis you gave me of the lady's character. Anyhow, that's all to the good; I'll congratulate George on his collection and he'll love me like a brother. I've met these china-maniacs before and I think I know how to deal with them."

"You're perfectly right," Margaret smiled. "It's certainly the shortest cut to George's heart."

"And before George is much older he's going to hear a few things about china," Anthony was beginning with heavy sarcasm, when the opening of the drawing-room door cut him short.

Of the two people who entered the room the next moment, it is hard to say which presented the more striking figure. Miss Williamson, who preceded her employer, would have drawn attention in any company. She was a tall, angular woman, with high cheek-bones and close-cropped fair hair, and the pince-nez she wore seemed to add emphasis to the darting looks of her cold, slightly prominent blue eyes. Her clothes were neat to the point of severity and there was that air of brisk efficiency about her which is likely to reduce the ordinary man to a condition of tongue-tied

uneasiness when he encounters it in a strange female, it clashes so persistently with all his ideas of what the word "feminine" ought to convey. Yet with it all the secretary was not one of those distressing creatures, a mannish woman; and though by no means beautiful, she was not in a way unhandsome. "A distinct personality here," Roger told himself before his eyes had been resting longer than two seconds upon her.

Dr. Vane, who followed close on her heels, bore out the picture Margaret had already given—a great hulking man, six feet two inches tall at least, with an enormous black beard and a stern eye, yet with a gentleness and delicacy of movement which was in striking contrast with the rugged strength of his appearance; as he closed the door behind him, one could scarcely hear it meet the lintel, so restrained was his action.

Margaret jumped to her feet as the two entered.

"Oh, George, these are two friends of mine, Mr. Sheringham and Mr. Walton," she said, not without confusion. "They called in to see me, not knowing about—about—"

"I am very glad for you to welcome your friends here, Margaret," the doctor said with grave courteousness. "It is after all the very least I can do now that you are so kindly looking after things here for me."

Margaret thanked him with a quick smile, and introduced the two to Miss Williamson. Bows were exchanged, and the latter rang the bell for tea.

"We've only got ten minutes, Margaret," she said briskly. "In the middle of something rather important, and it was as much as I could do to drag George in here at all."

The two girls and Anthony formed a group by the window, and Roger approached Dr. Vane.

"A magnificent collection of china you've got here, doctor," he said easily. "I've been admiring it ever since I came in. I've never seen finer Spode in my life than those bits over there."

Into the doctor's stern eye leapt the light of the collector who hears his collection praised, which is much the same as that of the mother who is told that her infant possesses her own nose. "You are interested in china, Mr. Sheringham?"

"I'm crazy about it," returned Roger untruthfully.

The rest simply followed.

With the arrival of tea the conversation became more general, and Roger was able to allow the novelist in him to rise to the surface and survey this truly piquant situation. Here was a man whose wife only three days ago had met with a violent death in circumstances which were, to say the least of it, suspicious, receiving his tea-cup from the hands of a young and pretty girl who, as he could hardly fail to realise after Inspector Moresby's visit, had come very closely under the notice of the police in connection with the same violent death. Yet the relations between the two, which might have been expected to be almost intolerable, did not appear, on the surface at any rate, to be even so much as strange. Margaret was perfectly natural; Dr. Vane

courteous, gentle and mildly affectionate. The more Roger watched, the more he marvelled. Unconventional though he was in literature as in life, he would hardly have dared to make use of such a situation for one of his books; it would have been voted too wildly improbable.

The talk, which had shifted for a few minutes to trifles, showed a tendency to revert, so far as Dr. Vane was concerned, to his former topic. Somewhat to Roger's surprise, Miss Williamson joined in as the doctor warmed again to his theme, even going so far as to put him right once or twice upon small points of detail.

"You're an enthusiast too, then?" Roger could not help asking her.

"Now, yes," she replied. "When I first came I knew nothing about it at all, but George showed me the way and now I'm as much under the spell even as he is."

"And know a good deal more about it, Mary, don't you?" commented the doctor, with the first signs of a smile he had yet displayed. "Another case of the pupil and the master, I'm afraid, Mr. Sheringham," he added to Roger, with an air of mock disgust.

"Oh, nonsense, George!" Miss Williamson laughed. "I only wish I did. You've got a great deal to teach me yet, I fear."

Fortunately it was clear that Dr. Vane had no idea of the identity of his visitor, as also had not Miss Williamson (indeed, neither of them looked the sort of person who might be expected to read the *Courier*), so that no suspicion as to the reason of his call could occur to either of them. Roger, content enough with the success of his tactics, continued to play the safe card of china; while Margaret and Anthony, to neither of whom china contained the least interest, were reduced for the most part to sitting and looking at each other in silence. They seemed perfectly content with this state of affairs.

When, half-an-hour later instead of ten minutes, Miss Williamson issued her third ultimatum which had the effect of bringing the doctor to his feet at last, Roger felt he had had enough of china to last him for several years. Dr. Vane, however, could not have felt the same, for he shook his visitor warmly by the hand and, having ascertained that he and Anthony expected to be staying several days in Ludmouth, invited both of them to supper on the following Sunday, brushing aside Roger's half-hearted attempts at a refusal with a firmness that was almost genial.

Roger sank back into his chair as the door closed behind them and fanned himself with a limp hand. "Did I happen to hear anyone mention the word china just now?" he asked feebly.

"Well?" Margaret demanded. "What did you think of them?"

"What did I think?" Roger repeated, speaking for the moment from the fullness of his heart. "I think that within a year or so the wedding-bells will be heard once more in Ludmouth."

"*What?*" cried Anthony and Margaret together.

Roger realised that he had spoken unguardedly, but it was too late to withdraw his words. “I think,” he said more carefully, “that George and that lady will make a match of it.”

“She’s head over heels in love with him,” Margaret nodded. “I’ve known that for years. But I didn’t expect you to notice it.”

“That’s my business, fair lady,” Roger returned sweetly.

“You *saw* she was keen on him?” Anthony asked in astonishment. “How on earth did you do that?”

“For the answer to this question, refer to my last remark,” Roger murmured. “Alternative answer—china!”

“Yes, that rather gave it away,” Margaret agreed. “Especially after what I’d said before. Do you remember?”

“It was that I was thinking of,” Roger laughed.

Anthony looked from one to the other. “What *are* you two talking about?” he appealed.

“Nothing that you’d understand, little boy,” said Roger kindly. “Run away and play with the blind-tassel. I like your doctor-man, Margaret.”

“George? Yes, he’s a dear, isn’t he? Though it took me ever so much longer to know him than it seems to have taken you. And he liked you too. I’ve never known him to ask anyone to supper on such a short acquaintance.”

“I *am* rather likable,” Roger admitted.

The conversation then became purely frivolous.

Having achieved the object with which he had set out, Roger was anxious to talk over its results with Anthony—a thing that could hardly be done in this case in the presence of Margaret. It was not long before he began to show signs of readiness to embark on the process of leave-taking. He ostentatiously arranged a meeting with Margaret the next morning “just in case,” he rose to his feet, hovered near the door, sat down and rose again, and he said that they must be going at least half-a-dozen times over, each time more as if he meant it than before. At this point he realised that nothing short of heroic measures would be likely to shift Anthony from that drawing-room.

Roger was not the person to shirk heroic measures when nothing short of heroic measures was required. “Anthony,” he said with decision, “I don’t think you realise that we’re out-staying our welcome. I’ve been trying to hint gently for the last quarter-of-an-hour that it’s time we were going. Margaret’s sure to have lots to do, you know.”

“But I haven’t, Roger,” Margaret objected. “Nothing.”

“Yes, you have,” Roger said firmly. “Lots. Come on, Anthony.”

“No, really I haven’t. Nothing at all.”

“Well, I have. Come *on*, Anthony!”

This time Anthony came.

Margaret said good-bye to them in the drawing-room, and from the hall Anthony had to go back to tell her something he'd forgotten. Roger waited five minutes; then he followed and dug Anthony out again. Margaret came out into the hall with them and said good-bye there, and from half-way down the drive Anthony had to go back for his stick. Roger waited ten minutes, then he followed once more, running the culprit to earth again in the drawing-room.

"Anthony, I think we ought to be going now," he said. "Job speaking. Anthony, I think we ought to be going now. Have you remembered to say all you'd forgotten to remember to say? Have you your stick, your hat, your shoes, your tie-pin, your spectacles and your lace cap? Anthony, I think we ought to be going. Margaret, perhaps if you were to go and immure yourself in your bedroom or the bathroom or the linen-cupboard or any other suitable place of immurement, I think Anthony might be induced in despair to—"

"Roger, I *hate* you!" Margaret gasped in a stifled voice, hurrying with burning cheeks out of the room.

"Portrait of a lady on her way to immurement," murmured Roger thoughtfully, gazing after her flying figure.

"Damn you, Roger!" spluttered the indignant Anthony, no less puce. "What the deuce do you want to go and—"

"Anthony, I think it's time we were going," Roger pointed out gently.

This time Anthony really did go, not only out of the house but right down the drive, over the road and on to the cliffs.

Roger gave him ten minutes to work off steam and simmer down again; then he got on with the business in hand.

"Now, look here, Anthony, drop all that and tell me this—what deductions did you draw at our little tea-party?"

"What deductions?" Anthony said a little reluctantly. "I don't know that I drew any. Did you?"

"One or two. That the lady we had the pleasure of meeting wouldn't be at all averse to becoming Mrs. Vane now that the post is vacant, for one thing."

"How on earth could you tell that, Roger?"

"It was sticking out in lumps all over her for anybody who had the eyes to see. In fact it seemed to me that she wasn't even troubling to hide it. But was the doctor-man equally minded? Now that I'm not nearly so sure about."

"You think he isn't?"

"No, I don't say that for a minute. What I do say is that he's very much better at hiding his feelings. I couldn't tell what he was thinking at all, except that he's fond of Margaret and anxious to show it. The only really significant thing about him was the fact of his asking us to supper like that."

"You mean only four or five days after his wife's death?"

"Exactly. Now what does that show?"

"That he's not any too cut up about it."

"Precisely. In other words, I should say, he knew his wife's true character. And not being sorry she's dead, he's not going to pretend that he is; that's how the man strikes me."

"Yes," Anthony said slowly. "I think I agree with you."

"Nor is the woman. That was obvious enough. He may even be taking his cue from her. She's without doubt the stronger character of the two."

"Is she?"

"Oh, yes. Then there's another thing. Does the woman know Mrs. Vane's real character too? On the whole I should be inclined to say yes. She's pretty sharp."

"That might even have started her being keen on him," Anthony pointed out; "if she really is. I mean, it must have been a pretty ghastly sight to see a decent chap like that tied up to a little rotter of a woman, mustn't it?"

"That's a very shrewd idea," Roger agreed. "Yes, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if that isn't how things did happen. Gradually, of course; these things always do. I'm not hinting that there was an intrigue between them or anything like that; I don't for a moment think there was. In fact, I shouldn't be surprised if the doctor hasn't got the least idea about her feelings even now. But he'll find himself marrying her one day for all that. She's a woman of unusually strong mind and she's made it up on that particular point all right, I wouldn't mind betting."

"She had large feet," said Anthony quite irrelevantly.

"So have a number of people. You, for instance. Did it strike you whether she liked Margaret?"

"She'd be a fool if she didn't," said Anthony with complete conviction.

"Do refrain from being maudlin, Anthony. Personally, I thought she didn't. She was inclined to be peremptory and not a little bossy, did you notice? But jealousy would quite well account for that. After all, Margaret is young and pretty and she's neither. Did anything else strike you about Dr. Vane? About his character, or anything like that?"

Anthony considered. "I should think he's probably got the very devil of a temper," he decided.

"You take the words out of my mouth. That's precisely what struck me. I don't suppose it has any significance at all, but it's a point that we might well keep before us. Dr. Vane has the very devil of a temper. Now, about that invitation, I don't—Hullo! Isn't that the inspector on the road? Yes, it is; I'd know that bulky form anywhere. Let's cut across and see if he's got any news. By the way, congratulations, Anthony."

"What on?"

"Not saying anything to Margaret about friend Colin's letter. A most admirable piece of self-restraint."

A lusty hail from Roger brought the inspector to a standstill. He halted and waited for them to catch up with him.

"It's a hot day for running about, gentlemen," he greeted them mopping his large red face. "Uncommonly hot."

"You're right, Inspector. And has virtue brought its own reward, or have you got any news?"

"I have got some news, sir, I'm glad to say. I've succeeded in locating the gentleman who wrote that letter. Been a bit of a job, but I'm pretty sure I've found him this time."

"You have, have you? I say, that's good! Who is he?"

"Gentleman by the name of Colin Woodthorpe; son of a Sir Henry Woodthorpe who's got a big place between here and Sandsea. I thought of going round to call on him this evening."

"Good," said Roger promptly. "May I come?"

"It's a bit irregular, sir."

"I know it is. Frightfully irregular. But you do owe me something over the letter, don't you?"

"Very well, sir," the inspector grinned. "I can see you're determined to come, so I suppose I shall have to take you with me. But it'll have to be as that personal friend of mine, mind, not as a newspaper-man."

"On my oath!" said Roger piously. "In any case I wouldn't— Oh, Heavens, talk hard and don't let me be buttonholed. This is the most persistent talker in the south of England coming along the road toward us."

"When you're in the north, Roger," Anthony amended humorously.

"His name is the Rev. Samuel Meadows," Roger went on to the inspector. "He caught me on the cliffs this morning and held me for half-an-hour by the clock. The Ancient Mariner couldn't make a match of it with him."

In some curiosity the other two watched the little clerical figure approach. He smiled benignly as he recognised Roger and touched the wide brim of his hat in a somewhat expansive gesture, but made no attempt to speak.

"Saved!" Roger murmured dramatically as they passed him. "Friends, I thank you!"

But the inspector did not smile. His brow was corrugated and he was tugging at his long-suffering moustache.

"Now, where the dickens," he remarked very thoughtfully to his boots, "have I seen *that* face before?"

CHAPTER XI.
INSPECTOR MORESBY CONDUCTS AN INTERVIEW

Clouston Hall, the home of Sir Henry and Lady Woodthorpe, was a stolidly built Georgian house, with the usual aspect of square solidity so happily typical of its period. It stood in its own grounds of nine or ten acres, and as Roger and the inspector made their way up the trim drive the setting sun was burnishing the mellow brick of its front to a deeper red and slanting over the velvety expanse of lawn, unprofaned by tennis nets or chalk lines, which faced it across the broad carriage-sweep.

"By Jove!" Roger exclaimed softly. "It's a fine picture, isn't it? There's something about these big Georgian country houses, you know, Inspector, that does stir the imagination. Can't you just see that carriage-sweep stiff with huntsmen in red coats and jolly red faces, all engulfing a couple of gallons of home-brew before going off to give Reynard the run of his life?"

"It's a tidy bit of property," the inspector agreed. "But they're child's-play for burglars, these old houses are." To every man his own point of view.

"I wonder what it is that always makes one associate Georgian houses with hunting scenes," Roger mused. "Must be the red, I suppose. Red brick, red coats, red faces. Yes, red seems to be the key-colour of the times. What would Rowlandson have done if there'd been no red on his palette? He'd have had to draw people without any noses at all."

They reached the white porch, and the inspector placed a large thumb over the un-Georgian electric bell-push. "You'll remember, Mr. Sheringham, won't you?" he said half apologetically. "We're here on official business, and it's me who's got to do all the talking."

"Did I or did I not give you my solemn word, Inspector?" queried Roger in hurt tones. "Besides, I would have you know that at school my nickname was 'Oyster.' 'Oyster Sheringham,' I was invariably called."

"There's often an untrue word spoken in jest," murmured the inspector with a face of preternatural innocence.

Before Roger could reply suitably the door was opened by a large and fish-like butler.

There are few men in this country who can remain their normal selves in face of a truly fish-like specimen of the English butler. Roger's admiration of his companion increased almost visibly as he watched him confront this monumental dolphin (that was the word which rose unbidden into Roger's mind the moment the door opened) without so much as a blench.

"I want to see Mr. Colin Woodthorpe," said the inspector heartily, in a voice free from the slightest tremor. "Is he at home?"

“I will enquire, sir,” returned the dolphin coldly, eyeing their dusty appearance with obvious pain, and made as if to close the door. “Would you care to leave your name?”

The inspector placed a large foot in the aperture. “You needn’t put on any of those frills with me,” he said with the utmost cheerfulness. “You know whether the gentleman I want to see is at home or not.” He paused and looked the other in the eye. “*Is he?*” he shot out with startling abruptness.

Roger watched the dolphin’s reaction to this mode of attack with some interest. His gills opened and closed rapidly, and a look of distinct alarm appeared in his pale sandy eyes. Roger had never seen an alarmed butler before, and he certainly never expected to see one again.

“He—he was in to dinner, sir,” gasped the dolphin, almost before he knew what he was doing.

“Ha!” observed the inspector, evidently satisfied. “Then you cut along, my man, and tell him that Inspector Moresby of Scotland Yard would like a word or two with him. And you needn’t shout it out for all the rest of the world to hear, understand?” It appeared that the dolphin understood. “Very well. Now show us somewhere where we can wait.”

The chastened dolphin led them into a small room on the left of the big hall, the gun-room. As the door closed behind him, Roger seized the inspector’s hand and wrung it reverently. “Now I see how you can arrest seventeen armed criminals in the most dangerous dive in Limehouse with nothing but a walking-stick and a safety-pin,” he said in awe-struck tones. “‘My man!’ And yet the heavens remain intact!”

“I never stand nonsense from butlers,” remarked the inspector modestly.

Roger shielded his eyes and groaned.

Colin Woodthorpe, who made his appearance a couple of minutes later, proved to be a pleasant-looking young man of some five- or six-and-twenty, with fair hair and a sanguine complexion, big and sturdy; he was wearing a dinner-jacket, but Roger instinctively saw him in gaiters and riding-breeches. He was perfectly self-possessed.

“Inspector Moresby?” he asked with a little smile, picking out Roger’s companion without hesitation.

“That’s me, sir,” assented the inspector in his usual genial tones. “Sorry to bother you, but duty’s duty, as you know. I hope that butler of yours didn’t make too much pother. I told him not to. Scotland Yard has a nasty sound in the ears of the old people, I know.”

“Oh, no,” laughed the young man. “As a matter of fact I was alone, though it was very kind of you to think of warning him. Well, what’s it all about, Inspector? Sit down, won’t you? Cigarette?”

“Well, thank you, sir,” The inspector helped himself to a cigarette from the other’s case and disposed his bulk in a comfortable leather-covered armchair. Roger followed suit.

As the young man sat down, the inspector edged his chair round so as to be able to look him directly in the face. “As I said, sir, I’m sorry to bother you, but it’s this matter of Mrs. Vane’s death I’m looking into.” He paused significantly.

Roger could have sworn that a look of apprehension flitted for an instant across the young man’s face, but his voice when he spoke after only a second’s hesitation was perfectly under control.

“Oh, yes?” he said easily (almost *too* easily, Roger felt). “And why have you come to me?”

The inspector’s hand shot out toward him, holding the piece of paper he had already drawn from his pocket. “To ask you to explain this, sir, if you please,” he said very much more brusquely.

Colin Woodthorpe looked at the paper curiously; then, as his brain took in the significance of the words written upon it he flushed deeply. “Where—how did you get hold of this?” he asked in a voice that was none too steady.

The inspector explained briefly that the original had been found among the rocks close to where the body was lying. “I want you to explain it, if you please, sir,” he concluded. “I need not point out to you its importance as far as we are concerned. You ask the lady to meet you, and on the very day you arrange she meets her death. If you kept the appointment, it seems to us that you ought to be able to shed some light on that death. I need hardly ask you whether you did keep it?”

The young man had recovered himself to some extent. He frowned and crossed his legs. “Look here, I don’t understand this. I thought Mrs. Vane’s death was an accident. They’ve had the inquest, and that was the verdict. Why are you ‘looking into it,’ as you say?”

“Well, sir,” the inspector returned in his usual cheerful tones, “I came here to ask questions, not to answer them. Still, I don’t mind answering that one. The fact of the matter is that we’re not at all sure that Mrs. Vane’s death *was* an accident.”

There was no doubt that the young man was genuinely startled. “Good Heavens!” he cried. “What on earth do you mean? What else could it be?”

The inspector looked at him quizzically. “Well—it might have been suicide, mightn’t it?” he said slowly.

“Suicide!” Woodthorpe sat up with a jerk and his rosy face paled. “You don’t—you don’t really mean to say you think it might have been, Inspector?”

“Have *you* any particular reason for thinking it might have been, sir?” the inspector shot out.

The young man sat back in his chair again, moistening his lips with a quick movement of his tongue. “No, of course not,” he muttered. “I don’t understand.”

“Oh, yes, you do, sir,” retorted the inspector grimly. “Now look here, Mr. Woodthorpe,” he went on in a more kindly voice. “I want you to put down your cards on the table and tell me the whole story. Believe me, it’s far and away the best thing to

do, from your point of view as well as ours. It's bound to come out in the end you know. And—"

Woodthorpe had risen to his feet. "Excuse me, Inspector," he interrupted stiffly, "I must repeat that I don't understand you. I have nothing to tell you. Is that all you wished to see me about?"

He walked toward the door as if inviting the other to rise and take his departure, but the inspector blandly ignored the hint.

"Of course I know what you're feeling, sir," he remarked. "You're trying to shield the lady's reputation, I know that. Well, the best way you can do so is to answer my questions. I've got to get my information, and if I get it from you we may be able to keep it between ourselves; if you force me to try other sources, I'm afraid there's no hope of keeping it dark. At present (if you haven't given yourselves away elsewhere) there's nobody but you and us who knows that you were Mrs. Vane's lover."

Woodthorpe looked at him steadily. "Inspector," he said slowly, "may I say that you are being offensive?"

"Can't help that, sir, I'm afraid," replied the inspector cheerily. "And if you're not going to be open with me, I daresay you'll find me more offensive still. And you can't bluff me, sir, you know. Not that I blame you for trying; I'd do the same myself for a lady I'd got into a mess with." The inspector's choice of words may not have been fortunate, but his sentiment was admirable. "Still, you've given yourself away too much in this note, you know, sir—besides what I've been able to find out elsewhere. For instance, I know that Mrs. Vane had been your mistress for some little time, that you'd got tired of her and were trying to break with her, and that she was threatening you if you did. I know all the essentials, you see. It's only a few details I want you to tell me, and I'd much rather have them from you than from anybody else."

The young man had put up a good fight, but it was plain to Roger that he now accepted defeat. Indeed, it was difficult to see what else he could do. Dropping back into his chair, he acknowledged the truth of the inspector's words by a tacit hiatus. "If I answer your questions," he said curtly, "will you treat what I tell you as private and confidential?"

"As far as I possibly can, sir," the inspector promised. "It's no wish of mine to drag out unnecessary scandals, or make things awkward which might have been better left undisturbed."

"I can't see what you're driving at, in any case," Woodthorpe said wearily, lighting another cigarette. "Mrs. Vane is dead, isn't she? What does it matter whether her death was accident or suicide? It can't help *her* to have these things raked over."

"It's my duty to look into it, sir," replied the inspector primly. "Now, when I mentioned the word 'suicide' just now you were startled, weren't you? Did it cross your mind that she might have killed herself because you insisted on breaking with her, and she didn't want to let you go?"

Woodthorpe flushed. "Yes," he admitted reluctantly. "It did."

“Ah!” Having succeeded in impressing the young man with his own mental acuteness, the inspector proceeded to the questions of real importance. “Did you keep that appointment, sir?”

“No.” Reconciled as he now was to the necessity of being frank, Woodthorpe spoke with no hesitation or sullenness. “You were wrong about that note of mine. It’s nearly three weeks old. That appointment was for a fortnight ago last Tuesday, and I did keep it then.”

“I see.” The inspector’s voice did not show the slightest surprise at this unexpected piece of news; Roger’s face, on the contrary, betrayed the liveliest astonishment. “And where was the meeting held, sir? What, in fact, is ‘the usual place’?”

“A little cave we knew of on that ledge, quite near the place she was killed. I discovered it about a year ago; and was struck with its privacy. Anyone who didn’t know of it would never find it. The mouth is at an angle in the rock, and there’s a big boulder masking it. We’ve been in there heaps of times when people have passed by outside without spotting us.”

“How many times have you met Mrs. Vane since then?”

“Not at all. I broke with her finally at that meeting.” He shifted a little uneasily in his chair, and Roger guessed that the process of breaking had not been a simple one. “I’d like to add, by the way,” he went on a little stiffly, “that the fault for the whole thing was mine. Mrs. Vane was in no way to blame. I—”

“We’ll leave that for the moment, sir, if you don’t mind,” the inspector interrupted. “It’s facts I’m after, not faults. Why did you decide to break with Mrs. Vane?”

“For private reasons,” Woodthorpe replied shortly, setting his jaw and looking very obstinate indeed.

The inspector abandoned that point. “What was Mrs. Vane threatening to do if you broke with her?” he asked bluntly.

“Tell her husband,” replied the other, no less bluntly.

The inspector whistled. “Whew! The whole story?”

“The whole story.”

“But that would have meant divorce!”

“She said she didn’t mind about that.”

“Humph!” The inspector turned this surprising information over in his mind. “How long had you been—well, friendly with her?” he continued, somewhat inadequately, after a short pause.

“For about a year,” replied Woodthorpe, who evidently understood what the inspector’s delicacy was intended to convey.

“Did you have many quarrels during that time?”

“About as many as other people do, I suppose.”

“Not more than you might expect to have with any other woman?”

“Well—perhaps a few more,” Woodthorpe admitted awkwardly.

Frantic signs from Roger conveyed the information to the inspector that his companion was anxious to put a question of his own. As the conversation had taken a psychological turn, the inspector saw no harm in graciously according permission.

"Did you find that you had cause as time went on very considerably to modify your original estimate of the lady's character?" Roger asked, choosing his words with some care.

Woodthorpe shot him a grateful look. "Yes," he said instantly. "I did."

Roger held him with a thoughtful eye. "Would you call her," he said slowly, "an *imprudent* woman?"

Woodthorpe hesitated. "I don't know. In some things, damnably! In others, very much the reverse."

Roger nodded as if satisfied. "Yes, that's just what I imagined.—All right, carry on, Inspector. Sorry to have interrupted you."

CHAPTER XII.
REAL BAD BLOOD

"Well?" Roger asked, as the two of them walked down the drive again half-an-hour or so later. "Well, what did you make of that young man, Inspector?"

"A very nice young gentleman, I thought," returned the inspector guardedly. "What did you, Mr. Sheringham, sir?"

"I thought the same as you," Roger replied innocently.

"Um!" observed the inspector.

There was a little silence.

"You brought out your deductions from the wording of that note very pat and cleverly," Roger remarked.

"Ah!" said the inspector.

There was another little silence.

"Well, I'm quite sure he knows nothing about it," Roger burst out.

The inspector bestowed a surreptitious grin on a small rambling rose. "Are you, sir?" he said. Mr. Roger Sheringham was perhaps not the only psychologist walking down the drive of Clouston Hall at that moment.

"Aren't you, Inspector?" Roger demanded point-blank.

"Um!" replied the inspector carefully.

"If he does, he's a better actor than ever I've met before," said Roger.

"I was watching him closely, and I'm convinced his surprise was genuine," said Roger.

"He certainly believed her death had been accidental," said Roger.

"I'll stake my life he knows nothing about it," said Roger defiantly.

"Will you, sir?" queried the inspector blandly. "Well, well!"

Roger cut viciously with his stick at an inoffensive daisy.

There was another little silence.

They turned out of the drive and began to tramp along the dusty highroad.

"Still," said Roger cunningly, "we got some extraordinarily valuable information out of him, didn't we?"

"Yes, sir," said the inspector.

"Which goes some way to confirm a rather interesting new theory of my own," said Roger, still more cunningly.

"Ah!" said the inspector.

Roger began to whistle.

"By the way," said the inspector very airily, "what exactly was the significance of that question you put to him about Mrs. Vane being an imprudent woman, sir? Why 'imprudent'?"

"Um!" said Roger.

In this way the time passed pleasantly till they returned to their inn. An impartial spectator would probably have given it as his opinion by that time that the honours were even, with, if anything, a slight bias in favour of the inspector. Roger retired to telephone his report through to London, stretching his meagre amount of straw into as many bricks as possible, and the inspector disappeared altogether, presumably to chew over the cud of his mission. Anthony was not in the inn at all.

Returning from the telephone, Roger looked into the little bar-parlour; three yokels and a dog were there. He looked into their private sitting-room; nobody was there. He looked into each of their bedrooms; nobody was there either. Then he took up his station outside Inspector Moresby's bedroom, laid back his head, and proceeded to give a creditable imitation of a bloodhound baying the moon. The effect was almost instantaneous.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the startled inspector, emerging precipitately in his shirt-sleeves. "Was—was that you, Mr. Sheringham?"

"It was," said Roger, pleased. "Did you like it?"

"I did not," replied the inspector with decision. "Are you often taken that way, sir?"

"Only when I'm feeling very chatty, and nobody will talk to me or occasionally when I've been trying to thought-read, and nobody will tell me whether I'm right or wrong. Otherwise, hardly at all."

The inspector laughed. "Very well, sir. I guess I have been trying your patience a bit. But now you've got that telephone business done with, perhaps we might have a chat."

"Distrustful lot of men, the police," Roger murmured. "Disgustingly. Well, what about a visit to the sitting-room? That bottle of whisky isn't nearly finished, you know."

"I'll be with you in half-a-minute, sir," said the inspector quite briskly.

Roger went on ahead and mixed two drinks, one stiff, one so stiff as to be almost rigid. The inspector, smacking his lips over the latter two minutes later, remarked regretfully that that was good stuff for nowadays, that was, but it was a pity they filled the bottles half up with water in these times before the stuff ever got into a glass at all. It is a hard business, trying to loosen a Scotland Yard Inspector's tongue.

"Well, now," said Roger, pulling himself together and settling down more comfortably in his chair. "Well, now, Inspector, what about it all? If you feel a little more disposed to be confidential, isn't this rather a good opportunity to review the case as it stands at present? I'm inclined to think it is."

The inspector set down his glass and wiped his moustache. "You mean, while there's only two of us to do the discussing instead of three?" he asked with a large wink.

"Exactly. My cousin's outlook is—well, not altogether unprejudiced."

"And is yours, sir?" asked the inspector shrewdly.

Roger laughed. “A palpable hit. Well, I certainly do *not* think the young lady in whom you’ve been taking so much interest has anything to do with it, I must confess. In fact, I’ll go further and say that I’ve absolutely made up my mind on the point.”

“And yet the evidence points more conclusively to her than to anybody else,” remarked the inspector mildly.

“Oh, no doubt. But evidence can be faked, can’t it? And you yourself were pointing out to me only a few hours ago that things aren’t always what they seem.”

“Was I, now?” queried the inspector, with an air of gentle surprise.

“Oh, Inspector, don’t start fencing with me again!” Roger implored. “I’ve given you a perfectly good drink, I’m prepared to hand over to you all my startling and original ideas—do try to be human!”

“Well, Mr. Sheringham, what is it you want to discuss?” asked the inspector, evidently trying hard to be human.

“Everything!” returned Roger largely. “Our interview just now; my idea about Mrs. Russell; your suspicions of Miss Cross (if you really have suspicions, and aren’t just pulling my leg)—everything!”

“Very well, sir,” said the inspector equably. “Where shall we start?”

“Well, we began just now with Miss Cross. I want to add a word to the very dogmatic statement I made, though it’s not really necessary. You know, of course, why I’m so convinced she had nothing to do with it?”

“Well, I won’t make you wild by saying ‘because she’s an uncommonly pretty girl,’” the inspector smiled. “I’ll wrap it up a bit more and say ‘because you think she couldn’t commit a murder to save her life.’”

“That’s right,” Roger nodded. “In other words, for overwhelmingly psychological reasons. If that girl isn’t as transparently straight as they make ’em, may I never call myself a judge of character again!”

“She *is* uncommonly pretty, I must say,” remarked the inspector non-committally.

Roger disregarded the irrelevance. “You must have to make use of psychology in your business, Inspector, and continual use too. Every detective must be a psychologist, whether he knows it or not. Don’t all your instincts tell you that girl’s as innocent—I don’t mean merely of this crime, but innocent-*minded*—as you’d wish any daughter of your own to be?”

The inspector tugged at his moustache. “We detectives may have to know a bit about psychology, as you say, sir; I’m not disputing that. But it’s our business to deal in facts, not fancies; and the thing we’ve got to pay most attention to is evidence. And in nine cases out of ten I’ll back evidence (even purely circumstantial evidence like this) against all the psychology in the world.”

Roger smiled. “The professional point of view, as opposed to the amateur. Well, naturally I don’t agree with you, and as I said, I’m not at all sure that you aren’t pulling my leg about Miss Cross all the time. Let’s go on to that interview of ours this

evening. I needn't ask you whether you saw that Master Colin wasn't being altogether as frank with us as he might have been. He was keeping something back, wasn't he?"

"He was, sir," the inspector agreed cheerfully. "His real reason for breaking with Mrs. Vane."

"Yes, that's what I meant. You don't think it was the reason he certainly wanted us to believe, then—that he was bored with her?"

"I know it wasn't," the inspector returned shrewdly. "He's a chivalrous young gentleman as far as the ladies are concerned, is Mr. Woodthorpe, and he'd never break with an old flame who was still desperately in love with him merely because he'd got bored with her. There was some much more powerful reason than that behind it."

"Ah!" said Roger. "I was right; you are a psychologist, after all, Inspector. And what do you think of this reason that friend Colin is so industriously hiding from us?"

"I think," the inspector said slowly, "that it would go a long way toward clearing up the case for us, if we knew it."

Roger whistled. "As important as all that, eh? I must say, I hadn't arrived at that conclusion myself. And have you got any inkling as to its nature?"

"Well—!" The inspector took a sup of whisky and wiped his moustache again with some deliberation. "Well, the most likely thing would be another girl, wouldn't it?"

"You mean, he'd fallen seriously in love elsewhere?"

"*And* wanted to get engaged to her," the inspector amplified. "*Was* engaged to her secretly, if you like. That's the only thing I can see important enough to make him resolve to break with Mrs. Vane at all costs."

Roger nodded slowly. "Yes, I think you're right.—But I'm blessed if I see how knowing it for certain is going to clear up the case for you?"

"Can't you, sir?" the inspector replied cautiously. "Well perhaps it's only a whim of mine, so we'll say no more about it for the time being."

Roger's curiosity was piqued, but he knew that its gratification was impossible. Accepting defeat, he turned to another aspect of the case.

"What did you think of that Russell theory of mine, by the way?" he inquired.

"Since you ask me, sir," answered the inspector with candour, "nothing!"

"Oh!" said Roger, somewhat dashed.

"I'd already collected all the gossip on those lines," the inspector proceeded more kindly, "and I've had a few words with the lady herself, as well as her husband. It didn't take long to satisfy me that there was nothing for me there."

Roger, who had confidently assumed that the Russell idea had been his and his alone, looked his chagrin. "But it *was* a woman who was with Mrs. Vane before she died," he argued. "And a woman with large feet at that. In fact, it hardly seems too much to assume that it was a woman with large feet who pushed Mrs. Vane over that cliff. Find a woman with large feet who'd got a big grudge against Mrs. Vane, and—! Well, anyhow, why are you so sure that Mrs. Russell is out of it?"

"She's got an alibi. I followed it up, naturally. Cast-iron. Whoever the woman was, it wasn't Mrs. Russell. But don't forget what I said once before, will you, Mr. Sheringham? Footprints are the easiest things in the world to fake."

"Humph!" Roger stroked his chin with a thoughtful air. "You mean, they might have been made by a man with small feet, wearing a woman's shoes for the express purpose?"

"It might have been anything," said the inspector guardedly. "All that those footprints mean to me at present is that there was another *person* on that ledge with Mrs. Vane."

"And that person was the murderer?"

"You might put it like that."

Roger considered further. "You've gone into the question of motive, of course. Has it struck you what a tremendous lot of people had a motive for wishing this unfortunate lady out of the way?"

"The difficulty is to find anybody who hadn't," the inspector agreed.

"Yes, that's what it really does amount to. Very confusing, considering how valuable a motive usually is. Establish your motive and there's your murderer, is a pretty sound rule at Scotland Yard, I understand. Help yourself to some more whisky, Inspector."

"Well, thank you, sir," said the inspector, and did so. "Yes, you're right. I can't say I ever remember a case when so many people had a reason, big or little, for wishing the victim dead. Here's luck, Mr. Sheringham, sir!"

"Cheerio!" Roger returned mechanically.

They fell into silence. Roger realised that the inspector, while pretending outwardly to be ready enough to discuss the case, was in reality determined to do nothing of the kind, at any rate so far as giving away his own particular theory was concerned. Official reticence, no doubt, and of course perfectly right and proper; but distinctly galling for all that. If the inspector would only consent to work with him frankly, Roger felt, they really might achieve excellent results between them; as it was, they must work apart. This professional jealousy of the amateur was really rather petty, especially as Roger would not insist upon any large share of the credit for a swift and successful solution. Well, at least he would present his rival (for such, apparently, was what the inspector was determined to be) with no more gratuitous clues such as that interesting scrap of paper, that was flat!

In the meantime, all being fair in love and war, it was always open to him to pick his opponent's brains to the best of his ability. He tried a new tack.

"You were asking me on the way back what I meant by applying the word 'imprudent' to Mrs. Vane," he said with an air of ingenuous candour. "I'll tell you. From what I can gather about her, the lady was anything but imprudent. She certainly married the doctor for his money, so far as my information goes; she cozened that extremely generous settlement out of him; and I'm quite sure that over anything

which might affect her material welfare, imprudent is the very last thing in the world she would be. So if she struck that boy as being so, she was bluffing."

"You mean, that she never intended to tell her husband at all? I see. Yes, that's my opinion too. It wouldn't square with my information about her either, not by a long chalk."

"Then what do you think her game was? Do you imagine she was genuinely in love with him?"

"Well, sir, that's impossible to say, isn't it? But knowing what I do about the lady, I should say she'd got some deeper game on than that. Something that was going to turn out to her material welfare, as you put it, I wouldn't mind betting."

"Of course you've had her past history probed into?" Roger remarked, with careful indifference. "That's where you Scotland Yard people can always score over the free-lance sleuth. Did anything interesting come to light? I gather she was a bit of a daisy."

The inspector hesitated and filled in a pause by application to his glass. Clearly he was debating whether any harm could be done by divulging this official secret. In the end he decided to risk it.

"Well," he said, wiping his moustache, "you'll understand that this is strictly confidential, sir, but we *have* had a man on the job—or two or three men, for that matter, both in London and up in the north, where the lady originally came from; and a few very interesting facts they were able to bring to light, too. Nobody has the slightest idea down here, of course, but the woman who called herself Mrs. Vane—well, she *was* a bit of a daisy, as you say."

Roger's eyes gleamed. "What do you mean, Inspector? *Called* herself Mrs. Vane? Wasn't she really?"

The inspector did not answer the question directly. He leaned back in his chair and puffed at his pipe for a moment or two, then began to speak in a meditative tone.

"There's real bad blood in that family—proper criminal stock, you might call 'em. The great-grandfather was one of the smartest burglars we've ever had in this country; they knew all about him at headquarters, but they never caught him. He never *was* caught, in fact. A lot of his jobs were put down later on to Charlie Peace, but they weren't, they were his all right; and he was lucky, while Peace wasn't. His son was a cut above burglaring. The old man left him a lot of cash, and he set up a bucket-shop in Liverpool. But he did over-reach himself. He served one stretch of three years, and one of five.

"This chap had two daughters and one son. They were left in pretty poor circumstances, because before he died their father managed to get rid of all the money he'd been left and all he'd made for himself besides. He'd managed to get rid of one of his daughters, as well before this, however—Miss Cross's mother, who married an army officer and passes out of the family history. The son was a bit of a bad egg, but he went over to America and operated there; he's still alive, and as a matter of fact in prison at the moment. Confidence-man, his little game is.

“The other daughter, Mrs. Vane’s mother, we’ve got nothing particular against either. She married a tradesman in Liverpool in a fair way of business, but ran away with another man after she’d brought him into the bankruptcy court by her extravagance, leaving her child, then ten years old, behind her. Her husband removed to London, taking the child with him, and took a post with a firm of wholesale chemists. He died when Mrs. Vane was seventeen, leaving nothing but debts.

“That left the girl a bit in the air. She got three months for shoplifting under an assumed name soon after her father died, and that taught her to be a bit more careful. She went out for bigger game after that. She was part-owner, and incidentally decoy, for a gambling joint in the West End till the police shut it up, and when times were hard she was usually able to make her keep out of the sort of rich young idiot who can be taken in by a baby face and a clinging manner—or rich old idiot too, for that matter. However, when she met Vane she really does seem to have been on her uppers. Still, she took him in all right, and he went further than all the other idiots and offered her marriage. She played him well, one must say, because she must have been in a blue funk all the time in case anything came out about the sort of person she really was. Anybody can see that the doctor’s got the very devil of a temper, and once he found out anything it would all be U. P.” The inspector paused and refreshed himself with a meditative air.

“Go on, Inspector!” Roger cried. “I know you’re keeping the tit-bit for the last.”

“Can’t put anything past you, Mr. Sheringham,” grinned his companion. “Yes, during the war, we’ve discovered, before she ever met Vane she went through a form of marriage with a man called Herbert Peters. We don’t know anything about Mr. Herbert Peters, but we’ve been looking for him pretty hard during the last day or two. No, we haven’t found him yet, and for all we know he may be dead.—He might even,” the inspector added judicially, “have been dead at the time of her marriage to the doctor.”

“But you’re pretty sure he wasn’t, eh?” asked Roger softly.

“I’d take my Bible oath on it!” returned the inspector piously.

CHAPTER XIII.
A MIDNIGHT EXPEDITION

When the inspector had gone to bed that night, as he did very shortly after this unprecedented outburst of confidence, Roger sat up to await the return of Anthony. A plan of campaign had been forming in his mind, and he was on tenterhooks to put it into operation.

Anthony made his appearance at half-past eleven, to be greeted by his cousin with severity and heavy sarcasm.

"Have you been studying the beauties of nature under the pale crescent moon?" Roger demanded. "Don't attempt to deny it—you have! One of the beauties of nature, at any rate. Well, it's as well, I suppose, because she certainly won't be beautiful to-morrow under this treatment. Her nose will be red, her eyes watery, and she'll be snuffling and sniffling with a streaming cold. There's a picture for a young lover! Will you love her in December, Anthony, as you did in May?"

"Dashed funny, aren't you?" growled the young lover, blushing warmly. He helped himself to what the inspector had left in the whisky-bottle.

"That depends on the point of view," Roger admitted very fairly. "*I* think I am; you don't. It's all a matter of opinion.—Now, hurry up and put that inside you, Anthony. There's dirty work afoot for us to-night."

"To-night? You mean there's something you want to do right away?"

"I do; and I've been waiting two or three hours for you to come in and do it with me. I want to make a little nocturnal expedition, in circumstances of some secrecy. To the fatal ledge, no less. You won't need a hat; come on. Everybody's gone to bed, so for Heaven's sake try to plant your large feet down gently; I don't want anybody to know we've gone out."

Obeying this injunction as well as possible, Anthony crept after his cousin down to the back-door of the inn, guided by the light of the latter's torch. Roger softly drew back the bolts, unlocked the door and pocketed the key. They passed cautiously through.

"I say, where are we going, Roger?" Anthony whispered.

"Yes, it is rather exciting, isn't it?" Roger agreed, answering the implication of the whisper rather than the actual words. "I told you, to the ledge."

"Yes, but why?"

"I'll have to explain a few other things first. Wait till we're out of this yard."

As they stepped out into the highroad Roger began to give his companion an account of the evening's work, describing the interview with young Woodthorpe as accurately as he could. The recital took them half-way across the stretch of turf, and then Anthony gave tongue.

"That's the chap who did it," said Anthony with the utmost confidence. "Can't you see his game? He wanted to shut her mouth; stop her telling her husband, you see. Seems obvious to me."

"So I suppose he put a pair of female shoes on his hands and walked along on them beside Mrs. Vane to disguise his footmarks?" queried Roger.

"He could easily fake those," Anthony returned, unmoved by this facetiousness. "The inspector himself said footprints were the easiest thing in the world to fake."

"Within limits," Roger demurred. "Besides, you must remember that the letter, which looked so suspicious at first, has rather lost its importance. I told you, it didn't refer to that Tuesday at all; it was for last Tuesday fortnight."

"You told me he *said* it was," Anthony retorted cunningly. "But he can't prove it, can he? You've only got his bare word to go on. And if he did push her over, it seems to me he wouldn't jib at telling you a naughty fib or two, dear Roger."

"Anthony, you overwhelm me!" Roger murmured. "To think that such a possibility had never occurred to my simple mind. That's the worst of having such a trustful nature, I always believe everything I'm told. If you were to tell me for instance that you'd been singing the Indian Love Lyrics to a jellyfish between the hours of nine and eleven-thirty this evening, I should believe you instantly."

Anthony's reply is unprintable.

When peace had been restored:

"You still haven't told me what we're coming here for," Anthony remarked.

They had reached the head of the nearer flight of steps, and Roger began to descend, flashing his torch before and behind him for the benefit of the following Anthony. "To have a look at that cave of course," he replied over his shoulder.

"But why the hurry?"

"Because if we leave it till a Christian time to-morrow," Roger explained patiently, "Moresby will certainly forestall us. And if there *is* anything interesting in the way of clues to be found there, we shall decidedly never see it, and probably never even hear of it, if we let Moresby get there first."

"Oh!" said Anthony.

They gained the ledge and made their way cautiously along its narrow width.

"By the way," Anthony remarked airily, "Margaret was asking—that is, do you happen to know whether that infernal inspector has still got any comic ideas about Margaret in his head?"

"How the average Englishman does shirk a plain statement of unpleasant fact," Roger murmured. "He'd rather use a hundred innocent words to wrap up his perfectly obvious meaning than half-a-dozen blunt ones. You mean, I suppose, does Moresby still think that Margaret murdered her cousin? Well, I don't know. I did try to sound him, but he's indecently reticent on the subject. On the whole I'm inclined to think that his ideas on that point are a little less rigid than they were."

“Well, thank God the fellow’s beginning to see a little sense at last,” was Anthony’s pious comment.

They progressed the rest of the way in silence, busy with their respective thoughts.

“Walk carefully, Anthony,” Roger remarked as they approached the scene of the tragedy. “We don’t want to leave our footprints at any rate. Try to tread only on dry rock.”

They picked their steps with elaborate caution.

Roger halted and flashed his torch round him. “This is the spot. You haven’t been here before, have you? That’s just about where she fell off, by that little cleft on the edge. Now you sit down on that boulder in front of you while I look round. We don’t want to leave more traces than we need, and my tread is probably rather more catlike than yours.” He began to poke about among the crevices and loose boulders at the back of the ledge.

A subdued cry of triumph a few minutes later brought Anthony to his side.

“This must be it,” Roger said, flashing his lamp upon a small aperture in the cliff face, almost covered by a large boulder. “Look!” He held his torch in the opening.

By screwing his head down to the level of his knees and peering round a corner of the boulder Anthony was just able to make out a dim and damp interior. “Great Scott,” he said in dismay, “I shall never be able to get inside that.”

“It is going to be a struggle,” Roger admitted, comparing his cousin’s burly bulk with the extremely small entrance. “A certain simile concerning the eye of a needle occurs to me with some force. Still, if friend Colin can do it, I should say you ought to be able to. But don’t stick half-way, or you’ll annoy the inspector when he comes exploring. Now then, expel a deep breath and follow Uncle Roger.” He dropped on his hands and knees and began to worm his way inside.

“I can’t cope with that,” observed Anthony ruefully, as he watched his cousin’s feet slowly and painfully drag themselves out of his field of vision. “I’ll watch the proceedings from the doorway.” He assumed a recumbent position and inserted his head and a portion of one shoulder in the tiny opening.

Inside was a tolerably respectable little cavern, some ten feet wide by a dozen deep, shelving at the back till ceiling met floor at an acute angle amid a medley of small rocks and fragments of stone; along one side a ledge two or three feet high and as many deep formed a natural couch, while a large, flat boulder opposite was equally useful as a table. Roger, standing upright in the centre without difficulty, was throwing his light into the various nooks and crannies with which the irregular sides were seamed.

“Any luck?” Anthony asked, twisting his head at an uncomfortable angle to improve his field of view.

Roger turned his light on to the floor. “There’s no doubt the place has been used,” he said slowly; “and used a lot. Cigarette-ends, matches, candle-ends all over the place.” He took a couple of steps toward the back and peered down among the rocks.

“Half-a-dozen empty chocolate boxes,” he continued, turning over his finds. “Paper bags, sandwich wrappings, half a bun; there doesn’t seem to be anything very exciting here.” He began to roam round the little enclosure, examining its possibilities with careful attention. Stooping, he picked up half-a-dozen cigarette-stubs and scrutinised them under his lamp. “Four gaspers and two Turkish,” he delivered judgment, “the latter marked with pink at the ends. Can you deduce anything from that, Anthony? Pale ends, pink-tipped. . . . Probably Mrs. Vane smoked them while chewing her chocolates, or, alternatively, chewed her chocolates while smoking them—a purely psychological distinction which certainly won’t interest you, but in either case an abominable practice; she seems to me to have been that kind of woman. Well, Anthony, except so far as we confirm friend Colin’s story, I’m very much afraid we’ve had our journey for nothing. All these things are damp, and most of them mildewed. I can quite believe that the place hasn’t been used for over a fortnight.”

“Were you looking for anything in particular?”

“No, just hoping against hope.” He bent and peered into a cavity in one of the sides. “Half-a-dozen banana skins and the remains of an orange. Not very helpful. How very hungry this place seems to have made those two! Well, I suppose we’d better be getting back.”

“What’s this thing just in front of me?” Anthony asked suddenly. “Bit of newspaper or something. No, you can’t see it from where you’re standing. Behind that big flat rock on your left.”

Roger retrieved the article in question. “A copy of *London Opinion*,” he replied without very much interest. “That would be Master Colin’s property, I should imagine; not the lady’s. Issue dated— Why, hullo!”

“What?” Anthony asked eagerly.

Roger paused and made a rapid mental calculation. “Good for you, Anthony!” he exclaimed. “Do you know what this is? It’s last Saturday’s number!”

“Oho!” observed Anthony with interest.

Roger stared at him. “So Colin was not telling the truth after all!” he exclaimed softly.

“That’s just what I’ve been trying to din into you all the time,” kindly pointed out his cousin.

CHAPTER XIV.
ROGER IS ARGUMENTATIVE

Roger dabbled his bare foot in the wave which surged past the rock upon which he and Anthony were sitting. Lifting it out of the water, he contemplated his dripping toes with apparently deep interest. “Of course,” he said slowly, “we must remember that Colin *may* have been telling the truth, after all.”

“How can he have been?” demanded his cousin.

It was after breakfast on the following morning. On the plea that business was business and that if he was to be any use in this affair at all Anthony must temporarily divest himself of the rôle of interesting young lover and assume that of the idiot friend, Roger had managed to restrain his cousin from making a hopeful bee-line, immediately his last mouthful had been swallowed, along the top of the cliffs in the direction of a certain small grassy ledge just below their summit. With tactlessly patent reluctance Anthony had been persuaded to bring his after-breakfast pipe down to the sea level, where Roger had insisted upon scrambling out to the very farthest rock which remained unsubmerged in order, as he carefully explained, to obtain the necessary privacy for airing his theories. There he had immediately removed his shoes and socks and proceeded to paddle.

Making the best of a bad business, Anthony had watched with a cold eye his cousin’s undignified behaviour and unhesitatingly refused to follow such infantile deportment.

“How can Woodthorpe have been telling the truth?” he repeated, as Roger showed signs of being less interested in his question than in a limpet which was sturdily countering all his efforts to dislodge it from its native rock. “That copy of *London Opinion* clinches that. If the inspector’s got any sense at all, he’ll draw the same deduction from it as we did and arrest the fellow right away, before he bolts.”

Roger abandoned the limpet with a slight sigh. “But supposing, Anthony, that it wasn’t Woodthorpe who left it there at all?” he said patiently. “Hadn’t that occurred to you?”

“No, it hadn’t,” Anthony returned, not without scorn. “It’s so dashed likely, isn’t it? You said yourself that it couldn’t have been Mrs. Vane. Who else could it have been?”

“Ah!” said Roger thoughtfully. “Who, indeed?” He withdrew his feet from the water and, hunching his knees, clasped his hands round them and stared out to sea. “Now just let’s see, for the sake of argument, what we can deduce from that copy of *London Opinion*, shall we? Forgetting for the moment all about Woodthorpe, I mean, and our slight complex about his veracity. Shall we do that, Anthony?”

“Fire ahead, then,” replied his cousin resignedly.

"Well in the first place, and confining ourselves to bare probabilities, with every likelihood of error, who constitute the majority of *London Opinion's* public, would you say? Men. That's why I advanced the unlikelihood of Mrs. Vane having left it there; it doesn't sound to me at all the type of paper that we might expect to find Mrs. Vane reading. Besides, she's much more likely to have brought a novel. Do you agree, so far?"

Anthony grunted.

"Very well, then; in all probability that paper was left there some time since last Saturday morning, by a man. Now what *type* of man reads *London Opinion?* Not the upper classes; they read *Punch*. Not the lower classes either. The middle classes—upper, middle and lower middle-classes. Our man, therefore, was probably an upper, middle or lower middle-class man. Now that doesn't sound very much like the son of Sir Henry Woodthorpe, does it?"

"Are you trying to make out that just because a chap's father is a baronet, he never reads *London Opinion?*" enquired Anthony with some sarcasm.

"No, Anthony, I am not. You tend to miss my point. What I am very brilliantly endeavouring to convey to your moss-covered intelligence is that if Mr. Colin Woodthorpe, son of Sir Henry Woodthorpe, Bart., wanted to take a piece of literature with which to amuse himself while waiting for the other half of an appointment he'd probably take the *Sporting Life*, *Punch*, or a detective novel. That he might very nearly as well have taken *London Opinion* I readily admit, but only very nearly. What I'm considering, in fact, is the balance of probabilities. Now are you there?"

"But how do you know that the chap, whoever he was, did take it to amuse himself with while waiting for an appointment? How do you know there was an appointment at all?"

"I don't, bandicoot," Roger returned with exemplary patience. "But do you imagine (a) that he took it to read *during* the appointment, fearing lest he should be bored by the lady's idle prattle; or (b) that he went down to that ledge all alone and crept into that cave for the sole purpose of reading *London Opinion* in the dark?"

"He might just as well have simply happened to have it with him, and chucked it away because he couldn't be bothered to carry it home again."

"He might," Roger agreed at once; "but it isn't nearly so likely. No, on the balance of probabilities I think we may assume that this man, probably not Woodthorpe, probably took *London Opinion* with him to read on the ledge while waiting for the other half of a probable appointment in that cave. He might have thrown it away then and there as soon as she turned up, but with that instinctive inhibition which most of us have against throwing something away with which we have not completely finished, he took it with him into the cave when the lady arrived and then, as you say, left it there because he couldn't be bothered to take it home again—psychologically speaking, there is a large difference between throwing a thing away and leaving it behind. And we know the lady *did* turn up, dear little Anthony, because otherwise he

wouldn't have gone into the cave at all, but would have continued to sit outside where he could see to read. Are you with me?"

"Humph!" said Anthony.

"Now who was the other half of this man's appointment?" Roger continued in argumentative tones. "Personally, I'm putting my money on Mrs. Vane. As far as friend Colin knew nobody but himself and Mrs. Vane had any inkling about that cave. He discovered it himself, he told us, about a year ago, and was at once struck with its suitability for the purpose to which he afterward put it. He was quite positive that he, at any rate, had told nobody else of its existence. To sum up then—if Colin is telling the truth all through, Mrs. Vane herself arranged an appointment with an unknown man belonging to the middle classes for some time since last Saturday morning, to discuss business of an obviously secret and confidential nature. And to stretch a point, we'll add that that appointment resulted in her death, and that the unknown middle-class man is her murderer.—And how is all that," Roger concluded with legitimate pride, "out of just finding a copy of *London Opinion* in that little cave, eh?"

"So now I should think you'd better go off and talk it all over with Moresby," said Anthony hopefully.

"Anthony, you disgust me. Do you or do you not want to help me save your young woman from the gallows? No, don't trouble to reply to that question; it's a rhetorical one. You do. Very well, then. Continue, if you please, to sustain the part of idiot friend which you play so admirably."

"Well, what do you want me to do?" Anthony asked uncomfortably.

"Listen to me while I clarify my own ideas, somewhat nebulous at the moment, by putting them into speech. Let me go on examining possibilities. Though by the way, since embarking on this one-sided discussion I find I appear to have converted myself on one point. I do *not* believe it was Colin Woodthorpe who left that copy of *London Opinion* in the cave. What have you got to say about that?"

"You made out a pretty useful case against it," Anthony was forced to admit.

"Yes; I did. On grounds of pure reason I reject Colin as our unknown man, but I can easily find that out for certain; I've got a little test in mind for him, which I propose to apply as soon as I leave you. Well, now, assuming Colin is out of it, can we find anybody else to take his place? Think hard."

"Wait a minute, though," Anthony said after a little pause. "Aren't you forgetting those foot-prints? You've been saying all the time that it must have been a woman with Mrs. Vane, not a man. How does that square in with this idea?"

"No, I'm not forgetting them. They can be worked into this theory all right. If we assume, you see, that the murder was a premeditated one, as I think it certainly was, we can assume also that the murderer took a few elementary precautions to throw the police off his track if ever anything turned up to make them suspicious about the accident theory. Well, supposing that Mrs. Vane arrived alone, as we now think she must have done, what would be easier for the man than to put on a pair of female

shoes he'd brought with him for the purpose, go a little way along the ledge and then walk back again beside Mrs. Vane's tracks, carefully making prints wherever he could and modifying his stride to suit her smaller steps? That's perfectly feasible. Footprints and how to fake them are about the first thing to which your amateur murderer would turn his attention."

"Cunning," commented Anthony.

"Oh, yes; but perfectly intelligible. Well now, having disposed of that point, let's get back to where we were before. Can you think of anyone else to take young Woodthorpe's place as the villain of the piece?"

Anthony ruminated. "The only other men in any way mixed up in the show seem to be Dr. Vane and Russell."

"Ye-es. And that doesn't help us much, does it? Dr. Vane we can wash out right away; there's no conceivable reason why a wife should want to make an appointment in an out-of-the-way and thoroughly uncomfortable place with her own husband when she can much better interview him from her own drawing-room sofa. But Russell—! What does Russell give us?"

"If she *had* been carrying on an intrigue with him as well as Woodthorpe," Anthony murmured.

Roger shifted his position so that he could plunge both his legs in the water up to their knees. "Ah, that's better. You're missing a lot, Anthony, if you only knew it, by being so proud and superior; superior people always do.—Yes, that's perfectly true. Russell would then have almost exactly the same motive for getting rid of her as Colin had, wouldn't he? Jealous wife instead of jealous unknown fiancée (I wonder who friend Colin *is* meditating an engagement with, by the way, if Moresby's right. It ought to be easy enough to find out), *plus* fear of jealous husband's righteous wrath possibly into the bargain, if she'd been trying the same bluff on with him too. But that does make the lady a little—how shall I put it?—*promiscuous*, doesn't it?"

"I shouldn't think she'd stick at that," said Anthony sagely.

"Oh, nor should I. Not for a moment. Especially if she'd got a little game on with both of them, to her own ultimate advantage. But if that were the case, I can't help thinking it somewhat imprudent to meet them both in the same very compromising spot. *That* doesn't sound like Mrs. Vane at all to me."

"But she *did* meet the second man in the same place for all that," Anthony pointed out, "whether it was Russell or not."

"Yes, that's true enough. Of course, this may have been an isolated assignation, made with the knowledge that Colin would be busy at that time elsewhere. But Colin hasn't an alibi for the time of Mrs. Vane's death, we discovered, whereas the inspector says that Russell himself has, a cast-iron one. No, it's a pure guess of mine, Anthony, but I feel instinctively that this mysterious man is somebody who hasn't cropped up in the case at all yet."

"Oh! That's rather vague. And you haven't the slightest notion who it could be?"

"Yes, I have," Roger replied thoughtfully. "Just the slightest notion. It's my opinion that this man will prove to be somebody out of Mrs. Vane's murky past. Quite possibly her real husband."

"By Jove, that's an idea," Anthony concurred with enthusiasm. "Good for you, Roger!"

"Thank you, Anthony," Roger returned gratefully.

They discussed this interesting possibility for a short time, and then Roger began to put on his shoes and socks.

"I think that's really all there is to go into at present," he said, "so you can have leave of absence for the rest of the morning. You can tell Margaret about our discovery last night and this new visitor Mrs. Vane may have had recently. With any luck she ought to be able to give us a pointer to the gent."

Anthony rose to his feet. "If I happen to see her, I will," he said a little stiffly.

"'If I happen to see her, I will!'" Roger scoffed. "Oh, very good, Anthony; very good indeed. I must try you with the butter test at lunch. If half-a-pound of butter, placed in the patient's mouth, shows no sign of melting within—"

"What are *you* going to do?" Anthony asked hurriedly.

"Me? Oh, I've got to be busy. I've got to lay my trap for young Colin first of all; then I want to have a word with Moresby and hear exactly what he's made of that *London Opinion*, if anything (he's probably concealing it from me in his breast-pocket at this very moment); and lastly I want to tackle this business of the mysterious stranger from the other end. I'm going to cross-examine every inhabitant of the place within a square mile of that ledge to try and find someone who was within sight of it early on Tuesday afternoon. I'm convinced I'm on the right tack; if Margaret can't help us, I'm going to exhaust the possibilities of that line of information if it takes me a month."

"But I thought everybody had been questioned about that already?"

"Not so," Roger replied cunningly. "They were questioned before about seeing Mrs. Vane. There was no word mentioned about a strange man."

"I see," said Anthony, balancing irresolutely on each foot in turn. "Yes, that's a sound scheme.—Well, I'll be strolling along now, I think, if you don't want me any more."

Roger waved a paternal farewell with an Oxford brogue.

After Anthony had departed Roger did not follow him immediately. For quite a long time he sat on his rock, oblivious of the fact that other and even tempting ones were being uncovered by the receding tide straight in front of him. This talk with Anthony certainly had clarified his ideas very considerably—had, indeed, presented him with some highly interesting brand-new ones. The case had suddenly taken on an entirely different aspect. From being merely complex it had become downright complicated. He wondered what Inspector Moresby, with his very much more conventional methods, would have to say about his deductions from that copy

of *London Opinion*, a piece of constructive reasoning which Roger had not the slightest hesitation in characterising in his own mind as brilliant.

There are some people who are said to know instinctively whether they are in the right or wrong, without the aid of any extraneous evidence. Roger had not the least doubt that he possessed this sixth sense, and as he rose at last to his feet and began his scramble back to the foot of the cliffs every instinct was busy telling him that he had got his finger poised above the very heart of the problem. In some new actor, not yet appeared on the stage, would the ultimate solution be found. To lay his hands on him should only prove a matter of time and patience.

Humming blithely, he clambered up the uneven ascent and hoisted himself on the ledge. Well, first of all he would have to—

"Ah, *there* you are, Mr. Sheringham! Do you know, I had quite an idea I should find you here. I've been so anxious to see you again, after our very brief conversation yesterday morning. I want to ask you what you think of this terrible crime in our midst, and whether you have formed a theory yet. I hope—I do so hope it will not prove to have been committed by—ah, dear me, a terrible affair!"

Roger wheeled about. From above a boulder at the back of the ledge a face like that of a benign and beardless goat was regarding him benevolently through an enormous pair of horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Oh, hell!" confided Roger Sheringham to his immortal soul.

CHAPTER XV.
INTERESTING DISCOVERY OF A SHOE

It was past noon when Roger made his appearance at the little grassy ledge. To his surprise he found it occupied by only one tenant, who was lying on his back and staring up into the blue sky, puffing contentedly at his pipe. Roger scrambled down the little slope and dropped on to the turf beside his cousin.

"How now, fair coz? What have you done with the lady? I wanted a word with her."

Anthony turned his head. "You can hardly expect her to be at your beck and call *all* the time," he observed with some severity. "You know she's keeping house for the doctor."

"Yes, Anthony," Roger replied meekly. "Is she keeping house now?"

"She's gone into the village to do some shopping. She'll be coming back here when she's through."

"A proper little gent," remarked Roger, pulling out his own pipe and filling it lazily, "a proper little gent, such as I could wish any cousin of mine to be, would have gone with her and carried her parcels for her."

Anthony flushed slightly. "She wouldn't let me, damn you. She said that— She wouldn't let me."

"Yes, she's quite right," Roger admitted handsomely. "Villages *are* appalling places for gossip, aren't they?" He concealed his grin in the operation of applying a match to his pipe.

"Did you have any luck?" Anthony asked hastily.

"Well, yes and no." His cousin's leg successfully stretched, Roger was ready enough to revert to the main theme. "First of all I was waylaid by that wretched little parson, whose curiosity strikes me as being really indecent. He tried his best to pump me as to what I thought about it all, what the inspector thought about it all, whether any arrest was imminent, whether any other clues had been discovered, and all the rest of it, and though I'm afraid I was outrageously rude to him in my frantic efforts to get away, he managed to waste a perfectly good quarter-of-an-hour of my valuable time; finally I told him that a Bible and prayer-book marked with the initials 'S. M.' had been found on the ledge close to where the tragedy had taken place, and the police were looking for the owner. While he was still gasping, I effected my get-away."

"You are an ass, Roger," grinned Anthony.

"So it may seem to you," Roger replied blandly. "In reality I am a person of remarkable astuteness and cunning. Well, then I went back to the inn, borrowed mine host's bicycle and headed for Clouston Hall. I don't mind walking it in the cool of the evening, but I was hanged if I was going to do so in the middle of a day like this. All fell out as arranged."

"You mean, Woodthorpe's cleared?"

"Yes. Luckily he was at home, and I pretended I wanted to clear up a minor point arising out of our conversation last night. If I must be forced to admit it, I'm afraid I took the inspector's name in vain. Then, by subtle and extremely cunning degrees, I led the conversation round till I could quote the best illustrated joke in that issue of *London Opinion*, having been at some pains previously to buy a copy and study it. I quoted the first half of the joke only, and if friend Colin had seen the paper he couldn't possibly have failed to remember it—but he couldn't supply the point. *Ergo*, Colin had not seen that issue of *London Opinion; ergo*, Colin could not have been the person to have left it in the cave."

"You don't think he saw through you?"

"I'm quite sure he didn't. Colin is not a young man who impressed me as teeming with intelligence, and of course I was on the alert for any signs of bluff. He was perfectly natural. No, I'm sure Colin isn't our man. Now it's your turn to report. Could Margaret give you any useful information? You had time to tell her our conclusions to date, I suppose?"

"Yes, I told her, but she couldn't remember anything about a strange visitor to Mrs. Vane. She said she'd rack her brains on the way to the village and back, but she couldn't think of one off-hand."

"I see. And when do you expect her back?"

Anthony consulted his wrist-watch. "Any time now."

"Good. Then let us recline on our backs, close our eyes and indulge in blessed silence till she comes, because certainly we shan't get any when she does." He proceeded to suit his action to his words.

Anthony regarded his horizontal cousin with a large grin. "'*Blessed* silence!'" he scoffed "Oh, very good, Roger; very good indeed. I must try you with the butter test at lunch. If half-a-pound of butter, placed in the patient's mouth—how does it go on, eh?"

But Roger, serenely recumbent, took refuge in his blessed silence.

During the next ten minutes not a single word was spoken. Then Margaret appeared, and Roger's Trappist-like vow was a thing of the past.

"Now then, Margaret," he said briskly, when greetings were over and they were all seated once more. "Now then, it's up to you. Anthony tells me he's given you an account of my activities. Have you got any information for me yet?"

"You mean, about the mysterious visitor?" said the girl, wrinkling her white forehead. "No, I'm afraid I haven't. Elsie never had a mysterious visitor at all, to my knowledge."

"And yet you said before that you thought there was someone or something she was afraid of," Roger mused. "That doesn't help you?"

"I'm afraid not," Margaret confessed. "I couldn't say anything definite about that when you asked me before, you remember."

"Look here," said Anthony suddenly, "are you sure she was *afraid?* Not just worried? If she was just worried, you see, that chap Woodthorpe would account for it."

"Yes, that's a good point," Roger approved. "Whether she had any deep game on with him or not, she'd naturally be put out by his wanting to break with her. Is that more like it, Margaret?"

"It might have been that of course," said the girl doubtfully, "but—oh, I don't know, but my impression certainly is that it was something stronger than just worry."

"All the better," Roger said cheerfully. "That confirms my theory. If it *was* somebody out of her past, trying in all probability to blackmail her, she certainly would show signs of fear."

"I know!" Margaret exclaimed. "I could go through her things, couldn't I? Letters and papers, I mean. I could easily do that, and I should think if there is anything to be found out that's the most likely way of discovering it."

"I should say the inspector is almost certain to have done that already," Roger meditated. "Still, there's no harm in your doing it too."

"Oh, I hadn't thought of that," said Margaret, her face falling. "Then it won't be much use?"

"I doubt it. Still, we mustn't disregard the possibility. Of course if you could find some place that the inspector may have overlooked—! Documentary evidence of that sort, you see, would be hidden very carefully away by a person of Mrs. Vane's criminal—shall we say?—training. And after all, the inspector wouldn't have been looking for anything like that. Probably he'll only have glanced through the obvious, merely as a matter of routine."

"Well, let's hope for the best," Margaret smiled. "Anyhow, if I don't find something I promise you it won't be for want of looking."

"By the way," said Roger, dismissing this topic, "how's Dr. Vane?"

"George? Oh, he's all right. Why?"

"I only wondered. No interesting developments yet?"

Margaret laughed. "You mean Miss Williamson? Oh, give her time. I don't think any woman could be expected to propose to a man in less than a week from his wife's death, really."

"Roger judges everybody by himself," interposed Anthony maliciously.

"I wasn't going so far as to suggest that she'd actually proposed to him yet, Margaret," Roger explained mildly. "I was just asking whether there'd been any developments, of any sort."

"If there have been, then, I don't know them. I hardly ever see either of them in these days. They seem to be spending more time in the laboratory than ever."

"Well, I don't know that I personally should care to conduct my courtship in an atmosphere of test-tubes, litmus-paper, and dead rabbits, but there's no accounting for tastes. A dead rabbit, I feel convinced, would put me off my stroke altogether."

“Roger, you’re disgusting. Well, is there anything else you want to ask me?”

“Not at the moment. I’ll wait for one of your more helpful days. Does that mean, by the way, that ‘Good-morning, Mr. Sheringham. It’s been so nice to see you. You must come again some day’? Because if so, I warn you that Anthony comes with me.”

“Roger, I think you’re being perfectly horrid this morning,” exclaimed Miss Cross, blushing warmly.

“Shall I chuck *him* over the cliff for you, Margaret?” suggested Anthony, no less moist.

“It doesn’t mean anything of the sort,” Margaret went on, disregarding this admirable offer. “I was simply going to say that if you don’t want to discuss things with me any more, I wish you’d show me the little cave where Elsie and Colin used to meet. It sounds most thrilling.”

“What I deplore most of all in the young women of to-day,” remarked Roger sadly, as he rose with reluctance to his feet, “is the unpleasing morbidity of their tastes.”

As they walked abreast along the top of the cliff, Roger’s thoughts were busy round a certain point. Margaret’s reference to her dead cousin as Dr. Vane’s wife tended to show that Anthony had not told her that the two were probably not legally married. Roger was glad of this; he had meant to warn Anthony that morning to say nothing to the girl on this delicate matter, but it had slipped his memory. Until the matter was settled one way or the other, either by the discovery of the living Herbert Peters or by the establishment of his death prior to Mrs. Vane’s marriage to the doctor, it was much better to leave the girl in ignorance of the issues involved. For (and this was the point which was really worrying Roger) if Mrs. Vane’s second marriage turned out to be a bigamous one, would that not mean that the settlement was invalidated and Margaret’s legacy vanished into thin air? Without knowing the exact terms of the document it was impossible to say, but Roger meant to go into the matter with a solicitor on Margaret’s behalf at the earliest possible moment.

His attention was recalled to the present moment with a jerk. “I can’t tell you how thankful I was to hear of this new theory of yours, Roger,” Margaret was saying with an effort of lightness. “It’s such a change from—well, from the way things seem to have been heading. And you really think you’ll be able to substantiate it?”

“I’m quite sure I shall, my dear,” Roger replied, perhaps with more confidence than he actually felt at the moment. “I’ve what is termed, I understand, a hunch about it. Don’t you worry any more; Uncle Roger is going to see you through this and get to the bottom of it for you.”

“I shall never be able to thank you enough if you do,” the girl said in a low tone. “Perhaps you can imagine something of the nightmare the last day or two has been, since I realised that I—that they—” Her voice broke.

Roger drew her arm through his and patted her hand paternally. “That’s all over now, my dear. No need to worry about that again. Uncle Roger’s on the job now. Besides,” he went on, instinctively shying away from any such display of feeling, “to

touch on lesser matters, I believe I can promise you that even the inspector is giving up that theory now too."

"He is?" Margaret did not attempt to conceal her joy. She looked at Roger with shining eyes. "He is really? Did he tell you so?"

"Well, not in so many words," hedged Roger, who had not the least solid ground for this assertion. "But he meant me to infer it, I think. He's a very cautious bird, though, and would never say anything outright."

"Oh, thank Heaven!" Margaret murmured. "At last I can begin to breathe again!"

Anthony glared at the horizon and muttered beneath his breath. The words "damfool," "anointed ass" and "tommyrot" were indistinctly audible.

The rest of the way Margaret seemed to dance on air, and Roger rejoiced openly with her. Even Anthony was so far infected by the general feeling as to forget his dark broodings regarding the inspector's state of anointed asininity and possess himself of Margaret's other arm. It was a singularly hot day, but Margaret did not appear to mind the extra burden in the least. Perhaps she liked having her arms carried for her.

They reached the nearer flight of steps and descended to the ledge.

"I've only been down here once since Elsie's death," Margaret remarked, as they made their way along it in single file with Roger in the van. "I'm not even sure whereabouts she—where it happened."

"Just along there, it was," Roger said, pointing ahead of them. "You see where the ledge broadens out for twenty or thirty yards. Just in the middle of that. The little cave's there too."

As they arrived at the spot where the ledge began to widen Margaret stopped and peered over the edge. Down below the waves were thrashing and beating, with a sullen roar and a seething of white foam, among the huge boulders. She shuddered.

"How—how *horrible!*" she said in a low voice.

Roger had waited for her and she walked slowly on, but still gazing down into the turmoil as if fascinated. Anthony watched her with a nameless anxiety: there *were* people (weren't there?) who got a bit rocky on heights and as often as not threw themselves over from sheer fascinated funk. "Better not walk so near the edge, Margaret," he called out to her above the roar of the waves.

Suddenly she stopped short and stared down among the rocks, leaning perilously over; it seemed as if something had riveted her attention.

"What's that?" she asked Roger, pointing a slim forefinger. "Isn't there something on that big greeny rock, just out of the water? It looks like a—yes, it's a shoe, surely."

Roger followed the direction she indicated. "Yes," he agreed. "It's an old shoe, I think. There must be a good man— Hullo, wait a minute!" He stood for an instant staring down, frowning. "Shin down and get it, Anthony, will you?" he said abruptly the next moment. "You're younger than I am. I've got an idea."

"You have?" Margaret asked eagerly, as Anthony hastened to obey. "What?"

"Half a minute, till I've had a look at it."

Five minutes later Roger was turning the shoe over in his hands. It was a lady's, size six, soaked with sea-water and in a dilapidated condition; the buckle had been torn off, and the leather was slit on either side of the toe down to the sole.

Roger's eyes gleamed. "Eureka!" he exclaimed softly. "Good for your sharp eyes, lady. You understand what this is, both of you, don't you?"

"Roger!" Margaret cried. "Do explain! I don't know what it is, except an old shoe. What is it?"

"It's one of the shoes worn by the murderer to disguise his foot-prints, precisely as I said," Roger explained, with a not unjustified triumph. "Don't you see why the leather's cut like this? To enable the shoe to be crammed on to a foot several sizes too large for it. He had the pair all ready with him, made use of them, and then threw them down into the sea."

"Jolly good, Roger!" Anthony exclaimed, smiting his cousin on the back in his exuberance. "Then you were right when you said the murderer was a man."

"I was, Anthony; and this clinches it once and for all. No woman would want to make a shoe this size still larger to fit her foot. I shall have to hare off and see the inspector about this. In the meantime, you shin down again and hunt among those rocks for the second one; it's bound to be somewhere about. Children, this is the biggest thing that's happened since I took up the case!"

CHAPTER XVI.
INSPECTOR MORESBY INTERVENES

"The biggest thing that's happened since you took up the case, is it, sir?" said a voice behind them. "Well, well, that's interesting. May I have a look at that shoe?"

They wheeled round, startled. Then Anthony glared, Margaret stiffened and Roger grinned.

"Hullo, Inspector!" cried the last. "Where in the world did you spring from?"

"The cave, sir," the inspector replied, a little twinkle in his blue eyes, as he possessed himself of the shoe. "Though not so much sprung as crawled." He turned the shoe over in his hand, examining it with professional intentness.

"Find anything interesting in the cave, by the way?" Roger asked airily.

The inspector glanced up from the shoe, his twinkle again to the fore. "Only what you did, I fancy, Mr. Sheringham, sir," he replied blandly. "A copy of *London Opinion*, eh?"

"Well, I hope you found that as interesting as I did," Roger returned, somewhat discomfited.

Anthony had been watching this exchange without joy. When one has been anointed ass enough to suspect, on grounds of mere material evidence, a particularly high-souled young woman, it would only be decent, to Anthony's mind, on finding one's self confronted with the said high-souled young woman at least to exhibit signs of uncontrollable embarrassment and gloom. Yet so far from exhibiting any such signs, the inspector had completely ignored the high-souled young woman's existence. Things like that were simply not done.

"I expect you'd probably like to be getting back now," said Anthony to the high-souled young woman, in tones of frigid correctness. "May I see you home?"

"Thank you, that is very kind of you," replied the high-souled young woman no less stiffly.

They turned and walked, like two faintly animated ramrods, back the way they had come.

Inspector Moresby must have been singularly devoid of all sensibility; even this pointed behaviour failed to move him to any exhibition of remorse. "You're quite right, Mr. Sheringham, sir," he observed, inhumanly unconscious of the censure conveyed in every line of the dignified retreating figures. "This *is* interesting, this shoe. I'll send a man down some time to look for its fellow. Now sit down and tell me all about it. What made you think that the murderer is a man, and what had that copy of *London Opinion* got to tell *you?*"

Now it had certainly been no part of Roger's plans to give the inspector, for the time being at any rate, any idea of his new theory. Beyond reporting to him, as in duty bound, the discovery of that significant shoe, he was going to say nothing of the

deductions he had been able to draw from it. The inspector himself had chosen to establish a rivalry between them, and Roger had not been slow to accept the challenge. Yet in a quarter of an hour's time, by a judicious mixture of flattery, cajolery and officialism, the inspector had succeeded in scooping from Roger's mind every thought that had passed through it during the last twelve hours, together with the full story of his activities for that period. It was not for nothing that Inspector Moresby had reached the heights he now adorned.

"Well, I'll not say you're on the wrong tack, sir," he observed cautiously, when Roger had hung the last bow and tied the final ribbon about his newly decorated theory. "I'll not say I think you're on the wrong tack, though I won't say I think you're on the right one either. The reasoning's clever, and though it's easy enough for me to pick holes in it, it's just as easy for you to fill 'em up again. The thing's too vague to say either way just yet."

"I made a perfectly legitimate set of deductions, and I've just had them confirmed in a rather remarkable way," Roger insisted not altogether too pleased with this hardly exuberant praise of his efforts.

"That's quite right," the inspector agreed soothingly. "But the trouble is, you see, that in a case like this when the known facts are so precious few, it's possible to make half-a-dozen sets of deductions from them, all quite different. For instance," he went on with a paternal air which Roger found somewhat hard to bear, "for instance I've no doubt that if you gave me time, I could prove to you, just as conclusively as you've proved your own theory, that the real murderer is the doctor's secretary—(what's her name?) Miss Williamson."

"Miss Williamson?" Roger echoed, startled out of his mild annoyance. "Good Heavens, I never thought seriously of her. You don't really think—?"

"I do not, sir," the inspector smiled. "Not for one minute. I can't say it ever entered my mind before. But—wait a minute!" He thought rapidly for a moment, still smiling. "How's this? Miss Williamson's setting her cap at the doctor,—" Roger caught his breath and looked at the other narrowly, but the inspector returned his gaze with bland innocence "—but knows she can't get him, or *thinks* of course that she can't get him, till Mrs. Vane's out of the way. You've seen the lady, and you probably gathered as well as I did that if Miss Williamson makes up her mind to a thing, that thing's going to happen. She strolled over from the house to the top of the cliffs that Tuesday afternoon to get a breath of air, and sees Mrs. Vane making for the Russells' house, alone; not a soul in sight. 'Here's my opportunity!' she says, joins Mrs. Vane and easily persuades her, on some pretext or other, to accompany her down to the ledge; and there all she's got to do is to push her over. That fits the facts all right, doesn't it?"

"But was Miss Williamson out that afternoon?" Roger asked shrewdly.

"Oh, yes, sir," said the inspector, with an air of mild surprise. "Didn't you know that?"

"No," Roger had to admit. "I didn't."

"Oh, yes. She went out just as I said, for a breath of air. It was a hot afternoon and the laboratory got a bit stuffy. She was on the top of the cliffs for about half-an-hour, and says she saw nobody. It was a bit before the time of the murder, but we've only got her word for that. If nobody saw her go out and nobody saw her come in, how are we to know she's telling the truth? I tried to get some confirmation of her statement from the doctor, but he's as vague as you like. Might have been the morning, so far as he remembers. Besides, he wasn't in the laboratory all the afternoon himself; I got that from the maid who took his tea in to him there; he wasn't there then."

"Well, how about the coat-button? How is that going to fit in?"

"On her way down the drive," responded the inspector glibly, "Miss Williamson noticed a coat-button lying on the ground. She recognized it as one of Miss Cross's, and being a precise, careful sort of person, picked it up and slipped it into her pocket, meaning to give it to Miss Cross later. After the murder, however, she says to herself: 'Well, there's nothing to beat a murder that looks like an accident, but I'll just make sure that if anybody *is* going to be suspected it shan't be me!' and with that she climbs down to where the body's lying (she's a strong, active-looking woman, so that wouldn't give her overmuch difficulty) and puts the button in the dead woman's hand. As for the footprints, they might just as well have been made by her as anyone else."

"Very neat," said Roger approvingly. "And the shoes, eh? What about them?"

The inspector laid one finger along the side of his nose and rubbed that organ slowly; his eyes began to twinkle again. "Ah! Well, I can think of several ways of working those shoes in, sir, and I've no doubt you can do the same."

"Meaning that you've already made an interesting deduction or two from them, about which you're determined to keep as tight as a clam?" Roger laughed. "All right, don't be frightened; I won't try to open you."

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that, sir," returned the inspector guardedly, and left the implication of his words tactfully vague. "Anyhow, Mr. Sheringham," he went on the next moment, "you see how it is. It's easy enough to twist the facts, when they're so few, into meaning exactly what we want them to mean, and away from meaning exactly what we don't want them to mean. It's only in those detective stories, where the inspector from Scotland Yard always shows up so badly, that there's only one inference drawn from a set of facts (not one fact, I'm meaning; a set) and that's invariably the right one. The fact of the matter is, sir," the inspector added in a burst of confidence, "that what I said about Miss Williamson might just as well apply to anyone. Given the motive in this case, *anybody* might have done it!"

"That's true enough," Roger agreed ruefully. "Heaven knows we've got a big enough field to search. Still, I'm confident I'm on the right track, and I shall jolly well remain confident, however much you try to damp me. So the next thing I'm going to do is to carry on with my enquiries about a strange man being seen round these cliffs between three and four-thirty last Tuesday afternoon."

“Well, it can’t do any harm, can it?” observed the inspector restraining his enthusiasm.

“And what are you going to do?”

“Me, sir?” said the inspector innocently.

“Yes, come on, Inspector; out with it. You know perfectly well you’ve got your job of work all planned out. Be a pal.”

The inspector smiled. “Well, if you must know, sir, I’m going to make a few enquiries about this shoe.”

“Ah!” Roger observed maliciously. “Well, it can’t do any harm, can it?”

They laughed.

“Inspector,” said Roger softly, “can’t you forget for once that you’re a member of an official body and be human? I found that shoe for you. Isn’t it up to you to let me know what the result of the few enquiries is? Not for publication, of course, unless you say the word.”

The inspector struggled for a moment with his official reticence. “Very well, Mr. Sheringham,” he said. “That’s fair enough.”

“Sportsman!” Roger approved as they parted.

Before they had progressed fifty yards in opposite directions, Roger had turned and was running back again. “Inspector!” he called. “Half a minute!”

The inspector turned and waited for him, “Yes, sir?”

“There’s one thing I’ve always been meaning to ask a real live police inspector,” Roger panted, “and always forgetting at the crucial moment. What do you *really* think at Scotland Yard of detective stories?”

The inspector ruminated. “Well, sir,” he said darkly, “we must have our amusements, I suppose, like everyone else.”

This time they really did part.

The inspector did not return to the inn for lunch, and Roger and Anthony ate a somewhat silent meal, each having plenty to occupy his own thoughts. Roger debated for a short time whether to depute some of the enquiry work, which now seemed to be assuming gigantic proportions, to his cousin, but decided on consideration that rather more delicate handling was required than Anthony would probably be able to bring to it. That young man therefore found himself with the afternoon off duty once more, whereupon he announced casually that he might not be back for tea and made a few guarded enquiries as to the possibility of hiring a two-seater in Ludmouth, just in case one happened to want to see something of the country round. By a superhuman effort Roger managed to refrain from all attempts to amuse himself.

Immediately after lunch he set out once more on his wearisome round.

It was nearly eight o’clock before he returned, and then it was with the glad face and bounding step of one to whom success has come, doubly sweet because almost hopelessly deferred. Anthony and the inspector, half-way through their supper, looked round in astonishment as the remaining member of their trio, almost unrecognisable

beneath the enormous grin which decorated his countenance, burst in upon them like a dervish.

"I've done it!" shouted the dervish. "Alone, unaided, unhonoured and unsung, frowned upon by the official police and snubbed by half the small boys in Ludmouth, have I done it!" He produced a small piece of paper from his pocket-book and laid it with a flourish beside the inspector's plate.

"There's a present for you, Inspector Moresby," he said. "The thumb-print of Mrs. Vane's murderer. Anthony, carve me a double portion of that veal-and-ham pie, please!"

CHAPTER XVII.
SHOCKING IGNORANCE OF A CLERGYMAN

"Of course," said Roger, disposing of a large mouthful of veal-and-ham pie, "of course when I say *murderer*, I may be exaggerating a trifle."

"You haven't told me yet who he is, sir," said the inspector patiently. It was the seventh time he had said something like this, and his curiosity was still ungratified.

"Perhaps it would be safer to say, for the present, that it's the thumb-print of a man who knows how Mrs. Vane met her death," went on Roger, who was taking a malicious joy in deliberately thwarting his professional rival's inquisitiveness. "Anyhow, there it is."

"Did you say it was a man in the village?" asked the inspector innocently.

"He that searches diligently shall find," Roger replied irrelevantly, "and he that is on the right tack shall make all the thrilling discoveries. Likewise, to him that hath shall be given; so give me some more of this excellent pie, Anthony.—No, a slice just about twice as big as the one you're meditating."

"Who *is* this man, Mr. Sheringham, sir?" demanded the inspector in desperation.

Roger gazed at him blandly. "Inspector, I'm not going to tell you! You may arrest me for obstructing the police in the dereliction of their duty, for arson, fraud, petty treason, or anything you darned well like, but I'm not going to tell you. You insinuated yourself, as I now realise, into my confidence this morning and very neatly picked my brains, without giving anything in return. All along I've been making you free presents of my discoveries, and got practically nothing in exchange for them. This time I'm hanging on."

The inspector refilled his tankard and applied himself to it with gusto. He set it down and wiped his moustache. "Serious business, sir," he observed, apparently unmoved.

"Obstructing the police?" Roger agreed heartily. "Yes, jolly serious, isn't it? But awfully interesting. I've never obstructed one before. I rather like it."

The inspector laughed. "You've got something up your sleeve, sir, I know. What do you want me to do?"

"Send that thumb-print up to headquarters and see if they can tell you anything about its owner," Roger said promptly. "Seriously, there may be nothing in this at all, but there may be rather a lot. I've got my own ideas, but I want to verify them before I tell you anything definite. That's all."

"Well, I'm not saying it isn't highly irregular, sir; it is. By rights you ought to tell me just what you've discovered and let me be the judge of whether it's worth following up or not. Still, knowing you," the inspector concluded handsomely, "I'll take the risk."

"That's right," Roger approved. "And I promise to tell you the whole story as soon as you've got the report, even if it's a negative one. By the way, if you jump to it you've just got time to get it into the post to-night."

"That's true," conceded the inspector, casting a reluctant eye on his tankard. He rose to his feet. "You won't be gone when I come back?"

"No, I shall be here, even though I can't say the same for my cousin. That little two-seater I saw outside wouldn't have anything to do with you, Anthony, of course?"

Anthony coloured slightly. "Well," he began, "I—"

"Enough!" Roger interrupted kindly. "You haven't taken it back yet, therefore you're proposing to use it again. Well, the country looks very charming by moonlight, I'm told. *Bon voyage!*— Oh, Inspector!"

Inspector Moresby paused, his hand on the door-knob. "Yes, sir?"

"Did you find anything out about that shoe, by the way?"

Inspector Moresby continued to pause. "Do you expect me to tell you that, Mr. Sheringham, when you're withholding your own information?"

"A promise," said Roger smugly, "is a promise, Inspector."

"Well, and I can't say it wasn't made in return for services rendered. Very well, sir, I'll return good for evil. I traced that pair of shoes (we found the other one all right, I should say)."

"Traced it, did you?" said Roger with interest. "Do you mean, found out whom it belonged to?"

"Just that. The inner soles, with the name of the maker, had been torn out, but it wasn't a difficult job. The servant-girl recognised 'em at once, and the mistress admitted to 'em without hesitation."

"Stop this cat-and-mouse act!" Roger implored. "Whose were they?"

The inspector gazed at him stolidly for a moment, enjoying his impatience. "Mrs. Russell's, sir," he said, and withdrew.

As the door closed Roger emitted a long whistle of astonishment. "Mrs. Russell's! Good Lord, that's an unexpected development. How on earth—? What do you make of that, Anthony?"

"Goodness knows," said Anthony frankly.

Roger mused, helping himself abstractedly to gooseberry-pie and cream. "Well, I suppose it'll fit in all right. I shall have to think that over."

"Are you going to keep me in the dark too about the bird with the thumb-print?" Anthony asked.

"You?" Roger recalled himself from his meditations. "Oh, no. I've got to tell somebody or bust. Anthony, I've had a heartrending day. Man, woman and child, I've been cross-questioning them all till my throat, hardened as you might think it, nearly collapsed under the strain; and not a helpful word could I elicit. And then at the very last gasp, quite literally, a little child led me toward the light. I found an urchin who'd actually been on the spot and seen just what I wanted him to have seen."

"Good egg!" quoth Anthony.

"I had a job to charm his information out of him, as his business on the cliffs (I never did discover what it was) seems to have been of an illicit nature; however, fearful oaths of secrecy and a couple of half-crowns did the trick. He was close to the top of the nearer flight of steps at half-past three that afternoon, apparently in hiding, and saw a man go down them and walk along the ledge. He is even prepared to swear, Anthony, that the man had a paper in his hand which didn't seem to be folded quite like a newspaper and might well have been a copy of *London Opinion*."

"Coo!" said Anthony. "And were you able to make out who the cove was?"

"There was no need to do that. The urchin very kindly supplied that information himself. Anthony, my lad, who do you think it was? Just about the very last person you'd expect."

"Who?"

Roger regarded his companion with triumphant eyes. "That blighted little parson, with a face like a goat—the Rev. Samuel Blinking Meadows!"

"*What!*"

"Yes, that's a bit of a facer, isn't it? So off I made in a bee-line for Samuel. He'd pressed me to drop in whenever I got the chance, so there was no difficulty about that. I dropped. He was delighted to see me—oh, delighted! And I was delighted to see him. We were both delighted. We almost wept on one another's necks with delight. It was a touching scene. He wanted to discuss the murder, but I didn't. I wanted to discuss something quite different. Theology, Anthony."

"Ah!" said Anthony.

"Quite so. I discussed theology. He didn't. He didn't even know the name of Moses's father-in-law, Anthony. Shocking ignorance for a clergyman, wasn't it? Of course I didn't let him see how shockingly ignorant I thought him. I was a model of tact. I told him that Omar Khayyám was my favourite among the minor prophets, and he never turned a hair. I remarked that if Queen Elizabeth hadn't written the Athanasian Creed, Cardinal Manning would never have condemned Joan of Arc to a diet of worms, and he batted no eyelash. Oh, we *did* enjoy ourselves."

"What you're getting at, I suppose," observed Anthony acutely, "is that the chap isn't a parson at all."

"Anthony, you read my thoughts. No, the chap isn't a parson at all."

"Good!" said Anthony.

"So all I had to do then was to get his finger-print in the orthodox manner, and come swiftly away. So that's that."

"How did you manage the finger-print?"

"Oh, that was simple enough. He was reading a newspaper when I was shown in. I professed to find something extremely interesting on the page he had been perusing, and he readily gave me permission to tear it off and take it away. To hold a newspaper it is of course necessary to grip the edge quite firmly. For a clergyman, Mr. Meadows

evidently doesn't wash his hands as often as he might. It has also been a hot day. Nicely planted in the margin was the perfect impression of a somewhat greasy thumb. Thank you, Mr. Meadows."

"Very cunning," Anthony approved.

"I rather thought that, too," Roger admitted.

"And you're not going to say anything about it to the inspector?"

"For the time being, no. I like having Moresby on toast for a change, I must say, but also I don't want to commit myself. If anybody's going to solve this pretty little mystery, I want it to be Roger Sheringham; so I'm not giving any information away unnecessarily. Of course it *may* turn out that this chap had nothing to do with it, but candidly, I don't see how that can possibly be the case."

"And you think they'll know about him at Scotland Yard?"

"It seems a reasonable inference. People don't go about masquerading as clergymen just as an interesting concomitant of their summer holiday. He may never have been in the hands of the police at all, but there's always the hope."

"It'll make a better case against him if he has."

"Yes, and help us in other ways too. You see, what I'm really hoping is that he's a slice out of Mrs. Vane's past. If so, we ought to be able to clear up quite a lot of things that are obscure at present. He might even—" Roger paused. "Oh, there are all sorts of possibilities," he corrected himself.

There was a little pause.

"Well, thank goodness Margaret seems to be outside it at last," said Anthony.

"Yes, and talking of Margaret, Anthony, I want you to treat what I've told you as highly confidential. It's much better for her not to know about this for the time being, at any rate till we hear from Scotland Yard. It may only raise false hopes, and in any case I don't want it talked about. You can simply say that I'm still pursuing my enquiries. Is it a bet?"

"I'm quite sure," Anthony began, "that Margaret can be trusted not to—"

"It isn't a case of that at all," Roger interrupted peremptorily. "It's simply that this information is to be looked on as my private property till I choose to make it public. If I can't rely on you to keep things to yourself when I don't want them to go any further, then I simply shan't be able to tell you anything. Now then, what about it?"

"Of course if you make such a point of it," said Anthony, a little sulkily.

"I do!"

"All right, then."

"Then that's settled," Roger said cheerfully. "Have some more beer."

Anthony rose. "No thanks. As a matter of fact I—I've got to be getting along now."

"Isn't that girl getting sick of the sight of you, Anthony?" Roger asked with frank curiosity. "The only times you leave her alone seem to be at meals."

“Well, she’s all by herself,” Anthony replied defiantly. “She never sees the other two, except at meals. If I didn’t go along there, she’d be quite alone.”

“Hasn’t it ever occurred to you to wonder whether she wouldn’t prefer that?”

“Funny ass,” said Anthony tolerantly. “Well, cheerio! See you later, I expect.”

“Grrrrr. . . .” said Roger coarsely.

However, Roger did not spend an uninteresting evening. For three whole hours he was able to enjoy the unbounded felicity of listening to Inspector Moresby trying by every means in his power, subtle and official, to obtain the name of the man whose thumb-print was on its way to London. In gently balking all these indefatigable attempts, Roger managed to enjoy himself quite considerably.

CHAPTER XVIII.
PREPARATIONS FOR AN ARREST

The next day was a Sunday, and Roger made it a day of rest. He did not welcome inactivity, but pending the arrival of Scotland Yard's report on the thumb-print he did not quite see what there was to do. During the morning he lay on the little grassy ledge and lazily discussed the case and life in general with Margaret and Anthony; during the afternoon he lay there alone, with a book, while Margaret and Anthony discussed other aspects of life somewhere else by themselves. The inspector appeared to be busy on some trail of his own, and was not in evidence.

In the evening Roger and Anthony both went to supper at Dr. Vane's. It appeared that the doctor had taken a liking to Roger, and the invitation had come from him. He even went so far as to close the laboratory altogether from six o'clock onward, which Roger rightly interpreted as a compliment of the first magnitude. They passed a pleasant if quiet evening, and no reference was made by anybody to Mrs. Vane, her death or the resulting investigations. "In fact," as Roger confided later to Anthony during their walk home, "if one hadn't been told it was a house of mourning, one would never have guessed for an instant that the mistress of it died violently less than a week ago."

Roger found himself returning Dr. Vane's liking almost with interest. The big, burly man was so genuine, so sincere, and (as Roger felt) so transparently honest. His predilections he did not attempt to disguise, and where he hated Roger was sure he would be no less candid. Summing up his impressions on their rather silent walk home, Roger found himself convinced that, whatever his feelings may have been once, the doctor had very little affection for his wife at the time of her death. Equally certainly his attitude toward Miss Williamson was one merely of rather impersonal camaraderie.

"A disheartening business for any modest girl who's trying as hard as that lady is, I should imagine," Roger told himself.

The next day was also a period of enforced rest. On this occasion, however, Roger had not only himself but Anthony as well to amuse. Margaret, it transpired, burdened by the household duties of a Monday, was unable to devote a single minute to anything outside them. Roger, fancying that he was able to appreciate these tactics, watched a restless Anthony moodily kicking small stones on the road in front of the inn till eleven o'clock, when the second post brought no official envelope for Inspector Moresby, and then carried him off in the hired two-seater to spend the day in Sandsea. They got back at half-past seven (the two-seater, which was of a decidedly decrepit nature, having behaved not at all well by the roadside) and found the inspector awaiting them in the sitting-room.

"Hullo, Inspector," Roger said at once. "Any news by the last post?"

The inspector regarded him benevolently. “Yes, sir; I’ve heard from headquarters.”

“Have you? Any luck?”

“Luck, sir?” said the inspector with maddening deliberation. “Well, it depends what you call luck, doesn’t it? Are you two gentlemen ready for supper? I’m so hungry, I could eat an ox. Funny thing, the heat always seems to make me hungry. My wife says—”

“Inspector,” Roger interrupted rudely, “I’m sorry for your wife and family. Very sorry. They must suffer a good deal. By the way, did you say you *had* heard from Scotland Yard?”

“Yes, sir; I have. Why?”

“I refuse to play mouse to your cat, Inspector Moresby,” Roger said with dignity. “So hand over that report, before I break your head. Even a mouse will turn, you know.”

“I thought we could talk about it after supper, Mr. Sheringham,” the inspector remarked innocently.

“Did you? Well, think again. Report, please Inspector!”

“He’s an impatient sort of gentleman, your cousin, isn’t he?” the inspector observed to Anthony, grinning maddeningly.

“Yes, but he’s awfully dangerous when roused. We always humour him in the family.”

“Is that good for him though, in the long run?” asked the inspector with an air of earnest enquiry. “Now my experience of these impatient people is that you ought to—”

Roger opened the door and called downstairs. “Landlord, empty the flowing bowl! We shan’t want our supper till midnight!”

“I give in, sir,” said the inspector hastily. “Here’s the report!”

“Fill the flowing bowl, landlord,” Roger countermanded in stentorian tones. “We’ll have supper at once.”

The report was all that Roger could have desired. Its laconic wording ran as follows:—

“The impression is of the right thumb of Sam Field, *alias* Slippery Sam, *alias* The Shrimp, *alias* The Sky Pilot, *alias* Herbert Peters, *alias* Herbert Smith, etc. etc. Served two years, 1909–11, for robbery with violence; three years, 1913–16, for burglary; five years, 1918–23, for fraud and embezzlement. Wanted now on three similar charges. Small, dark, mole on right cheek, blue eyes, large nose; good education, speaks well, ingratiating manners. Fond of disguising himself as a solicitor, clergyman or other member of the professional classes.”

“Golly!” observed Roger, and handed the report to Anthony.

“I thought you’d be interested, sir,” said the inspector blandly. “So it’s the Rev. Samuel Meadows, is it? I thought I’d seen that man’s face before, if you remember. Must have had a photograph of him through my hands.”

“Herbert Peters!” Roger murmured raptly. “Do you know, I *guessed* right inside me that he’d turn out to be Mrs. Vane’s husband, but I daren’t put it into words; it

seemed too good to be true. But I thought you said you'd got no information about Herbert Peters?"

"Yes, that was a bad bit of routine work," the inspector admitted handsomely.

"You've got no doubts about it now, I suppose?" Roger persisted.

The inspector did not reply directly. "What do you imagine his motive was?" he asked instead.

"Well, he was blackmailing her, obviously. It was a gift for him. She married the doctor when he was in the middle of that five years' stretch, evidently hoping that he wouldn't be able to trace her. Oh, yes; it was a gift for friend Peters."

"But that doesn't answer my question, sir," the inspector pointed out mildly. "That would be a motive for her murdering him, not he her. What do you imagine *his* motive was?"

Roger helped himself to pickled onions. "Well, it's impossible to say definitely, isn't it? I daresay I could think of half-a-dozen perfectly good motives, but this one strikes me as the most obvious: she knew there were two or three warrants out against him, so she countered his threat of blackmail with a threat of her own, to hand him over to the police. He got the wind up and pushed her over the cliff in a sudden panic. How's that?"

"That's quite plausible," the inspector agreed.

"After you with the potatoes, Anthony," said Roger. "Well, what do you think about it, fair coz?"

"Seems clear enough to me. We know he was there, and as you say, he probably had plenty of motives. Perhaps he was really in love with her and frightfully jealous. Then he might have sort of seen red when she told him what she'd done, mightn't he?"

"Yes, that's a good idea," Roger agreed. "No blackmail at all, you mean. And that fits in with what Margaret said about her being frightened of somebody a week or two before her death. By the way, Anthony, you can tell Margaret now that she needn't bother about searching any more in Mrs. Vane's papers."

"What's that, sir?" queried the inspector.

Roger explained how he had been trying to approach the identity of the mysterious stranger by two different routes.

"Going behind the backs of the official police, eh?" the inspector commented. "Well, well, reporters will be reporters, I suppose."

"And officials will be official. Well, what are you going to do about it all, official one? You'll arrest him, of course?"

"Am I talking to a reporter?" asked the inspector cautiously.

"Not unless you want to. 'Important developments are expected at any minute.' Is that what you mean?"

"For the time being, if you please, sir. I shan't arrest him to-night, you see."

"Not to-night?"

"No. I'll go along and see a magistrate and get a warrant after supper, but I shan't arrest him till to-morrow morning. There's no hurry, and it's more convenient in a little place like this. He can't have taken alarm at your interview with him on Saturday, or he'd have cleared out before now, and I've already made sure he hasn't done that."

"But why trouble to traipse off to a magistrate and get a warrant?" Roger asked curiously. "I thought you didn't need a warrant for an arrest on suspicion of murder."

"But I'm not going to arrest him on suspicion of murder, sir."

"You're not?" Roger said in surprise. "Why not?"

"For several reasons," the inspector returned non-committally. "For one thing it's handier, when there are other reasons for arresting a man, not to do so on the murder charge. They're more liable to give themselves away than if you've started off by frightening them to death already. We usually find it pays. And besides, it gives us an excuse for holding them when our murder evidence may not be quite complete."

"I see. I'm learning things about our official criminologists."

"We're nasty people to get into the hands of, sir," the inspector said jovially.

"You are indeed. I shall think quite seriously before committing my next murder. And you imagine you'll be able to induce Meadows to give himself away?"

"We have our ways of making people talk," observed the inspector darkly.

There was a short silence.

"Well, I must be getting along now," said Anthony, and went.

Roger regarded the closed door for a moment. "It's nice to be young," he said, from the depths of his thirty-six years.

"Humph, yes; but there's a rude awakening coming, I'm afraid," replied the inspector with surprising gloom.

"Your profession seems to have made a pessimist of you, Inspector," Roger smiled.

The inspector meditated this. "Well, perhaps it has; but there's one thing I have learnt—things are seldom in reality as they appear on the surface! And that's a thing youth never has and never will learn."

"Hark to the disillusionment of middle-age!" Roger laughed, refusing to echo the other's suddenly serious tone.

They settled down to a comfortable discussion of the case.

"There's only one thing that still puzzles me," Roger said a little later. "Everything else falls into place neatly enough, but what on earth is a pair of Mrs. Russell's shoes doing in the jig-saw?"

"I was wondering when you'd come to them," the inspector agreed.

"There *are* ways in which the chap could get hold of them, of course," Roger mused. "I did myself. Or I suppose he could have bought them at a jumble sale, or picked them out of the ash-bin. But why? And why Mrs. Russell's?"

"There are all sorts of ways of accounting for that pair of shoes, I take it," the inspector said thoughtfully. "Your idea is that his object was to leave a female trail behind him, if he was going to leave any trail at all?"

"Yes; the same as with the coat-button. Substituting the Rev. Samuel's name for Miss Williamson's, by the way, I think the explanation you put forward to account for the coat-button must be the correct one, Inspector. It certainly seems the simplest."

"Well, in that case, if all he wanted was to leave a female trail," continued the inspector, who evidently preferred to deal with one point at a time, "the question of the ownership of the shoes becomes unimportant. All that matters is that they shall be female shoes, and large enough for him to be able to get into them more or less, after their sides have been split. Isn't that what you mean?"

"Precisely."

"Well," said the inspector, with an air of clinching the topic, "as I said, then, there are all sorts of ways of accounting for his possession of that pair."

"That's perfectly true," Roger assented.

A few minutes later the inspector left to seek his magistrate.

He had not been gone long before Anthony returned. Margaret had seemed a little seedy (reported the latter), admitting on pressure to a touch of hay fever or incipient influenza or something equally depressing, and had been unable to stop out long, nor had Anthony pressed her to allow him to accompany her indoors for a time; with reluctance both had agreed that she would be better in bed. However, he had been able to break the great news to her and was now the bearer of her heartiest and rapturous congratulations to Roger.

"Well, I'm not sorry you're back, Anthony, I must say," observed that gentleman, having elicited these facts. "Entrancing though my company should be, I was beginning to get just a trifle satiated with it. Besides, it's a shame and an abominable thing to stay indoors on an evening like this. Let's stroll down to the sea-level and gloat over the moonlight on a rock somewhere, while your Uncle Roger tells you what a great man he is."

Before letting him out of his sight, Roger had extracted a promise from the unwilling inspector, obtained by means of the most blatant threats in connection with his capacity as a reporter, to allow him to be in at the death on the following morning. Not altogether trusting to the efficacy of a promise won under such conditions however, he was out of bed at least an hour earlier than usual and proceeded to watch the inspector's door with lynx-eyed assiduity. He need not really have troubled. Inspector Moresby, while quite alive to the advantages of appearing to grant a difficult favour, had not the least objection to figuring on a million breakfast-tables as the hero of a thrilling arrest, complete with full details "from our special correspondent, who was an actual eye-witness of the scene." Not the very least objection. Roger had lost an hour's sleep for nothing.

They breakfasted and set out together, leaving Anthony to kick his heels in the inn or meditate over the beauties of nature from the top of a convenient cliff as he saw fit.

The house in which the Rev. Samuel Meadows, *alias* Slippery Sam, *alias* Herbert Peters, *alias* etc. etc., had taken rooms, was in the centre of the village. The two walked briskly along to the front door, Roger on his toes with excitement at reaching the end of the chase, the inspector relating anecdotes of the *really* interesting arrests he had effected.

A stout woman opened the door to them and smiled as she recognised Roger. "Yes, he's in his sitting-room," she said, in answer to their inquiries. "I took his breakfast along not much over an hour ago, and he hasn't gone out yet. Not but what he isn't a quiet gentleman altogether, the Rev. Meadows; never does go out much, he doesn't. Keeps 'imself *to* 'imself, as you might say. A better lodger I couldn't wish for. Now the last gentleman who had these rooms—"

"Can we go along?" asked Roger.

"To be sure you can, sir," agreed the stout woman with much heartiness. "You know the way, don't you? Seeing as you were here only the other day, I mean. And you might tell him I'll be down in a minute for the tray, will you, sir? Then you'll be more comfortable-like, you see. I ought to have fetched it sooner, I know, but what with one thing and another, there! the time goes before you ever notice it's gone, doesn't it?"

"Long before," Roger murmured mechanically, following the inspector down the narrow passage. Still discoursing, the stout woman disappeared into the upper regions.

The two stopped out of sight of the stairs and Roger indicated the door of the Rev. Samuel's sitting-room. Dispensing with the formality of a knock, the inspector pushed it open and entered.

Just inside the threshold he halted so abruptly that Roger, following close on his heels, collided with his burly back. "Hullo!" he exclaimed softly. "Hul-*lo!*"

Roger peered over his shoulder. The Rev. Samuel Meadows was certainly there, for he could see him seated in a chair by the window, a copy of the *Courier* across his knees. But his head was sunk on his chest, one arm hung limply by his side, and his whole attitude was twisted and unnatural.

"Good God!" Roger exclaimed in shocked tones. "What's the matter with him?"

The inspector strode forward, bent to peer into the half-hidden face, and thrust his hand inside the clerical coat. Then he stood up and tugged at his moustache, staring down at the still, crumpled figure.

"The matter, sir?" he repeated slowly. "He's dead—that's what's the matter with him."

CHAPTER XIX.
END OF A SCOUNDREL

For a moment there was silence. Then:

"*Dead?*" Roger echoed incredulously. "You say he's *dead?*"

"As a door-nail," asserted the inspector without emotion. "Only just (he's still warm), but dead right enough."

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Roger blankly.

The inspector turned his eyes back to the motionless form in the chair and continued to tug his moustache. "Hell!" he observed simply. As an epitaph for the Rev. Samuel the remark was perhaps not inapposite.

"This appears to have torn it," Roger said, closing the door behind him and advancing gingerly.

"It does indeed," the inspector agreed, and his tone was one of profound regret. Roger gathered that the inspector was feeling balked.

Together they gazed at the occupant of the chair.

"Well, what's the next move?" Roger asked, after a full minute's silence.

The inspector seemed to recall himself with an effort from some meditation of his own. "The next move?" he repeated vaguely. "Well, we shall have to get a doctor in at once, of course. And as you're here, sir," he went on in brisker tones, "I wish you'd be good enough to get him for me, will you? By rights I ought to stay here and see that nothing's disturbed and the body left untouched; and I shall want a word with the landlady too."

"Of course I will," Roger assented at once. "Any particular doctor?"

"Well, there probably won't be more than one in a place this size. The landlady can tell us his name and address. It's early yet, so you ought to be able to catch him before he goes out. And on your way back you might see if you can get hold of the local constable (he lives quite near here, I know) and send him along too. I don't want to let the body out of my sight for more than a second at a time till he comes, and that'll leave me a bit freer."

"Yes, rather," Roger said, opening the door, "I'll go at once."

They made their way out into the passage and the inspector sent a stentorian voice flying upstairs in search of the landlady. She appeared at the top of the stairs, wiping her hands on a floor-cloth.

"Mr. Meadows is ill," said the inspector abruptly. "What's the name and address of the nearest doctor?"

"Ill, is he?" said the stout landlady, much concerned. "Well, that's funny. Poor gentleman! He seemed quite all right when I took his breakfast in to him. Not serious, I do hope? 'Good-morning, Mrs. Harper,' he said, just the same as usual. 'What've you got for breakfast to-day?' he said. And I—"

Firmly the inspector cut short the flow of the volubility and extracted the desired information. Roger set out, leaving him to break the news to her of her lodger's untimely death. It was strange, he reflected, that although in the past few people could have ardently desired for the Rev. Samuel, under any of his pseudonyms, a long lease of life, yet his death was a matter of deep regret for everybody in Ludmouth who had had anything to do with him.

The doctor's house was over half-a-mile distant, and with the help of an intermittent jog-trot Roger managed to cover the ground to it in less than five minutes. As the inspector had predicted, the doctor had not yet started out on his rounds and, his surgery being just over, Roger was able to see him at once. Somewhat breathlessly he stated his business, the doctor, a tall, angular man with pince-nez on a pointed nose, asked a few pertinent questions and hastily stuffed some things into a small leather bag, and they set off together on foot, Dr. Young apologising briefly for not being able to offer a seat in his car, which was not yet ready for its morning's work.

They walked briskly, in spite of the growing heat of the day, but not too briskly for Roger to volunteer the answers to various questions which the doctor might have asked but didn't.

Fortunately their route took them past the house of the local constable, which Dr. Young was able to point out, and the latter waited while Roger routed out its occupant and told him to get into tunic and helmet and follow on as quickly as he could. The constable's large red jaw dropped ludicrously as he assimilated Roger's terse communication.

Let into the house by the now white-faced and speechless landlady, they hurried down the passage and into the sitting-room. With a nod to the inspector the doctor stood for a moment, allowing his trained eye to take in and photograph on his brain every detail of the dead man's attitude. Then he approached to make a closer and more detailed examination, scrutinising the surface of the skin and tilting back the head to obtain a clear view of the face.

"No distortion," he murmured, half to himself and half to the inspector. "No convulsions before death." He lifted an eyelid with his thumb and peered into the eye. "Pupils not contracted," he announced, and went on with methodical care to examine the dead man's tongue.

Roger watched the rather gruesome business with profound interest. He had already formed a tentative theory to account for the man's death, and was anxiously awaiting some confirmation of it from the doctor's lips. In the passage outside the constable signalled his arrival by blowing his nose importantly.

The doctor straightened up and adjusted his pince-nez, turning to the inspector. "You've got the case in hand?" he remarked. "Inspector Moresby, isn't it?"

"That's right, sir," said the inspector, economically answering both questions at once.

"Yes, I've heard about you, of course. Gossip soon travels in a place like this, and the doctor's always one of the first to hear it. Well, it seems you're going to have a second case to look after, Inspector."

"Ah!" said the inspector.

The doctor indicated the body with a careless gesture. "Know anything about him?"

"Very little," the Inspector replied untruthfully. "I'd got my eye on him, though," he admitted.

"Any reason to suspect suicide?" asked the doctor curtly.

"Well—no reason to *ex*pect it, doctor," returned the inspector with some care. "No, certainly not."

"Um!" The doctor removed his pince-nez and began to polish them with his handkerchief. "You were on your way to arrest him, I understand?"

"Somebody seems to have been talking," the inspector observed, and grinned openly at Roger's guilty blush.

"I mean," amplified the doctor, "there may be some connection."

"You think it's poison, then?" enquired the inspector genially.

The doctor frowned. "I can't possibly say that yet, till I've examined the body. At present I see no marks of violence. I'd like to get him on to his bed; will you give me a hand?"

Between them they carried the slight figure without difficulty upstairs and into a room which the stout landlady, fluttering round them like a corpulent hen on the landing, indicated as the dead man's bedroom. The doctor began to undress the body, the inspector helping him, and Roger, for once feeling himself in the way, retired to the sitting-room downstairs to await their verdict.

On the floor by the chair in which the dead man had been sitting lay his pipe, fallen no doubt from his nerveless hand. Roger was about to pick it up with aimless curiosity, when he remembered that nothing should be handled except by the official police. He sat down on a hard horsehair sofa of uninviting aspect and began to think furiously.

At the first shock this unexpected death had seemed completely to upset his carefully worked out theory, the success of which had seemed last night to be a foregone conclusion; but during his hurried mission to the doctor even this had fallen into its place in the scheme. Long before the word suicide had been mentioned at all Roger had arrived at the same conclusion. This explanation, he had realised, so far from upsetting the theory, comfortably confirmed it. Meadows must have got wind of the fact that the net was being drawn round him, and had taken in desperation the only way out. And how had he thus got wind? Even though he was alone, Roger wriggled a trifle guiltily.

It would be an exaggeration to say that Roger had betrayed the inspector's confidence. It would be no exaggeration at all to say, putting it on its mildest possible

terms, that he had been indiscreet. Actually in touch over the telephone with the editor of the *Courier* (that great man) himself, he had let slip something more than the demure "important developments are expected at any minute" of his official report; he had, in fact, so far given way to his temperamental volubility as to hint that the important developments were due entirely to the *Courier's* own special correspondent and his remarkable acumen, the said correspondent having unearthed in the neighbourhood, by a cunning and perspicacity far exceeding that of his official colleague and rival, the presence of a notorious criminal whose past life had been discovered to be bound up with that of the deceased, who had ample motive for compassing her death, and who was actually going to be arrested, though not ostensibly on this account, the very next day—all of which had duly appeared, in a little laudatory article upon the special correspondent, as a preface to his own article that morning. It is true that Roger had imagined himself to be speaking in the strictest confidence, but he had certainly erred in overestimating a newsman's sense of personal honour where his paper's interests are concerned.

He glanced across at the *Courier* which had been taken from the dead man's knees and wriggled again. Reading that little paragraph, Meadows could hardly fail to realise that his game was up; nobody else perhaps could see the personal application, but to the man concerned it must have been as clear as daylight. Roger ruefully anticipated a bad quarter-of-an-hour with the inspector. However leniently the latter might be disposed to treat the slip and however readily he might accept Roger's own explanation, this must mean the end of even such meagre confidences as he had been cajoled into bestowing.

Roger began to compose a letter to the editor of the *Courier* in which he purposed to acquaint that great man with the precise and unvarnished state of his feelings toward him.

He was still in the middle of its vitriolic sentences when the inspector and the doctor reappeared.

"Yes," the former was saying, "I'll arrange all that with the Coroner, doctor. Ten o'clock to-morrow morning, the inquest (I don't see that we can put it much earlier than that) so you'll be able to get going by eleven."

"Mr. Simpson—the Coroner—I'm afraid you'll find him rather a fussy little man," said the doctor doubtfully. "Very full of his own dignity and importance."

"Oh, I won't tread on his toes," the inspector laughed. "I'm used to fussy coroners, I can tell you. I promise you he'll call the inquest for ten all right, when I've done with him. And you'll get in touch with the Sandsea man right away?"

The doctor nodded. "Yes, but of course the Coroner will have to confirm it."

"I'll see he does that," returned the inspector confidently. "Dear me, look like having a busy day in front of me, don't I? And then there's all these things in here to seal up and send to Sir Henry Griffen for analysis. Bother the Rev. Samuel Meadows! What did he want to go and give me all this trouble for?"

"It is suicide, then?" eagerly put in Roger, who had been waiting with impatience during this exchange for an opportunity of learning what had been discovered. "He did take poison?"

Dr. Young looked disapproving before this leading question. "Really, it's quite impossible to say yet; we must look to the post-mortem to establish the cause of death. There are no signs of apoplexy, it's true, but he may have had a bad heart. It's impossible to say anything definitely yet."

"You'll have to wait for the adjourned inquest for all that, Mr. Sheringham, sir," said the inspector reprovingly, though his eyes twinkled. "Be careful what you say to this gentleman," he added to the doctor. "He's a pressman. They're all unscrupulous, but he's worse than most."

"Yes," said Roger, considerably relieved to find that the other was disposed to treat his blunder so jocularly. "Yes, I've got to grovel to you, Inspector, I know. I've got a perfectly good explanation, but I know I don't deserve to be forgiven. Say when you've got a spare quarter-of-an-hour to-day, and I'll come and grovel *ad lib*." He turned to the doctor. "Then those are the only three possibilities—apoplexy, heart or poison?"

"So far as one can say," agreed the doctor guardedly.

"And you've no idea at all what poison it is?"

"I've no idea that it is even poison at all."

Roger eyed his interlocutor sadly. There was such a lot of possible information to be obtained, and apparently so little probability of obtaining it. For the life of him he did not know what to ask next.

"Well, doctor, you'll be wanting to get along now, I suppose," the inspector broke in on this dilemma. "And Mr. Sheringham, I'm afraid I shall have to turn you out of here. This room's got to be kept locked from now on, and nobody allowed in except under orders from me."

"Right-ho, Inspector," Roger acquiesced. "And of course all these breakfast things and so on will have to be analysed, if they do find poison in the body, won't they? By the way, there's his pipe on the floor there; he may have been smoking it just before he died.—Well, doctor, if we're to be turned out, I'll stroll along part of the way with you."

The doctor managed to conceal his joy at the prospect.

Inspector Moresby watched them go with his twinkle in full action. His obvious surmise was not amiss. Roger obtained some excellent exercise, but nothing else. For half-a-mile he walked by the doctor's side, pumping busily; but either the well of his companion's information had run dry or else the pumping machinery was out of gear. In either case, truth remained coyly in her fastness and none of Roger's strenuous efforts succeeded in bringing her to the surface.

Returning disconsolate to the inn, however, he had a pleasant surprise in finding Anthony unexpectedly in attendance. For the next hour or two he was able to

discourse, on the farthest unsubmerged rock, to a thrilled audience of one to his heart's content.

CHAPTER XX.
POISONS AND PIPES

Roger did not see the inspector again that day till supper, when he was obviously tired out and disinclined to talk. He referred in terms of gentle sarcasm to Roger's breach of trust, though quite without heat, his attitude being one rather of disillusionment than anger; one gathered that the person he really blamed for the business was himself, for being such a consummate idiot as to trust a journalist. He listened to Roger's explanation and apologies and accepted the latter, but retaliated, as the culprit had foreseen, by refusing to utter a single word about the case.

The inquest was duly opened the following morning, but though Roger attended in a spirit of pious hope nothing of the least importance transpired. Twelve solemn rustics viewed the body and then sat perspiring in the village schoolroom, and that was practically all that happened. Almost the only witness was the stout landlady, who was able to give evidence of identity and who also had been the last person to see the deceased alive. She agreed, in the time-hallowed formula, that he had then seemed in his usual health and spirits, and added, with more originality, that had he been there when she heard of his death the Coroner could have knocked her down with a feather. She was going on to add a good deal more, but was held with a testy hand.

Inspector Moresby deposed to finding the body, and Roger, somewhat to his surprise, was called to give corroborative evidence. As to who the dead man really was, the inspector preserved a strict silence; and whether the Coroner had been taken into the secret or not, the court was apparently content to accept the Rev. Meadows as a chance visitor to Ludmouth on a prolonged stay and made no inquiry into his antecedents. The whole proceedings had not lasted more than a quarter-of-an-hour when, Dr. Young being called and stating his inability to give the cause of death, the enquiry was adjourned for this to be ascertained and the Coroner formally ordered a post-mortem to be made.

Naturally the news of this second death increased the public interest in the Ludmouth Mystery, as it was now generally called, and in spite of Inspector Moresby's careful reticence popular imagination was not slow to link the two tragedies together. Newspapers which had hitherto paid little attention to the affair made haste to send down their own representatives, and Roger had cause half-a-dozen times a day to congratulate himself on his foresight in preventing all other intruders from finding foothold in the Crown. To all enquirers the landlord, that mountainous man, presented an ox-like front of stolid imperturbability: they couldn't have a room, for why? there wasn't one, that was why. Even offers of double or treble the market-price failed to move him. He seemed to have conceived a bovine affection for Roger (opposites, it has already been said, do sometimes make for a male friendship), and

followed out his guest's wishes to the letter, bewildered but faithful. By way of some return Roger felt compelled to drink as much beer as he could possibly contain.

Thereafter matters progressed for the next ten days or so, inasmuch as the actual case was concerned, not at all. Indeed so far as Roger could see the whole thing was over, bar the shouting. The finding of poison of some description in the body and the subsequent verdict (after Inspector Moresby had unfolded the real story) of suicide during temporary insanity, was practically a foregone conclusion. Roger's articles in the *Courier* grew shorter and shorter as he found it increasingly difficult to find anything new to say, and he would have given them up altogether had the editor not made it a personal favour that he should carry them up to the adjourned inquest in order to help the paper as much as possible over the slack season. And all the time Inspector Moresby gave a really first-class imitation of a sphinx, so far as any unusual happenings in Ludmouth were concerned.

During these days Roger converted for the most part what had been chiefly a duet during the proceeding week, into a trio. The original members made no audible protest, but whatever their real feelings on the point Roger saw no reason why, having brought Anthony for the express purpose of keeping him company, he should be callously abandoned to loneliness just because his susceptible cousin's fancy in companionship happened to have strayed temporarily elsewhere—or so at any rate he phrased it to himself; for after all, one could hardly expect Roger to admit, even privately, to jealousy of a young man nearly a dozen years his junior. At other times he told himself seriously that it was no less than his duty to break up his cousin's *tête-à-têtes* with a young woman of (when all was said and done) distinctly doubtful origin and antecedents; it might be an awkward thing, Roger pointed out earnestly to himself, were Anthony to become in any way *involved;* his mother would have a good deal to say about it, and she would certainly say it, and forcibly, to him. Roger continued to martyr himself to duty.

In the course of his devotion to this stern mistress, he observed Margaret closely. Now that she had been definitely cleared of the horrible suspicion of causing her cousin's death, her demeanour had altered perceptibly. The iron self-control which she must have been exerting during that week was relaxed, and signs of a corresponding reaction were not infrequent. At one moment she would be more self-reliant than she had appeared before, and less dependent upon their strength; at another she would laugh almost hysterically and propose the maddest escapades on the spur of the moment. Anthony she kept continually upon tenterhooks of bewilderment, treating him one day as if she were seriously in love with him and the next as if he bored her beyond words.

Roger was convinced that there was really nothing of the coquette in her, that she was as straightforward and unguileful as he could wish a girl to be, so that he found himself at times seriously perturbed about her. The place, he felt sure, exercised a

distressing effect upon her, and he continued to urge her to leave it, if only for a temporary holiday. Her manner of receiving these suggestions was on a par with the rest of her behaviour: one day she would say shortly that it was quite impossible for the moment, that she must stay and look after George till everything had quite blown over; on another she would jump eagerly at the idea and begin to discuss, quite seriously, the feasibility of flying over to Paris and embarking on a hectic European tour the very next day—yet when it came to the point of a final decision it was always the first mood which prevailed with her. In some vague way Roger felt a certain responsibility for her, and it worried him more than he would have cared to admit.

Inspector Moresby evidently also felt that the case was only marking time during these days, pending definite confirmation of the existence of poison in the body from Sir Henry Griffen, the Home Office analyst, for he took the opportunity of going over to Sandsea for a couple of days to resume his interrupted holiday with his wife and family. It seemed as if he was anxious not to lose touch with Ludmouth, however, for he only took two days when he might have taken five, and was back again at the inn considerably before Roger expected him.

As for Anthony, that young business man began to feel seriously alarmed as the days went by that he would have to return to London before the adjourned inquest brought the case definitely to an end. He had only got three weeks' holiday, and already two of them were gone. Careful though he had been to conceal any exuberant display of admiration, Anthony really had found himself profoundly impressed by Roger's handling of the case and his laying bare of its hidden core which even such a tough bird as Inspector Moresby had failed to uncover, and it would have broken his heart to be compelled to leave before all the threads were finally unravelled and the last knots smoothed out.

Fortunately he was not called upon to do so. The Rev. Samuel had died on a Tuesday; on the following Friday the inspector had gone over to Sandsea, returning on Sunday evening; on the next Thursday, exactly a fortnight after his arrival in Ludmouth, Roger was sitting alone with the inspector after supper—and for once Inspector Moresby was not feeling quite so official as usual.

It happened like this:

"I wonder," Roger had said, "when you'll hear from Sir Henry about the cause of death."

And the inspector replied, surprisingly: "Oh, I heard yesterday morning!" He may have felt tempted to bite his tongue out immediately afterward, but indubitably that is what Inspector Moresby replied.

"You did?" squeaked Roger. "Inspector, you—you taciturn devil!"

The inspector applied himself to such small remnants of beer as were still to be found at the bottom of his tankard. "Perhaps it was about time for me to be a little more taciturn than I have been sometimes," he remarked with ominous application from its depths.

“But I’ve grovelled about that,” Roger said eagerly. “Simply grovelled. Also I’ve explained it all away. Nothing like that will ever occur again.—Inspector, you—you *are* going to tell me what Sir Henry said, aren’t you?”

The inspector, having arrived at the regretful conclusion that his tankard really was empty this time, replaced it on the table. “No, Mr. Sheringham, sir,” he said with a good deal of firmness. “I’m not.”

“Oh, you are!” Roger wailed. “Don’t you remember? Think again. You—you are, really.”

“I’m really not,” retorted the inspector still more firmly.

They eyed one another in silence.

“Have some more beer!” said Roger helpfully.

“Are you trying to bribe me, sir?” asked the inspector sternly.

“Certainly I am,” Roger replied with dignity. “Do you want everything put into blatant words?”

“Then thank you, sir,” said the inspector. “I could do with another pint on a night like this.”

Roger went with alacrity to the door. “Not a quart?” he suggested, “Come, it’s a hot night as you say. What about a gallon? No? You’re no sportsman, I’m afraid.” He shouted out the order to the landlord and returned to his seat.

“Seriously, though, sir,” the inspector resumed, “I’m afraid I can’t say anything about Sir Henry’s report. You’ll have to wait for the inquest. It’ll all come out then.”

“And when’s that?”

“It was adjourned to to-day week, if you remember.”

“Oh, Lord!” Roger groaned. “I can’t possibly wait till then.”

“Looks as if you’d have to, doesn’t it?” said the inspector, with hypocritical sympathy.

The landlord brought in two pint tankards of beer and retired again, breathing heavily.

Roger raised his. “Well, here’s confusion to you,” he said with deep gloom.

“Best luck, sir,” returned the inspector politely.

They eyed one another above their respective rims. Then each set down his tankard and laughed.

“You were going to tell me all the time, weren’t you?” said Roger confidently.

“Well, I ought not to, you know, Mr. Sheringham,” the inspector demurred. “Still, I mustn’t forget that it was you who put me on to the man in the first place, must I?”

“You must not,” Roger agreed with feeling.

“But this really isn’t for publication, mind. In fact I’d rather you undertook not to tell a single living soul. It’s only on that condition I can say anything to you.”

“Not even Anthony?”

“Not even Mr. Walton.”

"Not even Anthony it is, then," Roger said cheerfully. "Shoot! What was the poison?"

"Aconitine."

Roger whistled. "Aconitine, was it? By Jove! That explains the rapidity, of course. But it's not exactly a common one, by any means. Lamson's specialty, eh? I wonder how Meadows got hold of it."

"Exactly," agreed the inspector laconically.

"Aconitine!" observed Roger in deep thought. "Well, well! Of course one of the merits of aconitine is the smallness of the fatal dose. Somewhere about one-tenth of a grain, or less, isn't it? But that doesn't usually kill for three or four hours. This must have been a good deal more than a fatal dose to work so quickly."

"It was. At least a grain, Sir Henry reckons."

"Yes, probably all that. Always the way with the lay suicide, of course, to give himself about ten times as much as he needs. You know that better than I do, no doubt. But aconitine's about the last thing I was expecting, I must say. I should have put my money on arsenic, or strychnine, or even prussic acid; something more easily procurable than aconitine, at any rate."

"The symptoms showed it couldn't be any of those three."

"Yes, that's right; they did, of course. Still aconitine is a bit unexpected. Weren't you surprised?"

"I'm never surprised at anything, sir."

"Aren't you really? *Blasé* fellow! I am, and aconitine is one of the agents. I wonder how he *did* manage to get hold of it. Forged a medical prescription, I suppose. Have you any idea how he took it? In his breakfast coffee, or something like that?"

"Sir Henry found no trace of it in any of the breakfast things."

"Oh? Did he take it neat, then? Rather unpleasant. And not very safe either; a grain of the stuff wouldn't be much larger than a big pin's head."

"Sir Henry found a considerable quantity of it," said the inspector steadily, "mixed up with the contents of the tobacco-jar."

"The tobacco-jar?" echoed Roger in incredulous tones.

"He also found it," pursued the inspector, "in the pipe which Meadows had been smoking, particularly in the stem. He says there can be no doubt that that was the vehicle through which it entered his system. There was no trace of it in anything else."

"His—his *pipe!*" Roger stammered, staring at his companion with round eyes. "But—but in that case—!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Well—that seems to put suicide almost out of the question!"

"Exactly," agreed the inspector blandly.

Roger continued to stare at him. "Good Heavens, you don't mean—?"

"What, sir?"

"That—well, that somebody else poisoned him?"

“There can’t be a shadow of doubt about it,” said the inspector with the utmost cheerfulness. “The Rev. Samuel never committed suicide at all. He was murdered!”

CHAPTER XXI.
ROGER PLAYS A LONE HAND

It was some minutes before Roger would agree to abandon, once and for all time, his cherished theory of suicide. Suicide had smoothed all difficulties away; suicide had explained both deaths in the simplest possible terms, reduced them to a common denominator; in spite of superficial appearances surely in some way it *must* be suicide. Not until the inspector had patiently, and for half-a-dozen times in succession, pointed out that the very last place in which a voluntary consumer of aconitine would put the poison was among the contents of his tobacco-jar, and the very last way he would choose of imbibing it was through the stem of his pipe, did Roger reluctantly admit that, hang it! yes, it really did begin to look as if the man had been murdered after all.

"But you don't think he was under the impression that aconitine was a narcotic and that he could smoke it like opium and so have an easy passage?" he suggested as a final gleam of hope.

"I do not," said the inspector, briskly extinguishing the gleam. "A man who's going to use a drug like aconitine at all is going to know something about it; and the very least he'd know is that it isn't a narcotic. No, sir, there's no other conclusion at all. Meadows was murdered."

"Curse the man, then!" Roger observed with feeling. "He'd simply got no right to be, that's all I can say. Now we're put right back to the beginning again. Well, who murdered him, Inspector? Perhaps you'll tell me that too?"

The inspector tugged at his moustache. "I was hoping you'd be able to tell me that, Mr. Sheringham."

"I see," Roger said bitterly. "I might have known you weren't pouring out all this confidential information for nothing. You want to pick my magnificent brains again, I suppose?"

"Well, if you like to put it that way, sir," remarked the inspector in deprecating tones.

"I do. I hate calling a pick-axe an 'agricultural implement.' All right, pick away."

The inspector drank a little beer with a thoughtful air. "Let's begin with a motive, then. Now can you see anyone in the case with a motive for Meadow's death?"

"Wait a minute. You still think his death is mixed up with Mrs. Vane's? You're taking that as a starting-point?"

"Well, we can always keep the other possibility before us, but it seems a fair enough assumption, wouldn't you say?"

"Yes; the balance of probability is certainly in favour of it. But I don't think we ought to forget that Meadows (we'll call him Meadows; it's easier) was quite possibly a blackmailer, among his other activities; and once we admit blackmail the field is enormously widened."

"Oh, yes, sir; I'm not forgetting that. But you must remember that he was certainly down here for some specific purpose to do with his wife—the coincidence otherwise would be so great that I think we can wash it out altogether; so if he *was* blackmailing, it was either his wife or somebody very closely connected with his wife."

"Such as her husband?"

"Such as Dr. Vane," said the inspector meticulously. "Well, you see what I mean. It seems to me we can take it for granted that his death *is* due to somebody already mixed up with the case."

"Yes," Roger agreed. "I think you've clinched that point."

"So that brings us back to what I asked you first of all: can you see anyone in the case with a motive for getting him out of the way?"

"Plenty!" said Roger promptly. "And the one with the biggest motive of all was Mrs. Vane herself."

"Excluding her, I was really meaning," the inspector amplified, with quite exemplary patience.

"Well, confining ourselves for the moment to the blackmail *motif*, I suppose Dr. Vane's the next on the list. He'd have plenty of reason to get rid of his wife's real husband, especially if he was threatening to give the whole show away—as he probably was."

"Even after his wife was dead? What would it matter to the doctor then?"

"Everything! Nobody likes to be shown up as a credulous fool, imposed upon by a clever and unscrupulous woman. Besides, there are bound to be reasons there that we don't know anything about, wheels within wheels. How do we know, for instance, that she hadn't somehow made him an accessory to some real breach of the law? It would be a useful weapon for a woman in such a precarious position as she was. And Meadows might have got wind of it."

"Very ingenious, sir," the inspector approved. "Yes, you make out quite a pretty case against the doctor; though how you're going to prove it is a different matter. And now cutting out the blackmail idea—or rather, taking another aspect of it. Who after all, whether it was Dr. Vane or not, would have the greatest incentive to put Meadows out of the way—to ensure his mouth being shut for ever, if you like?"

Roger nodded slowly. "I see. Yes; of course. And we know Meadows was on the spot at the time; I was forgetting that. Yes, certainly that's the strongest motive of all."

"That's how I look at it, anyway," said the inspector cheerfully. "In fact, the way I see it is this. Meadows was in that little cave at the time, probably waiting to keep an appointment with his wife. Along she comes, but—with somebody else; not alone. Naturally he lies low; doesn't want his name connected with hers at all; that might be killing the goose with the golden eggs. And while he's waiting, this other person pushes his wife over the cliff—*and he knows who that person is*."

"A masterly reconstruction," Roger commented. "So although the original goose is killed, the gander that did it has delivered himself into his hands; and contrary to all

the laws of nature, that gander is going to be made to shell out golden eggs just as fast as a sausage-machine!"

"That's one way of putting it," the inspector smiled. "But the gander thinks differently, and—"

"As Samuel is promptly despatched to fresh meadows and pastures new!—Well, yes, Inspector, one must admit that's a sound enough theory, and very cogently stated."

"Doesn't it seem to you the only reasonable theory, sir? Or at any rate, the most reasonable?"

"I suppose it does," Roger said thoughtfully. "Yes, the most reasonable, without doubt. So now we come back to the good old problem, which I solved so extremely neatly last week—who killed Mrs. Vane?"

"We do, sir. And as to that, do you see one big fact in this second case which is going to give us a valuable pointer to the identity of the double murderer?"

"This is as good as a correspondence course," Roger murmured: "'How to Be a Detective,' in three lessons—Yes, Teacher, I do. Aconitine."

"That's right, sir. It must have been somebody who had access to aconitine; I think we can take *that* for granted. I shall make enquiries at the chemist's in Sandsea and elsewhere, of course, as a matter of form; but I don't fancy they'll lead to anything. The murderer knew all about poisons; that's obvious. Something was wanted that would act quickly, so the choice was practically limited to prussic acid, strychnine, aconitine and curare. Prussic acid smells too strong, so the man could hardly be induced to take it unsuspectingly; with strychnine he'd shout out and make too much fuss; curare won't act except on an open wound; aconitine (a *big* dose of aconitine, that is) was just what was wanted."

"Humph!" Roger said seriously, stroking his chin. "I see what you're getting at, of course. But do you really think he—"

"Hullo, you two!" said a voice from the door. "Still yapping? Hope you've got something to drink up here. I've got a throat like a mustard plaster after walking along that road in this heat."

"Anthony," said his cousin with not unjustified annoyance, "you're gross."

The conversation swerved abruptly from matters criminal.

Lying in bed that night, Roger did not get to sleep very quickly. Apart from this fresh development of the case which in itself was enough to prolong his meditations well into the small hours, he had another problem to engage his attention scarcely less closely—*why* had the inspector emerged, practically unbidden, from his shell of reticence and volunteered this startling information? The pretext of picking his amateur colleague's brains was of course only an empty excuse, for in the subsequent discussion it was the inspector who had taken the lead, pointed out the possibilities and established a workable theory; Roger had contributed nothing of any value to it. Why, in other words, had the inspector gone out of his way to drop unmistakable hints

that the author of both crimes was Dr. Vane himself? It was only as he was at last dropping off to sleep that an illuminating answer occurred to him—the inspector had done this because that is what he wished Roger to think: his real theory was something entirely different!

Shaving the next morning, Roger pursued this train of thought. That certainly was the explanation of the inspector's otherwise inexplicable conduct. Laughing maliciously up his sleeve, he had been trying to head the officious journalist, against whom he already had a score to pay, not toward the truth but away from it. Roger grinned at his reflection in the mirror: very well, but two could play at that game. Likewise, forewarned was forearmed. He began to ponder a plan of campaign which should end in extracting the wind from the inspector's sails.

Obviously the only thing to do was to go straight ahead with his investigations as if nothing had been said. It was possible of course that Dr. Vane really was the murderer, although the inspector clearly did not think so. Nor for that matter did Roger himself. Not that Dr. Vane struck him as likely to shrink from murder if murder should be necessary, but somehow he did not *feel* him as the murderer of his wife—he could put it no more reasonably than that; the eliminator of Meadows, yes, quite possibly; but not the other.

And in that connection, was it so unlikely that the two deaths should have been brought about by different agents? The inspector had pretended to think so and had certainly made out a strong case to support his hypothesis, but did that not now point all the more strongly to the opposite conclusion? The inspector had been at some pains even to labour the point; all the more reason therefore to suspect that his real opinion was just the opposite. Well, well, things did seem to be getting really very involved. The only way of straightening them out was to keep a clear head, forget no possibilities and yet allow none to bias him unduly—and might the best sleuth win!

Roger brushed his hair with his usual care, put on his coat and walked demurely down to breakfast.

The inspector was already half-way through his meal, and Anthony had not put in an appearance. For ten minutes the two exchanged platitudes, the topic bulking largest in both of their minds being as if by common consent avoided. Then the inspector mumbled something about having a busy day in front of him and took his departure. Almost simultaneously Anthony entered the room.

Roger helped himself to marmalade and watched Anthony scoop the remainder of the dish of bacon and eggs on to his plate. He had devoted some earnest thought between platitudes during the last ten minutes to the promise the inspector had extracted from him the evening before, and while deprecating any temptation to break it even in the circumstances, fancied that he had found a blameless way round it. "Anthony," he began with some care, "you're on duty this morning."

"Right-ho!" said Anthony with equanimity. "But what's the idea? Nothing for us to do, is there?"

"Well, yes," Roger said, with elaborate carelessness. "At least, nothing *necessary;* just something I'd rather like to play about with. To tell you the truth, Anthony, I'm getting a little tired of this enforced idleness, so I've propounded a neat little puzzle to myself. It's this: suppose Meadows turned out after all not to have committed suicide, but to have been murdered!"

"Suppose the moon turned into pink cheese too," responded Anthony jocularly. "All right, I'll suppose that. What about it?"

"Well, you know, it *is* a possibility," Roger said, with an air of trying to convince himself against his reason. "We ought not to lose sight of it just because it seems improbable. And it would be remarkably interesting if we could make out some sort of a case to support it, wouldn't it?"

"Is that what you want to do?" Anthony asked, cutting himself a second slice of bread. "Seems a bit of a waste of time to me. However, I'm game if you want to amuse yourself. Things have been a bit quiet lately, haven't they?"

Roger glanced at his cousin in some surprise, but tactfully forebore to comment on this remarkable statement. It had been his impression that things had not been at all quiet lately, so far as Anthony and his affairs were concerned. "You haven't fixed anything up with Margaret for this morning, then?" was all he said.

"No," said Anthony very airily. "She's got to go into Sandsea, I believe. Shopping, or some rot. I shan't be seeing her till to-morrow, if then."

Again Roger, with almost superhuman tact this time, refrained from comment. It was on the tip of his tongue to say, "What have you quarrelled about now, you pair of idiots?" but he didn't. For one thing he had no wish to be accompanied all the morning by a glowering and resentful Anthony.

"That's all right then," he remarked briskly, as if for Anthony and Margaret not to meet during a whole twenty-four hours was quite the most ordinary thing in the world. "Well, I'll tell you what we'll do. I think it would be rather fun, to say nothing of the exercise in detectiveship, to assume for one day that Meadows was murdered (poisoned, of course) and see if we can collect any evidence in support of the notion. What do you say?"

"Frightful fun," Anthony agreed mechanically.

"That's the spirit," said Roger with great heartiness. "Very well, then; hurry up with your breakfast, and we'll see what the Queen will send us."

CHAPTER XXII.
NEW DISCOVERIES

Roger and Anthony stood in the sitting-room that had been occupied by the Rev. Meadows, while the stout landlady entertained them with a ceaseless flow of reminiscences concerning her late guest. Anthony's face was already feeling the strain of keeping an expression of polite interest held firmly toward this stream of verbiage; Roger was blatantly paying not the slightest attention. Anthony began to realise why his cousin had been so anxious to bring him.

"Never was a one for making a fuss, neither," the stout landlady assured Anthony with considerable emphasis. "Not never, he wasn't! Always got a pleasant word for me when I'd bring his meals in or come to ask him if he wanted anything, like. Make a little joke too, he would, as often as not. Very fond of his little joke, the Rev. Meadows was. Sometimes I couldn't help but laugh at him, he'd say such comical things. Seems dreadful to think of now, doesn't it, sir, with the poor gentleman lying stiff and cold in his grave, as you might say?" She paused momentarily for breath.

"Very dreadful," Anthony agreed, casting a harassed eye at a pink china pig on the mantelpiece.

Roger, who had been gazing thoughtfully out of the low window, turned round. "Did anybody come to see Mr. Meadows before breakfast on the morning of his death?" he asked abruptly.

The landlady was so taken aback that she answered with equal brevity. "No, sir, that there wasn't."

"You're sure?"

"Quite sure, sir," replied the landlady, recovering herself. "You see, I was in me kitchen from—"

"Did he have a visitor on the previous day, do you remember?" Roger cut in ruthlessly.

"No, sir; he never had a visitor all the time he was here, not till you came. Very quiet gentleman, he was; very quiet. I remember saying to Mrs. Mullins, not three days before the end, 'Mrs. Mullins,' I said, 'there's lodgers *and* lodgers, as you know as well as I do, but the Rev. Meadows, he—'"

"Did you go to bed early the night before Mr. Meadows' death?" asked Roger.

"Well, in good time, as you might say," replied the landlady, instantly directing her steady stream along this new course. "But then I always do. Candle out by ten o'clock's my rule and always has been. An hour's sleep before midnight's worth two after, I always say. Now my husband, when he was alive, would sit—"

"So if Mr. Meadows had had a late visitor, you wouldn't have known?"

"Well, it's funny you should say that, sir," said the stout landlady, in no wise disconcerted, "because as a matter of fact I *should* have known. I should have heard

the bell, you see. Because I didn't get to sleep after all that night, not till it was quite light I didn't. I had the toothache something chronic. I do get like that sometimes, and then it's as much as I can do to get a wink of sleep at all. I remember it was that night, because when I heard about poor Mr. Meadows the next morning, well, troubles never come singly, I thought. Not but what I know the toothache oughtn't to be mentioned in the same breath as—"

"But supposing the visitor hadn't rung the bell," Roger persisted. "Supposing he'd come round and tapped at this window and Mr. Meadows had gone to the door and let him in. You wouldn't have known anything about it then, would you?"

"Well, it's funny you should say that, sir, too, because as it happens I *should* have. I should have heard them talking in here, you see. My bedroom's just above this room, and you can hear the voices through the ceiling as plain as plain. Not what they're saying, I don't mean, but just the voices. And I know *that*," continued the landlady with an air of mild triumph, "because I heard it meself a matter of three weeks ago or more, when someone did come to see Mr. Meadows after I'd gone to bed, just like you said."

"Oh? Someone did come to see him, eh? But I thought you said he'd had no visitors?"

"Well, I did," admitted the landlady handsomely, "and that's a fact. But not having let this one in meself, well, it slipped my memory, I suppose. Yes, the Rev. Meadows did have a visitor one night, and I know that although I'd gone to sleep, because they woke me up with their talking."

"It was pretty late, then, and they were talking loudly. Good! Have you any idea who it was?"

The landlady hesitated. "No, sir, I couldn't say that, I'm afraid."

"What could you say, though?" Roger asked, with his most winning smile.

"Well, sir, I'm not a one for scandal," said the landlady rapidly; "never have been, and please God never will be. But this I must and will say: if it'd been anybody else but the Rev. Meadows I should've gone down to them then and there, in bed though I was and goodness knows tired enough already. My house has always been respectable and I look upon it as me duty to keep it respectable, but seeing it was the Rev. Meadows—well, what's wrong for other people would be right for him, I thought. Being a clergyman does make a difference, doesn't it, sir? So I just shut me eyes—"

"Do you mean," Roger put in gently, "that Mr. Meadows' visitor was a lady?"

"Well, I don't know about that, sir," said the landlady doubtfully. "I don't know whether you'd call her a *lady*. You see, she was talking that loud I could hardly get to sleep again, try as I might. And the Rev. Meadows, he was talking louder than a clergyman ought, if you ask me, sir. Not but what we ought to say any good of the dead, as the saying goes, and the Rev. Meadows always being such a pleasant, soft-spoken gentleman in the ordinary way, but—"

"Were they quarrelling, then?"

“Well, I suppose if you put it like that, sir,” said the landlady with reluctance, “they were.”

Roger exchanged a significant look with Anthony. “And you haven’t the least idea who the lady was?” he asked.

“Oh, no, sir; I don’t know who she was. I never saw her, you see, and she didn’t leave nothing behind her, only a handkerchief.”

“She left a handkerchief, did she?”

“Yes, sir; I found it the next morning, when I was doing this room before Mr. Meadows was up. I meant to give it to him to give back to her, but kept putting it off somehow. I thought, perhaps, he mightn’t like me knowing anything about it, you see, him not having said a word about her being here at all; and after all, least said soonest mended, as the saying goes.”

“You haven’t,” said Roger, with elaborate carelessness, “still got that handkerchief by you, have you?”

“Well, it’s funny you should say that, sir, because just as it happens, I have. I kep’ it by me, you see, meaning—”

“Would it be too much trouble to let me have a look at it for a moment?” Roger asked in honeyed tones.

“Not a bit, sir,” replied the landlady cheerfully. “I’ll go and get it now, if you wouldn’t mind waiting a minute.”

She bustled out of the room, and Anthony looked at his cousin with raised eyebrows.

“Mrs. Vane, of course?” he said.

“Of course,” Roger nodded. “She could easily get in at that window without being seen.”

“But it’s natural enough, isn’t it? I mean, why the excitement?”

“I’m not excited. And it is perfectly natural. She probably came here several times. But having unearthed a brand-new fact, we may as well find out all there is to be known about it. I admit that I don’t see any fresh development that it can lead to, but there’s no harm in following it up.”

The landlady bustled back again, decidedly the worse for breath, and handed Roger a small piece of cambric entirely surrounded by lace. Roger examined it and silently pointed out to Anthony a small E embroidered in one corner. He turned to the landlady and significantly rattled his loose change.

“I’d like to keep this, if I may,” he told her.

“And welcome,” responded the landlady with alacrity. If her visitors were ready to pay good cash for such an insignificant souvenir of the tragedy, who was she to stand in their way?

“I suppose you can’t say at all definitely which evening it was, can you?” Roger asked, tucking the flimsy thing away in his pocket-book.

"Yes, I can, sir," returned the landlady, not without triumph. "It was the very night before that poor Mrs. Vane was thrown over the cliff. That fixed it in my memory, like. Wasn't that a dreadful thing, sir? Really, I don't know what's happening to Ludmouth. First Mrs. Vane and then the Rev. Meadows! Do you think that police-inspector is going to find out anything, sir? You being with him last week and all, I thought perhaps—"

Roger discouraged her inquisitiveness with gentle firmness and began to prowl round the room. The excuse he had given for his presence, that the dead man was an old friend of his, could be easily stretched to cover any curiosity, bordering on the indecent, which he might display regarding that old friend's habits and possessions.

A rack on the wall containing three or four pipes arrested his attention, and he drew one out of its socket. "Mr. Meadows was a heavy smoker, wasn't he?" he remarked.

"Well, it's funny you should say that, sir," observed the landlady, who had been following his movements with interest, "because I shouldn't have said he was, meself, at all. Leastways, not compared with my husband, he wasn't. He'd smoke his pipe after breakfast, the Rev. Meadows would, and again after his dinner and perhaps a bit in the evening if he felt like it, but not much more than that. Now my husband; you'd hardly ever see him without he had a pipe in—"

"But Mr. Meadows had a lot of pipes for so small a smoker?"

"Well, yes, he had, sir; I'd noticed that meself. But he was very funny about his pipes, the Rev. Meadows was. He used to smoke them one at a time, for a week; in roteration, he called it. Very comical about it, he was too. 'Pipes are like wives, ma,' he used to say (always called me ma, he did; said I mothered him better than his own mother ever had; a very friendly sort of gentleman, the Rev. Meadows was). Yes, 'Pipes are like wives,' he'd say; 'a man ought never to have more than one of 'em going at a time.' That was just one of his comicalities, you see. Always full of jokes like that, he was. 'Pipes are like wives,' indeed! You see what he meant: a man ought never—"

"Yes, very comical indeed," Roger agreed gravely. "Ha, ha! By the way, you don't know where Mr. Meadows bought his tobacco, do you?"

"Well, it's funny you should say that, sir, because as it happens I do. Next door but one the shop is, and that's the only place they sell it in the village. Barring the Three Swans and the Crown, of course; and the Three Swans being over a mile outside the village, you could hardly expect him to go there for it, could you?"

"Certainly not," Roger agreed with an air of great seriousness. "No, I couldn't possibly expect that. Well, I mustn't keep you any longer, I suppose. Thank you so much for letting me look round." He held something out toward her which the landlady received with ready palm.

“And welcome, I’m sure,” she said genially. “Thank you kindly, sir. And if there’s anything else you want to see, you’ve only got to ask. Wouldn’t like to have a look round his bedroom, I suppose, now you’re here?”

“No, I don’t think we need trouble about that. Come along, Anthony. Good-morning, madam.”

They were shown into the road and Roger turned to the left.

“Some day,” remarked Anthony chattily, “I must match you against that woman, if I can find somebody to put up a purse. You’ll enter the ring directly after breakfast and talk to each other till one of you gives up. If either of the combatants is found at the time of the contest to be suffering already from clergyman’s sore throat, he or she forfeits the stake-money and all bets are null and void. Queensbury rules, no kidney-punch, towels and sponges to be provided by—”

“Cease prattling, Anthony,” Roger remarked in tolerant tones, diving into a shop in their left. “We’re going in here.”

They went in.

“By the way,” Roger opened the conversation, having paved the way by buying an ounce of tobacco that he didn’t want. “By the way, this is the same brand as poor Mr. Meadows used to smoke, isn’t it? You remember; the clergyman who died next door but one last week.”

“Oh, yes, sir,” said the village grocer. “We all knew him here. But he didn’t smoke that, sir. Crown and Anchor Coarse Cut was what he always bought.”

“Is that so? I thought he told me once that he smoked this. But of course he never did smoke very much.”

“That’s right, sir. About an ounce a week, that’s all.”

“Used to come in here for his ounce every week, did he?”

“Oh, no; he didn’t do that. He used to buy it a quarter-of-a-pound at a time; but that works at an ounce a week, you see.”

“So it does,” observed Roger with an air of mild surprise, and took his departure.

“So now, Anthony,” he confided to that young man outside, “we know what Samuel smoked, how he treated his pipes, how much tobacco he bought at a time and everything else; in fact, about the only thing we appear not to know in this connection is the name of Samuel’s tobacconist’s cousin’s great-aunt’s cat.”

“And what the deuce,” wondered Anthony, “do you imagine you’re going to get out of it all?”

“That Heaven alone knows!” replied Roger, with pious agnosticism.

They went back to the inn for lunch.

CHAPTER XXIII.
COLIN UPSETS THE APPLE-CART

Inspector Moresby was evidently having a busy day. He did not put in an appearance at lunch, and when Roger and Anthony strolled down to the sea-level to smoke their post-prandial pipes there was still no sign of him. Anthony surmised vaguely that his investigations must be covering a larger field than their own.

Anthony had plenty of time for his surmises, for ever since their return to the inn Roger had lapsed into a highly unaccustomed state of taciturnity. To his cousin's efforts to make conversation or discuss their discoveries of the morning he replied with only a brief word or grunt. Anthony, who was not always so tactless as he appeared, realised that his mind was busy with some knotty problem connected with the case, and was content to leave him to his meditations. They scrambled out to their usual rock and composed themselves to smoke in silence.

It was nearly three-quarters of an hour before Roger volunteered any clue as to what was puzzling him. "I'm sure," he said abruptly, "that this information of the landlady's ought to give us a pointer to the truth, if we could only interpret it correctly."

"You mean, about Mrs. Vane's visit and their quarrel?" Anthony enquired.

"No, no," Roger said with unusual testiness. "That doesn't give us anything fresh. It's natural enough for her to have visited him, and we'd gathered already that they were on bad terms. No, about those pipes."

"Oh! But I don't see how they come in."

"Well, after all," observed Roger sarcastically, "a pipe does play rather a leading part in the affair, doesn't it?"

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked Anthony blankly.

Roger stared at him for a moment and then laughed. "Oh, sorry! I was forgetting that you don't know anything about that. And you mustn't ask me either, because I'm under the most fearful oaths of secrecy. Anyhow, a pipe *does* play a leading part—but don't tell Moresby I told you."

"Mum's the word," agreed Anthony cheerfully. "All right, carry on, then. You'll get to the bottom of it, Roger, if you work your grey matter hard enough."

"Thank you, Anthony," Roger murmured. "I do need a little encouragement, it's true." He relapsed into his brown study.

Anthony sat on the rock till it became too hard to sit on any longer, then he removed his shoes and socks, tucked up his trousers and began to wander further afield. Anthony was growing up.

High overhead an aeroplane made its appearance, sweeping a vast circle in the blue sky. The drone of its engine reached their ears as a muffled hum.

"Wonder if that's Woodthorpe's bus," Anthony called out, seeing his cousin's eyes following the tiny speck across space.

"Woodthorpe's?" said Roger absently. "Didn't know he'd got one."

"So Margaret told me. He was in the Air Force during the war, and now he keeps a bus of his own. They're rolling in money, of course."

"Lucky devils," remarked Roger mechanically.

Anthony found a small crab under a flat stone and the conversation lapsed.

It was another half-hour before Roger again broke the silence. He rose from his cramped position and made his way over to Anthony, jumping agilely from rock to rock and refilling his pipe as he went.

"Look here, Anthony," he said, "is there absolutely no way of getting hold of Margaret this afternoon? There's something I particularly want to ask her."

"I don't think there is," Anthony replied doubtfully. "I wanted to take her out in the car, as a matter of fact, but she said she couldn't possibly manage it; far too busy."

"She's gone into Sandsea, you said?"

"Yes."

Roger frowned. "What an infernal nuisance! It's a point I badly want to clear up."

"What is it?"

"I wanted to ask her whether by any remote chance Mrs. Vane had expressed any intention before her death of going away in the near future."

"Well, it's funny you should say that, sir," replied Anthony humorously, "because as a matter of fact I *do* know. She had. What's the great idea?"

"She had, had she?" Roger demanded eagerly. "Did Margaret tell you?"

"She mentioned it once, I remember; just casually. Mrs. Vane hadn't been away this summer, and she was going to stay with some friends for the twelfth."

"The twelfth, eh?" Roger made a rapid calculation. "Then she'd have gone about a fortnight ago. Excellent! Anthony, I do believe I'm on the track of something."

"I say, are you really?" Anthony's enthusiasm was all that the most exacting detective could have required. "Mean you've solved the whole thing?"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say that," Roger said modestly. "But I do think I'm beginning to see daylight. I've got a rather stupendous idea, at any rate, and things seem to be fitting into it rather neatly."

"What is it?"

"Oh, you mustn't ask me that yet. I shall have to chew it over a lot more before I can make a connected and logical story of it. Besides, the best detectives always hold up their brilliant solutions for the most effective moment (surely you know that), and I refuse to think that an audience of Anthony Walton, two green crabs and a limpet would be in the least effective."

"Well, hurry up and think it out properly," said Anthony, ignoring this pleasantry. "You know we all want to see this damned business cleared up once and for all."

"Then let's go back and have our tea. And after that, if you'll leave me to myself for a couple of hours, I'll see what can be done."

Inspector Moresby had still not returned to the inn when they got there, as the landlord informed them on Roger's enquiry. Roger wondered uneasily what exactly he might be up to; feeling as he did that he himself was on the verge of the truth he had no wish that anybody should forestall him in crossing it.

Throughout tea he chattered incessantly about nothing at all, explaining on Anthony's remonstrance that he wished to clear his brain of all stale notions in order to approach the problem afterward with an entirely fresh mind.

As soon as they had finished he took his pipe down once more to the rocks, and sternly forbade Anthony to come within half-a-mile of him.

More than the stipulated two hours had passed before he climbed once more up to the little path along the face of the cliff and thence to the top of the headland where Anthony, bored beyond tears with his own company but far too eager to risk missing his cousin's return, was anxiously waiting.

"Well?" demanded the latter at once, hurrying forward. "Any luck?"

"Not so much luck, Anthony, as brilliance," Roger replied with pardonable pride. "Yes, I think I've solved this little problem, as Holmes would have said if he'd been here instead of me."

"Who's the murderer, then?"

"Can you possess your soul in patience a little longer? I don't want to spoil a good story, but it's such a long and complicated one that I don't want to have to tell it twice over. If you can wait till Moresby arrives I can kill two birds with one stone."

"But he may be ages," Anthony grumbled.

"Well, give me till half-way through supper," said Roger, "and if he isn't back by then I'll promise to give you an outline of it in advance." And with that Anthony had to be content.

"By Jove," Roger resumed, as they walked back to the inn. "By Jove, I do hope Moresby hasn't been working along this line himself. He's such a reticent devil, I never know what's in his mind; he'll spill a fact or two occasionally, but never a theory—that is, not without some ulterior motive. Yes, if this idea hasn't occurred to him already, I fancy I've got a little shock in store for Inspector Moresby."

"Is the solution quite—quite unexpected, then?"

"Entirely, so far as I know—or at any rate, by me. Then I suddenly caught a glimpse of things from a fresh angle, and all the facts proceeded to arrange themselves in the neatest way possible."

"You'll be able to convince the inspector, I suppose? He's a bit of a sceptical devil."

"He is that," Roger agreed with feeling. "But I don't see how I can fail to convince even him. The facts ought to do that for themselves. Of course the solution isn't capable of cast-iron proof, that's the only trouble; but if it comes to that, what solution

that depends only on circumstantial evidence ever can be? And proof hasn't necessarily got to be cast-iron, it only needs to be reasonably convincing; and that mine certainly is."

"Good egg!" quoth Anthony with satisfaction.

In the hall of the inn the landlord intercepted them.

"There's a gentleman come to see Inspector Moresby," he said. "I told him he was out, but he wanted to wait, so I said he could wait in your sitting-room, thinking you wouldn't mind, gents."

"Of course not," Roger concurred. "Did he leave his name?"

"Well, there wasn't no need for him to do that," replied the landlord quite seriously. "I know who 'e is, you see. It's young Mr. Woodthorpe."

Roger and Anthony exchanged glances. "Oh, yes?" said the former. "Well, no doubt the inspector will be in soon. Thank you, landlord.—And what the devil," he observed to Anthony, as they made their way up the stairs, "does young Mr. Woodthorpe want? We'd better go in and see."

Young Mr. Woodthorpe was standing by the window, his usually ruddy face decidedly pale and set in grim lines. He wheeled round abruptly as they entered the room.

"Hullo! You wanted to see Inspector Moresby?" Roger greeted him pleasantly.

Woodthorpe nodded. "Yes," he said curtly. "Will he be long?"

"I can't say, I'm afraid. We haven't seen him since breakfast. Is it anything important?"

"It is rather."

"Well, have a drink while you're waiting. I can recommend the beer here."

"Thanks."

"Anthony, shout down for three tankards," Roger said hospitably, quite unperturbed by his guest's noticeable failure to return his own cordiality; indeed the young man's manner was so abrupt and cold as to be not far short of downright rude.

Anthony's stentorian shout echoed down the dark stairs.

"Couldn't I give the inspector a message, if he's longer than you care to wait?" Roger asked, turning back to Woodthorpe.

"I'm afraid not," said the young man stiffly. "My business with him is rather private." He swallowed slightly and swept a nervous glance toward the door, through which Anthony was just returning. "Oh, well," he burst out with sudden defiance, "you'll know soon enough in any case, so I may as well tell you now. I've come to give myself up. I killed Mrs. Vane and—and Meadows."

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Roger blankly.

CHAPTER XXIV.
INSPECTOR MORESBY IS HUMOROUS

It is not an easy exercise in hospitality to entertain a guest who has just announced that he is a double murderer. Small talk about the weather and the latest books seems something of an anticlimax, while to display a polite interest in his hobby and question him as to details might be misconstrued as mere indecent curiosity. On the whole it is difficult to see how the situation (should it ever occur to the reader) could be better handled than it was by Roger.

"Did you really?" observed that gentleman politely, pulling himself together with an effort as the three tankards preceded the landlord into the room. "Well, well!—er—cheerio!"

"Cheerio!" echoed the self-confessed murderer gloomily, and extracted what comfort he could from his tankard.

"Won't you sit down?" mumbled Roger, still mechanically polite.

"Thanks."

The trio seated themselves and looked at one another in silence.

"The—the inspector ought to be here soon, I should think," volunteered Roger helpfully.

"Will he?"

"Yes, I should think so."

"I see."

There was another pause. Roger frowned at Anthony. Anthony continued to preserve unbroken silence; the situation was evidently beyond him.

It was rather beyond Roger too, but he flung himself valiantly into the breach once more. "Have you been waiting long?" he enquired desperately.

"Not very."

"Oh!—Well—he ought to be in any minute now."

"I see."

There was another pause.

"Look here," said Roger still more desperately, "what are we to talk about?"

Woodthorpe smiled faintly. "I suppose it is a bit awkward for you fellows," he remarked.

"Infernally awkward," Roger agreed warmly. "I don't know what the etiquette is on these occasions at all. Besides, they'll be coming in to lay the supper in a minute. Shall I tell them to lay a place for you, by the way?"

"I don't know. That rather depends on the inspector, doesn't it?"

"Well, I should think he'll allow you to have some food at any rate, whatever he does with you afterward. I'll tell the girl when she comes up. In the meantime, if you don't care for talking here's the morning paper."

Colin Woodthorpe smiled again. “Thanks,” he said and began to read it diligently, upside-down.

“Well, I suppose I’d better go along and wash,” Roger observed very airily. “Coming, Anthony?”

They escaped from the room.

“Was this your solution, Roger?” Anthony asked, when they had gained the privacy of one of their four bedrooms.

“Don’t rub it in!” Roger groaned. “And I’d got it all worked out so beautifully. Dash it, I can’t believe I was wrong! I wonder if the chap can be making a mistake?”

“Fellow ought to know whether he’s murdered somebody or not, surely,” Anthony stated judicially.

“Yes, I suppose he ought. It would be a difficult thing to overlook, wouldn’t it? Well, all I can say is, dash the chap! This is the second time I’ve solved this mystery wrong.—Anthony, I don’t want to go back to that room a bit. Let’s sit down and smoke and talk about Ibsen.”

“I’ll go down and tell them about that extra place first,” said Anthony, and extricated himself with neatness and despatch.

Twenty minutes later the maid knocked on the door and informed them that supper was ready. With reluctance they returned to the sitting-room.

Their guest was by this time a little more composed, and a scrappy conversation upon various subjects of no interest at all was determinedly maintained. Nevertheless it was with considerable relief that Roger hailed the arrival of Inspector Moresby ten minutes later. He did not wish to see young Woodthorpe, to whom he had taken a liking, being bundled off to prison, but the situation really was a very difficult one.

Woodthorpe jumped to his feet immediately the door opened. “Inspector,” he said, with a return to his former abrupt manner, “I’ve been waiting to see you. I want to give myself up for the murders of Mrs. Vane and Meadows.”

The inspector gazed at him coolly for a moment. Then he closed the door behind him. “Oh, you do, do you?” he said without emotion. “So it was you who did it after all, was it, Mr. Woodthorpe?”

“Yes.”

“Well, well,” said the inspector tolerantly, “boys will be boys, I suppose. What’s for supper, eh, Mr. Sheringham?”

“C-cold veal and salad,” stammered Roger, somewhat taken aback. He had never seen an experienced policeman arresting a murderer before, but this certainly did not coincide with his ideas of how it should be done.

“Well, let’s hope the salad’s better than it was last night,” observed the inspector with some severity, and took his seat at the table.

Roger was not the only person to whom things did not seem to be going right. “Well, aren’t you going to arrest me, Inspector?” asked Woodthorpe in bewilderment.

"All in good time, sir, all in good time," replied the inspector, busying himself with the veal. "Business first and pleasure afterward, perhaps, but food before either of them."

"And drink before that," murmured Roger, who was beginning to recover himself. Roger thought he saw a gleam of light in the darkness.

Woodthorpe dropped back into his seat. "I—I don't understand," he muttered.

"You've got no salad, sir," said the inspector in tones of some concern. "Help yourself and then pass the bowl across to me.—Well, well! So it's you who's been giving us all this trouble, is it?"

"If you like to put it that way," replied Woodthorpe stiffly. Certainly it must be galling to any conscientious murderer, who has just brought off a neat right and left, to hear his exploit described merely as 'troublesome.' There is nobody like an inspector of police for showing things up as they prosaically are.

"And why did you suddenly make up your mind to come and tell me all about it, sir?" pursued the inspector, with the air of one making polite conversation.

"I don't see that I'm called upon to give you my reasons."

"Of course not," the inspector agreed with the utmost heartiness. "Worst thing in the world you could do. Never give reasons, that's my advice. Have some more veal? Mr. Walton, you've finished; cut Mr. Woodthorpe some more veal."

Anthony, who had been watching this exchange with open mouth, started violently and began to cut the bread.

"I don't want any more veal, thank you," said Mr. Woodthorpe, flushing angrily.

"Just as you like, sir, of course," murmured the inspector, and bestowed a large wink on Roger.

Roger, to whom the gleam of light had now become a broad beam, returned the wink with interest.

Unfortunately Woodthorpe intercepted both. He sprang wrathfully to his feet again, knocking his chair over behind him. "Look here," he burst out, "I've had about enough of this fooling. I told you what I came here for, Inspector. Are you going to arrest me or are you not?"

The inspector looked up from his plate. "Well, sir," he said blandly, "since you ask me so candidly—no, I'm not!—But I'd like to ask you a few questions, perhaps."

For a long moment the eyes of the two men held each other, while a deep flush slowly overspread the younger's face. Then Woodthorpe turned away and marched over to the door.

"Then you can jolly well come up to my home and ask me them there," he announced as he opened it. "I've had about enough of this." The door closed behind him with a bang.

"That looks like a walk for me, I'm afraid," observed the inspector with regret.

"Yes," Roger laughed. "He got one back on you there, Inspector."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Anthony. "Good Lord!"

"What's the matter, Anthony?" Roger asked sympathetically.

"You mean—that chap never did it at all?"

"No, not exactly that, Anthony," said Roger with a grave face. "It's simply that Inspector Moresby has a conscientious objection to arresting anybody for murder under the age of thirty."

"Ass!" growled his cousin, and helped himself to stewed gooseberries. "Well, what about your story now, then? Did you know Roger had solved the mystery, Inspector?"

"No, Mr. Walton, I didn't," said the inspector with interest. "Has he?"

"Well, he thinks he has," said Anthony nastily.

"Now, now, Anthony," Roger reproved. "Don't be vindictive.—Yes," he added modestly to the inspector. "I've solved the mystery all right. And I warn you that I'm going to telephone part of it at any rate to London to-night, though not the bit you wanted suppressed for the present, of course."

"Well, well!" said the inspector. "These gooseberries seem to me a bit sour, didn't you think?"

"Inspector Moresby," said Roger with heat, "there are some people for whose murder it's well worth while to be hanged. You're one of them. So take this as a friendly warning and don't try me too far."

"But they are a bit sour, Mr. Sheringham," protested the inspector. "Really!"

"So are the grapes too, I'm afraid," Roger grinned. "Never mind, Inspector; perhaps I shan't be on your next case.—So the story-books are right after all when they talk about Scotland Yard's professional jealousy of the amateur."

"True, sir," said the inspector, shaking his head. "Terribly true."

"See in the paper this morning that Glamorgan have won their eleventh match this season, Anthony?" Roger remarked airily. "Extraordinary how they've come on, isn't it? We shall see them head of the table soon."

"Yes, it's nice to see a county that plays more than one amateur doing well for a change," Anthony responded with alacrity.

Roger kept the conversation firmly upon cricket till the inspector had swallowed his last mouthful and the dinner things had been cleared away, and even till the inspectorial pipe was well alight and the inspectorial countenance decidedly bored.

"By the way, sir," remarked Inspector Moresby, relaxing comfortably in the armchair to which he had transferred himself. "By the way, didn't I hear you say something about having solved the mystery?"

"I thought you'd come round, with time and gentle treatment," Roger laughed. "Yes, Inspector, joking apart, I really think I have solved it. Care to hear?"

"Of course I would, sir. You mustn't mind if I pull your leg now and then."

"Well, I do a bit of that myself," Roger admitted. "But look here, the trouble is Anthony. I haven't told him yet, because it's all bound up with what you confided to me the other night; but of course he wants to hear. Can't you stretch a point and let me just give him a quick idea of what you told me?"

The inspector hesitated. “You’ll give me your word that it wouldn’t go any further, then, Mr. Walton? Not to another mortal soul?”

“On my oath,” Anthony agreed eagerly.

“It’s highly irregular,” sighed the inspector, “but—very well, Mr. Sheringham; fire away!”

Roger proceeded to give Anthony a brief outline of how Meadows had met his death and the discovery of the aconitine in the tobacco-jar.

“And that’s why I was so interested in tobacco this morning, Anthony, you see,” he concluded, and went on at once to acquaint the inspector with the new discoveries he had then made.

The inspector nodded sagely. “Yes, I wondered whether you’d get hold of that,” he remarked.

“You knew it already?” Roger asked, somewhat dashed.

“A week ago,” replied the inspector laconically.

“But she never told me she’d told anyone before.”

“She didn’t know she had. She doesn’t know she’s told you now. With that sort of person, if you don’t ask ’em direct questions but just let ’em dribble their information out in their own way, they’ll tell you everything they know just the same and they won’t realise five minutes later that they’ve told you anything at all. Yes, well, what did you make of it all, Mr. Sheringham?”

Roger drew a deep breath.

CHAPTER XXV.
ROGER SOLVES THE MYSTERY

"Well, I'd better begin at the beginning," said Roger.

"Now, in the very first place I made up my mind, as you know, Inspector, that the person whom you seemed to be suspecting (whether you really did or not, I don't know; but you certainly gave me that impression)—I made up my mind that that person was not responsible for Mrs. Vane's death. The evidence was against her, of course, and badly, but there are some cases where circumstantial evidence, however apparently convincing, can lead one rather badly astray, and I was sure this was one of them. I admit that I had nothing definite to go on; my reasons were purely psychological. I felt, quite simply, that to suspect Margaret Cross of murder—and a seemingly cold-blooded, carefully-planned murder at that—was nothing short of ridiculous. The girl was transparently sincere and honest."

"If it wasn't she, then, who was it?"

"Well, both of you know that my suspicions finally centred upon this fellow Meadows, *alias* all the rest of it. I thought I had a pretty good case against him even before we knew anything about him at all; afterward it almost amounted to a foregone conclusion. And then Meadows apparently committed suicide. Well, that didn't affect my case; if anything (and the circumstances being as they were) it was actually strengthened. But Meadows, it turned out, could hardly have committed suicide at all. He must have been murdered. How did that make things look?

"Now, this is where we jumped to the wrong conclusion, Inspector. At least I did, I can't answer for you; I've never known what was really in your mind from the very beginning. Misled, intentionally or otherwise, by you, I practically assumed that the two murders had been committed by one and the same person—or if I didn't actually assume that, I came so near it as automatically to wash out the idea that Meadows committed the first. We agreed that they must almost certainly be interdependent, and I accepted your very plausible theory that the strongest and most obvious motive for the second was that Meadows had been an actual eye-witness of the first. And that theory of course eliminated him from the list of suspects. At the same time you made out a very useful case against Vane for the double murder.

"And now I'm afraid we become a little personal.

"Thinking things over in bed last night, away from your magnetic influence, I was suddenly struck by this bright thought: *why* does Inspector Moresby go to such pains to plant in my mind the idea that both murders were committed by the same person, and to give me the impression that this is what he himself thinks? He's a reticent sort of devil; he's never volunteered any ideas of his own worth speaking of before; he knows that in a way we're rivals here; the last person he'd want to help toward a solution is Roger Sheringham—*why?* And of course the answer to that came pat:

because he wants to put me on the wrong track! He *doesn't* think those murders were committed by the same person. On the contrary, he's convinced they weren't. How's that, Inspector?"

The inspector laughed heartily. "No, no, Mr. Sheringham," he said, shaking his head. "You do me an injustice, you do really. That was my honest opinion when I was talking to you last night. I had no doubt at all that Mrs. Vane and Meadows were murdered by the same person and I don't mind admitting it."

"Humph!" observed Roger, not altogether without scepticism. "And do you still think so?"

"I'm always open to conviction, I hope," replied the inspector carefully. "Yes, go on, sir. This is very interesting."

"Well, whether you really thought there were two murderers or whether you didn't, my base suspicions of you did me one good turn: they biased me in favour of thinking so myself. So when I set out to pay a visit to Meadows' lodgings this morning, I was already prepared to look for his murderer in somebody other than that of Mrs. Vane. Well, I made my investigations, I unearthed a few new facts which looked interesting but which I was blessed at the moment if I could make head or tail of, and I sat down after lunch to try to think the whole thing out." Roger re-lit his pipe, which had gone out, and settled himself more comfortably in his chair.

"It wasn't for some little time that a very simple question occurred to me, to which the answer began at last to put me on the right track. The question was this: what after all has happened to make it so impossible that Meadows *should* be the murderer of Mrs. Vane, as seemed so obvious before? And the answer, of course, was—nothing! Very well, then. Could I get any further with the second mystery by utilising my theory of the two agents to make Meadows the solution of the first?

"Now there were two pointers toward the murderer of Meadows, both somewhat vague—motive and aconitine. Assuming, as I think one had every right to do, that Meadows would not have shrinked from blackmail, the first of these was so wide that I shelved it for a time and concentrated on the second. This was wide too, but it could be narrowed down. If one took the working assumption that the aconitine had come from Dr. Vane's laboratory, there were, excluding servants and so on, three people who could have got hold of it: Dr. Vane himself, Miss Williamson and Miss Cross. Well, for some reason or other (psychological again) I wasn't drawn toward Dr. Vane as the murderer although, as you showed, Inspector, it was possible to make out a pretty convincing case against him—probably because you *had* gone out of your way to make a pretty convincing case against him, perhaps. In the same way, of course, I had already discarded Miss Cross. There remained Miss Williamson.

"Well, Miss Williamson was a difficulty. Why in the name of goodness should she want to kill Meadows? I could see no possible reason. There would have been a reason, of course, if she had already murdered Mrs. Vane—an idea that had already occurred to me by the way, Inspector, and for the same motive, before you put it

forward once as a joke, if you remember. There would have been a motive in that case, if Meadows had seen her do it; but I was working on the theory that he had murdered Mrs. Vane himself. For the life of me I couldn't see, if that were the case, how she could possibly be his murderess."

"Out of the question, I should have said," interjected the inspector.

"Yes, that's what I decided. Well, there were all my three suspects discharged without a stain on their characters; so I was driven to the conclusion that either the aconitine had not come from Dr. Vane's laboratory at all, or else Meadows had not killed Mrs. Vane. In either case I was in an *impasse* and had to go back a little way. I went back to motive.

"Now this is where we really do begin to warm up. Do you remember last night, Inspector, you asked me who had the biggest motive for wanting Meadows out of the way, and I replied, somewhat facetiously, that Mrs. Vane had? I began to play with that idea."

"Mrs. Vane?" repeated Anthony incredulously. "But she was dead already."

"When Meadows died, yes; but she had plenty of motive, I imagine, for wanting him out of the way before she died herself. Anyhow you see the idea. I was asking myself, with growing excitement: was there any way in which Mrs. Vane could have brought about Meadows' death, although she herself was already dead? And the answer, of course, was obvious. Yes, there was!" Roger leaned back in his chair and beamed triumphantly at his audience.

"This is very clever, Mr. Sheringham," said the inspector ungrudgingly. "Very clever indeed. Yes, I see now what you're driving at, but let's have it in your own words."

"Well, as you probably discovered yourself, Meadows had had no visitors during the last few weeks, so far as the landlady knew. Any theory, then, which was to cover the insertion of poison in his tobacco must presuppose the murderer's visit late at night and, probably, through the sitting-room window, with or without Meadows' own knowledge. But on the night before the murder the landlady, although awake, heard no sounds at all, whereas she had heard a visitor's voice, quite distinctly, some three weeks beforehand, that visitor being proved to be Mrs. Vane."

"Wait a minute, sir," said the inspector. "What's all this about? I don't know anything of a visit of Mrs. Vane's."

"Ah!" Roger grinned. "Well, I'm one up on you there at any rate. Look at this!" He drew the little handkerchief out of his pocket-book, tossed it over to the other and explained how it had come into his possession.

"Yes," agreed the inspector with a rueful air. "Yes, you're certainly one up on me there, Mr. Sheringham."

"That's good," said Roger with undisguised satisfaction. "Well, to continue. Apart from the information about Mrs. Vane's visit, two other facts emerged: one, that Meadows changed his pipes once a week, to which no significance appears to attach,

the other, that he was a very small smoker—and that's very important indeed. I found out from the village shop, you see, that he bought a quarter-of-a-pound at a time, but only smoked it at the rate of an ounce a week. As he evidently emptied the whole lot into that tobacco-jar in his room which you sent away to be analysed, that would mean that the bottom contents of the jar would remain in place for between three and four weeks. For anybody conversant with his habits, this knowledge might be very useful indeed."

The inspector nodded slowly. "Very ingenious, sir; very ingenious."

"Glad you think so, Inspector," Roger smiled. "I'm quite sure that praise from you is praise worth having. Well, that's my theory. Mrs. Vane and Meadows, to cut a long story short, were both planning to murder each other. Meadows believed in direct methods; Mrs. Vane was more painstaking. Both their motives are obvious, I think. Meadows had been threatening her with exposure, no doubt, if she didn't satisfy his financial demands, which, as Mrs. Vane with her knowledge of the type must have realised, would gradually grow bigger and bigger. She had retaliated by threatening to inform the police of his whereabouts, knowing that he was badly wanted by them on more than one charge. The result was that both had succeeded in thoroughly frightening the other, and each decided on the other's elimination as the only escape from an intolerable situation. That's perfectly reasonable, I think?"

"Perfectly," assented the inspector at once.

"Damned cunning," commented Anthony warmly.

"Thank you, Anthony. Well, as I said, Mrs. Vane was the more painstaking of the two. She elaborated her plan with, I think, considerable ingenuity. Her knowledge of poisons, you see, was probably two-fold; her father was with a firm of wholesale chemists, you said, and she might well have picked up a few tips from him, apart from what she could have got out of her husband's books. She knew enough at any rate to recognise aconitine as pre-eminently her requirement. And she hit upon poison in the first place, I should have said, because she had an unlimited supply of all brands ready to her hand. What did she do, then? Simply this: having made an excuse for visiting her real husband's rooms (necessarily in circumstances of profound secrecy), she sent him out of the room on some pretext, slipped the stuff into the *bottom* of his tobacco-jar, and went calmly away to await developments."

"Which turned out to be somewhat different from what she'd expected," supplied the inspector.

"Very much so. But of course she thought she was on velvet. She knew the fact of her having been to Meadows' rooms that night would never leak out, because it was to his advantage to keep quiet about it (though it certainly was short-sighted of her to talk loudly enough to waken the landlady); and having placed the poison at the bottom of the jar, with two or three ounces of harmless stuff on top of it, she knew that it would be at least a fortnight before he would reach it, and by that time she would be miles away with a complete alibi established."

"Ah, but how do you know that, sir?" asked the inspector, with the air of one who puts his finger on a weak point.

"Because Miss Cross happened to mention it casually to Anthony!" Roger returned triumphantly. "I'd got as far as that in my reasoning, you see, when it occurred to me that the only possible purpose Mrs. Vane could have in delaying the death was this one, to provide herself with an alibi. If I could find out, I felt at that stage, that Mrs. Vane actually *had* expressed her intention of going away in the very near future, then my case was as good as clinched. And up pops Anthony with the very information I wanted!"

"So I haven't lived in vain after all, Inspector, you see," murmured Anthony facetiously.

"Well, hitherto I'd been working entirely on guesswork, but that seemed to give me the one bit of proof I wanted. After that it was simply a case of using one's imagination to reconstruct what must have happened. And what did happen can be put baldly in a couple of sentences. Before Mrs. Vane's ingenious scheme could take effect, Meadows had pushed its author over the cliff. Result, Meadows murdered Mrs. Vane and Mrs. Vane murdered Meadows, in spite of the handicap of being already dead herself. I should think that must be the first time in Scotland Yard's history that a man had been murdered by a corpse, Inspector, isn't it? If I wanted to make a detective story out of it and was looking for a nice lurid title, I should call it 'The Dead Hand.' Well, now, comments, please. What have you got to say about it all?"

"I'll say this, sir," replied the inspector without hesitation. "It's as clever a bit of constructive reasoning as ever I've heard."

"And the idea had never occurred to you?" pursued Roger, pleased.

"Never," admitted the inspector handsomely. "And so after all this excitement the public is to be disappointed of an arrest, eh?"

"Well, I'm afraid so."

There was a little silence.

"Of course it isn't capable of what you might call *proof*, Mr. Sheringham, is it?" remarked the inspector thoughtfully. "Not the kind of proof to satisfy a court, I mean."

"No, it isn't; I know that. But as they're both dead, justice isn't going to be cheated."

"You're going to publish your solution in the *Courier*, after the facts have come out at the inquest next Thursday?"

"Yes, but only as an interesting theory, of course. I don't know whether there's any law about libelling the dead, but in any case I couldn't very well do more than put it forward as a workable solution, in the complete absence, as you say, of all proof."

The inspector smoked a few more minutes in silence.

"I think, sir," he said slowly, "that you'll find the official explanation of the whole thing, for the benefit of the public, will be that Mrs. Vane's death was an accident and Meadows committed suicide."

Roger nodded. “Yes, I’d rather expected that. It’s tame, of course, but it’s safe. Do you mean, you don’t want me to attack that too fiercely in the *Courier?*”

“Well, we don’t want to stir up mud which it’s impossible to clarify,” replied the inspector, in somewhat deprecating tones.

“I see that. Very well, I promise not to be sarcastic. You must let me put my theory forward, just as an interesting piece of deductive reasoning, but I won’t insist upon its being the truth.—And after all,” Roger added, “I can’t defend it, except on the grounds of probability and commonsense. However convinced we ourselves may be that it’s the right solution, we’re always up against this unfortunate absence of decisive proof.”

The inspector nodded as if satisfied. “I think you’re wise, Mr. Sheringham, sir,” he said.

“Well, well,” remarked Anthony robustly. “What about a drink?”

“Anthony,” observed his cousin, “your ideas are sometimes nearly as good as mine.”

Anthony removed himself to the lower regions and returned with the wherewithal for celebrating the occasion fittingly. In the intervals of celebration, they continued to discuss the case, the inspector now paying ungrudging acknowledgments to his unprofessional rival’s acumen and ingenuity. Roger decided that after all he really liked that hitherto somewhat maddening man very much indeed.

Half-an-hour or so later the recipient of Roger’s new affection put down his glass with a sigh and looked at his watch. “Well,” he said with deep regret, “I suppose I’ll have to be getting along.”

“To interview Woodthorpe?” said Roger in some surprise. “But surely there’s no hurry about that?”

“When a man bothers to confess to a double murder, the least one can do is to ask him why,” the inspector pointed out. “It’s merely a matter of form, I know, but I think I ought to get it done to-night. I’ve got a motor-bicycle outside; it won’t take me a minute. By the way, Mr. Sheringham, how do you account for that, I wonder?”

“Woodthorpe’s confession?” said Roger thoughtfully. “Yes, that is a little puzzling, I admit. But you do get all sorts of comic people confessing to crimes they haven’t committed, don’t you?”

“Oh, yes, sir; they’re always doing it. Sort of muddled mentality, I suppose. But you wouldn’t call Mr. Woodthorpe a comic person, would you?”

“No, I certainly shouldn’t. There’s only one other explanation that I can see—a super-quixotic sense of chivalry. The village gossip must have reached him, and he would naturally be acquainted with the other members of the Vane *ménage*.”

“You’ve hit the nail on the head again,” the inspector agreed. “That must be the explanation. No doubt the report in the village is that I’m going to make an arrest at any minute.”

“But super-quixotic, for all that,” Roger smiled. “Now if it had been Anthony who had made the confession I should have understood it much better.”

“What on earth are you talking about?” asked that gentleman in high bewilderment. “This is all Greek to me.”

“Then Greek let it remain, Anthony,” replied his cousin kindly. “Greek let it remain. That shows the advantage of a classical education.”

The low hum of a distant engine floated in through the open window, increasing rapidly to a loud roar.

“Powerful sort of car, that,” Roger commented.

“That isn’t a car engine,” remarked Anthony, with all the scorn of the mechanically-minded for those not similarly gifted. “That’s an aeroplane, you ass.”

The inspector jumped hastily to his feet. “An aeroplane, did you say?”

Anthony cocked an ear towards the now shattering din. “Yes,” he was forced almost to shout. “Nearly overhead, and flying low. Making for the sea apparently. Young Woodthorpe celebrating his escape from arrest, I expect. You can tell it’s a—”

“I must go and look into this,” observed the inspector shortly, and vanished with rapidity. A minute later the noise of a motor-cycle engine drowned that of the swiftly receding aeroplane.

“What on earth’s the trouble now?” wondered Anthony.

“Heaven knows,” replied Roger philosophically. “Probably friend Colin is still trying to make himself look guilty by pretending to do a bolt for the Continent. Dear me, what a handicap to a man a super-developed sense of chivalry must be! It’s as bad as a disease.”

The next hour passed pleasantly enough; there was plenty for the cousins to discuss, and Roger had not by any means yet got over his elation at triumphing over the inspector. He talked at considerable length. The second hour passed more slowly. By a quarter to twelve both were frankly yawning.

At ten minutes past twelve the buzz of a distant engine heralded Inspector Moresby’s return. They heard him pushing his bicycle round into the yard at the back, and then his heavy tread on the stairs outside.

“Thought you’d gone for the night,” Roger greeted him. “Well, was I right? Has Colin bolted for the Continent?”

“He has, sir,” replied the inspector, shutting the door and advancing into the room.

“Ah!” said Roger, not without satisfaction.

The inspector was looking decidedly grim. He did not return to his chair, but stood in the middle of the room, looking down on the other two. “I’m afraid I’ve got bad news for you, Mr. Walton,” he said slowly. “Mr. Woodthorpe hasn’t gone alone.”

Anthony stared at him. “What do you mean?” he asked, in a curiously high voice.

The inspector looked still more grim. “Miss Cross has gone with him,” he said shortly.

CHAPTER XXVI.
CAUSTIC SODA

"Miss Cross!" exclaimed Roger.

The inspector continued to address himself to Anthony. "You must be ready for a bit of a shock, I'm afraid. It's Miss Cross that Mr. Woodthorpe has been engaged to all the time. She's been just amusing herself with you. She's—"

"I think I shall go to bed," observed Anthony abruptly, and rose from his chair. "It's pretty late. Good-night, you two."

He went.

The inspector watched the door close, then dropped into his seat. "It's a nasty smack for him," he said sympathetically. "But he's young. He'll get over it."

Roger found his tongue. "But—but that is almost incredible, Inspector!"

The inspector looked at him quizzically. "Is it, sir?"

"I can't believe it of her. Are you sure you're not making a mistake?"

"Perfectly. I've known it for some time as a matter of fact, but I couldn't very well drop a hint to your cousin."

"Of course," Roger said slowly, readjusting his ideas in the light of this startling development, "of course this makes Woodthorpe's confession a good deal more understandable."

"Oh, yes, I knew what he was getting at."

"She must have shown him she was frightened," Roger pursued, thinking rapidly. "But the last time I saw her she seemed quite all right. Something must have happened since then. Inspector—you're looking guilty! Out with it!"

"I had a long interview with her this morning," the inspector admitted. "Perhaps I *did* press her pretty closely. I knew she was concealing her engagement from me, you see, so she might have been concealing other things as well. Yes, I certainly did press her pretty closely."

"What you really did, I suppose, was to convey to her quite obviously that you still suspected her after all and that if she couldn't produce a better explanation of certain matters, she'd be finding herself very shortly in distinctly hot water?"

"We have to do these things, you know, sir," confessed the inspector almost apologetically.

"Well, thank goodness I'm not a policeman," retorted Roger, making no effort to conceal his distaste. "No wonder you frightened the poor girl out of her wits. I suppose you practically told her you were going to apply for a warrant against her. The rest was inevitable, of course. So what do you suppose is going to happen now?"

"Perhaps when she finds there isn't a warrant out against her, Mr. Woodthorpe will bring her back the same way as he took her away."

"Oh, so you're not going to apply for a warrant after all?" said Roger sarcastically.

"No, sir, I'm not."

"Very nice for the girl's reputation, I must say, to be careering about the Continent with a young man for goodness knows how long."

"She's engaged to him," the inspector pointed out mildly. "It *is* possible for them to get married abroad, you know."

Roger snorted.

There was a little silence.

"You seem very put out on her behalf," the inspector ventured, curiosity overcoming discretion. "Considering how she's been treating your cousin, I mean."

"She was a minx, I admit," Roger said, with a little laugh. "I also admit that she took me in properly; I really thought she was quite fond of Anthony. But after all, I suppose she had some justification. If she was engaged to friend Colin all the time, the position must have been a very difficult one for her, both before Mrs. Vane's death and afterward, whether she knew anything about her fiancé's intrigue with that lady or not. She couldn't admit the engagement while she was under that cloud, you see, and all her energies must have been concentrated on clearing her name. I don't say she behaved very nicely, but that must be the explanation. Having had it forcibly impressed on her that not only public opinion but the official police as well were dead against her, she deliberately set out to attach Anthony to her in order to make sure of getting him and me on her side and enlisting our energies on her behalf. Don't you think that's the truth of the matter?"

"Not a doubt of it, sir," agreed the inspector heartily. "That's the truth of that all right."

"And very well she succeeded," added Roger modestly. "Well, now that the whole thing's at an end, so to speak, Inspector, what about a little bed?"

The inspector's answer was not a direct one. "So you think the whole thing's at an end, do you, Mr. Sheringham?" he said, with a return to his quizzical expression.

"I do, yes," said Roger, surprised. "Don't you?"

"I'm very much afraid it is," the inspector agreed.

Roger looked at him. "What are you driving at, Inspector? Have you still got a card or two up your sleeve? You surely don't mean to say you don't accept my solution of the mystery?"

The inspector puffed once or twice at his pipe. "If you'd asked me that question before, when Mr. Walton was still here," he said slowly, "I should have said that I did accept it. But as we're alone—well, no! I certainly don't accept it."

"But—but why ever not?" Roger asked in astonishment.

"Because I happen to know it isn't correct, sir," returned the inspector placidly.

Roger stared at him through the blue haze of tobacco-smoke. "Isn't correct? But—but—well, dash it, man, it must be correct!"

The inspector shook his head. "Oh, no, sir, if you'll pardon me. It isn't correct at all. You see, my trouble hasn't been to find out the truth; I've known that all along.

My trouble has been to prove it. To prove it, I mean, definitely enough to satisfy a court of law. And that I haven't been able to do, and I'm afraid, never shall. The truth's plain enough, but there's too many gaps in the chain of legal proof. It's a great pity." The inspector shook his head again, this time expressing gentle regret.

"What on earth are you talking about?" Roger cried. "Truth obvious all the time? What do you mean? I haven't found the truth obvious all the time!"

Once more the inspector shook his head, now conveying the disappointed reproof of the master at the too easy failure of a fairly gifted pupil. "And yet it was staring at you in the face all the time, sir," he said in tones of reproach. "The trouble was you wouldn't look at it." He drew again at his pipe for a moment or two, as if collecting in his mind what he wanted to say. Roger watched him in frank amazement.

"Yes, that was your trouble, sir," resumed the inspector, in a slightly didactic voice. "All the time you've been refusing to look the facts in the face. This was a simple case, so far as just finding out the truth went; as simple as ever I've come across. But that wouldn't do for you. Oh, dear, no! You must go and make a complicated business out of it. As simple a little murder as ever was, but you want to run about and raise all sorts of irrelevant issues that had nothing to do with the case at all."

"Who did murder Mrs. Vane, then?" demanded Rogers, disregarding these strictures. "If Meadows didn't, as you seem to be meaning, who the devil did?"

"That's the trouble with you people with too much imagination," pursued the inspector. "A simple murder's never enough for you. You can't believe a murder can be simple. You've got to waste your time ferreting out a lot of stuff to try to make it look less simple than it really is. No good detective ought to have too much imagination. He doesn't need it. When all—"

"Oh, cut the cackle for the time being!" interrupted Roger rudely. "Who *did* murder Mrs. Vane?"

"When all the evidence points to one person, and motive and opportunity and everything else as well, the real detective doesn't waste his time saying, 'Ah, yes! I know a thing or two worth that. When all the evidence and the rest of it points to one person, then the odds are that that person is innocent and someone else has made it look like that. That's how I should commit a murder, by Jove! I'd fake all the evidence to point to somebody else. That's what must have been done in this case. So whoever may be guilty, we know one person at any rate who isn't, and that's the one that the foolish inspector from Scotland Yard, who hasn't got a nice big imagination like me, is going to go and suspect. Haw, haw!'" The mincing accent with which the inspector strove to represent the speech of this superior person with imagination was offensive in the extreme.

"Who murdered Mrs. Vane, Inspector?" asked Roger coldly.

"Why ask me, Mr. Sheringham?" retorted the inspector, still more offensively. "I'm only the man from Scotland Yard, without any imagination. Don't ask yourself

either, though, because the answer's staring you in the face; so of course you'd never be able to see it. Go and ask any child of ten in the village. He'd know. He's known all the time, for the matter of that."

"Good God!" Roger exclaimed, genuinely shocked. "You don't seriously mean that—" He paused.

"Of course I do!" returned the inspector more genially. "Good gracious, sir, I can't think how you can have persuaded yourself she didn't. Everything was against her—every single thing! There wasn't a loophole, so far as commonsense went (I'm not talking about legal proof, mind you). Of course she did it!" He lay back in his chair and roared with callous laughter at Roger's unmistakable discomfiture. It was the inspector's hour, and he was evidently going to enjoy every minute of it.

"But—but I can't believe it!" Roger stammered. "Margaret Cross! Good Lord!"

"Well, perhaps I ought not to laugh at you, sir," the inspector went on, continuing nevertheless to do so with the utmost heartiness. "After all, you're not the first one to be taken in by a pretty face and a nice, innocent, appealing sort of manner, are you? Why, there's mugs in London being taken in by 'em every day!"

The country mug winced slightly, but no words came to him.

"Of course I wouldn't be saying any of this if Mr. Walton were here," said the inspector, ceasing to laugh. "It'd be a nasty shock for him, very nasty indeed; and the one he's got already is quite enough. You'll keep it all dark from him, of course."

Roger found his voice. "Who killed Meadows, then?" he asked abruptly.

"Why, the girl!" ejaculated the inspector. "She killed 'em both, I keep telling you. Meadows saw her with Mrs. Vane, lay low for a few days, then sprang it on her and started in to blackmail her, no doubt; probably wanted most of that ten thousand pounds she was to get under the will. So she finished him off, too."

"Oh, rot!" Roger cried incredulously.

"It's true enough, sir," said the inspector more seriously. "I saw it all the time; knew he must have been murdered when we found him there dead. It was a nasty blow for me too, I can tell you, because he was my only witness against her for the murder of Mrs. Vane. That's what I was going to arrest him for, as a matter of fact, to keep him safe in prison and make him talk—not because I thought he'd committed the murder himself, like you; I never did think so. In fact, I knew he hadn't. Yes, she spoilt my case against her there completely."

"But—but look here, can you prove these extraordinary assertions in any way, Inspector?"

"Well enough for commonsense, sir, though not beyond all reasonable doubt, which is what the law wants. Let's take the two cases in turn. What were the clues in the first one? The coat-button and the footprints. Well, the footprints had been made by a number six shoe, fairly new, the heels not worn at the side; Miss Cross I found out, had been wearing shoes that afternoon which answered to that description. That wasn't conclusive, of course; half-a-dozen people might have been wearing shoes like

that. But the coat-button was. There was no getting round that. The maid was dead certain that button had been on Miss Cross's coat when she went out, and there it was in the dead woman's hand. That would want a lot of explaining away."

"But it *could* be explained away."

"Oh, yes, sir; it could," agreed the inspector cheerfully. "I showed you how myself."

"But what about those shoes I found in the sea? You said they were Mrs. Russell's."

"So they were, sir. But what about them? You never seriously thought those were really the shoes the murderer had worn, did you?"

Roger choked slightly, but made no reply.

"Oh, I can't believe you thought that," continued the inspector with relish. "Why, that was an old pair, not new like the pair that had made those footprints. A child could have seen that. Besides, they'd only been in the water an hour or two."

"What?" Roger cried.

"Oh, didn't you know that, sir?" asked the inspector innocently. "Oh, yes; they weren't much more than wet through. And you don't mean to say you never recognised them, sir? Well, dear me!"

"Rub it in, rub it in," Roger groaned. "Dance on my body if you like. I've no doubt I deserve it. No, I didn't recognise them. Would you mind explaining to my futile intelligence what exactly you mean by that?"

"Well, seeing that you'd had them in your hands not twenty-four hours before, I thought you might have recognised them. Didn't you get hold of a pair of Mrs. Russell's shoes, and give them to Miss Cross to give back for you?"

"Great Scott, you don't mean to say *those* were the ones?"

"Indeed they were, sir, as it wouldn't have taken you five minutes to find out, if you'd ever thought of it. The girl lost her head a bit over that. It's easy enough to see what happened. You'd been putting forward the idea that the murderer was a man, who'd made those marks with a pair of woman's shoes to throw us off the track. She's getting pretty desperate by then, seeing how strongly I suspected her (I never troubled to hide that), so she makes some excuse to get away, nips back to the house, slashes the shoes up the sides to give the impression they'd been prepared for big feet, and throws them over the top of the cliff. Then she makes another excuse to get you down on to the ledge, where they can be found. Why, bless you, sir, *you* never found those shoes! She did!"

"It's perfectly true," Roger muttered. "She did. I remember."

"Yes, it's all plain enough as far as commonsense goes, but no good for a court of law, I'm afraid. A smart counsel could tear all that to shreds with his eyes shut. The same with the second case too."

"Yes, go on to that."

"Well, there, sir, I really did my best to put you on the right track. I *told* you that Meadows was murdered by the same person who killed Mrs. Vane, and because he'd seen the first murder done, I told you that, and I told you that it must have been someone who had access to aconitine. You said just now you thought I meant Dr. Vane, but I didn't of course; I meant the girl. And then the funny thing is you thought I was trying to pull your leg. Why, it's all been staring you in the face. I've heard you with my own ears talking with Mr. Walton about how funnily Miss Cross was behaving, wanting to go over to France one minute and stay here the next and all the rest of it; and all you thought was that it was nerves. So it was, but not the kind you meant!

"And I'd given you another hint long before that, when I told you there was real bad blood in that family. I told you straight out they were practically all of them criminals; and still you thought she couldn't be, just because she had an innocent face. Of course the first thing I'd done was to have the records searched for her at the Yard, *and* found her in them too. Never actually been in prison, you understand, but mixed up before she came here with a very shady crew indeed; a house she got a job in as a parlourmaid was burgled for instance, and another where she was supposed to be the governess; we never laid our hands on the lot that did it but there's no doubt that she was in with them, though nothing could be proved against her. Oh, and several other things too. She was a bad lot all right before she ever came here, but clever—oh, yes, clever enough."

"Go on to the second case," said Roger feebly.

The inspector paused and marshalled his ideas. "Well, now, there, sir, you made a very bad mistake indeed," he said with some severity. "You jumped to the conclusion that Meadows was killed by aconitine in his tobacco. If you'd troubled to read up aconitine as you ought to have done, you'd have found out that it's a vegetable alkaloid, and vegetable alkaloids lose all their power if they're burnt. You can smoke as much aconitine in your tobacco as you like, and it isn't going to do you any harm."

"But that's what killed him," Roger protested.

"Oh, no, it isn't, sir, if you'll pardon me. He was killed by aconitine placed in his *pipe*, not his tobacco. Aconitine was put in the bowl or the stem of his *pipe*, sir, where his saliva melted it, and he swallowed it before he knew what he'd done. And that not only proves that it couldn't have been put there three weeks before, as you thought, but must have been during the previous night, but also that it was put there by someone who knew a little about poisons but not very much, for otherwise there'd have been none wasted in the tobacco. She meant to make sure of the job all right, by the way; there was enough of the stuff there to kill a hundred people."

"But wait a minute!" Roger interrupted. "You're wrong there, Inspector. It *could* have been put there by Mrs. Vane. I found out that Meadows only smoked his pipes a week at a time, remember!"

The inspector's expression was more pitying than chagrined. "Yes, but did you find out when he changed them, Mr. Sheringham, sir? I did, you see. On Sunday mornings. So it couldn't have been Mrs. Vane after all. It was somebody who came during that previous night, while he was asleep. It wasn't the doctor, because he'd never have put the stuff in the tobacco; there's no conceivable reason why it should have been Miss Williamson; it *must* have been Miss Cross. But there again there's no absolute proof."

"Well," said Roger, "I'll be damned!"

The inspector helped himself with an absent air from the bottle of whisky which stood, flanked by a couple of syphons, on a small table at his elbows. He sipped his drink thoughtfully.

"And you're not going to apply for a warrant?" Roger asked, when all this had sunk into him. "You're going to let her get away with it?"

The inspector allowed a little whisky to sink into him. "No help for it, I'm sorry to say. We could never get a conviction. As I said, I think you'll find that the verdict next Thursday will be suicide, and we shall let it rest at that; the verdict of accidental death on Mrs. Vane as well. It isn't the first time this has happened, you know. There's any number of people walking about to-day, free men and women, that we *know* to be murderers, but we can't prove it to the satisfaction of a court."

"Yes, I know that, of course," Roger nodded. "Legal proof is a very different thing from moral conviction. Well, I must say I'm not sorry. They were two distinctly unpleasant specimens of humanity of which she ridded the world, and I should be sorry to hear of her hanging for them. But—poor Colin!"

"Be thankful she hasn't got into your own family, Mr. Sheringham, sir," replied the inspector philosophically. "And I daresay she won't make him a bad wife when all's said and done. It was his money she was after, of course; now she's got that, and an established position, she may settle down all right."

"Not the sort of wife I'd choose myself for all that," Roger said with a little shiver. "Yes, she must have been after his money, I suppose. As no doubt Mrs. Vane was before her."

"No, sir," said the inspector meditatively. "I'm inclined to think Mrs. Vane wasn't; I think she was genuinely fond of the boy. Margaret knew about her affair with him, of course, and that was another reason for wanting her out of the way. That's why the engagement was kept so secret too. She knew her cousin would never give him up to her, and would certainly cut her out of her will as well. By the way, it may interest you to know that the doctor's marriage settlement is invalidated, as Mrs. Vane was never his legal wife; I had the wording looked into and a legal opinion taken. So the girl doesn't get that ten thousand after all."

"'Much Ado About Nothing,'" Roger commented ironically.

“Or ‘The Dead Hand,’” smiled the inspector. “That was a good title of yours after all, sir, because it was the button in Mrs. Vane’s dead hand that makes the whole thing so certain.”

Roger stifled a yawn and looked at his watch. “Good Heavens, do you know it’s past two, Inspector? We’d better get to bed. Though whether I shall sleep very much is another question. All this is a little upsetting, you must understand.—By Jove,” he added as he rose to his feet, “do you know, even now I can hardly believe that she did it!”

The inspector smiled at him tolerantly as he also rose. “Because she looked pretty and innocent, and you thought at one time she might be going to make a match of it with your cousin, sir? Because you saw her, in fact, as the pretty little heroine of one of your own books?”

“I suppose so,” Roger admitted.

The inspector patted him on the shoulder with a large and consoling hand. “Do you know what’s the matter with you, sir?” he said kindly. “You’ve been reading too many of those detective stories.”