

NO OTHER WAY

BY GORDON HOLMES

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

CLAUDE G. WAVERTON, a rich young New Yorker, became so dissolute that his wife Doris was forced to get a divorce, which was just at the time he was seriously injured in an automobile accident at Palm Beach, Florida. He recovered at the Asphodel House, where he was attended by a woman of unsavory reputation, known as Mrs. Josephine Delamar. On his return to the North, Waverton's friends were astounded at the change in him: for he had dropped all his riotous habits and become a sober, respectable man. He saved his own child from drowning at Narragansett Pier; then spurned his wife's efforts to bring about a reconciliation and departed.

Herbert W. Kyrle of Absecon, New Jersey, Mrs. Delamar's husband, was found dead (supposedly from heart failure) in a cutter off Cape May. James Leander Steingall, inspector in charge of the New York Detective Bureau and C. F. Clancy, his chief assistant, instantly took up the case. It was found that Kyrle had been poisoned, and Clancy busied himself in running down clues at Absecon, which seemed to implicate Mrs. Delamar.

CHAPTER VIII. Close Quarters

AFTER that slamming and bolting of the door of reconciliation, the talk in the train died away. Steingall began to chat about other matters, hoping to draw out his strange companion, and take his measure more completely by interchange of ideas and reminiscences; but Waverton, pleading fatigue, dozed for an hour or longer.

He was not feigning sleep. Obviously, he was still enfeebled by the injuries he had received in the accident, and the activities of the day had exhausted him. So Steingall could only seize the opportunity to study an interesting face; and this, to be sure, he did thoroughly. The strange outcome was that the closer he analyzed Waverton's characteristics as portrayed in his worn features, the less he understood how Mrs. Delamar had contrived to ruin such a life. He failed completely to read into the strong, stern, self-reliant lineaments the indelible records of a roué, a drunkard, a jaded patron of the prize ring and haunter of the degraded circles that pander to the idle and dissolute in New York and the rest of the world's capitals. Illness has a pathos and a dignity of its own; but it cannot efface the traces of vicious years. Yet Claude Waverton bore closer resemblance to one who had fought through a long and arduous campaign than to the dissolute ne'er-do-well whose evil repute was almost worldwide.

In fact, Steingall summed him up exactly as Clancy had done, and the extraordinary thought intruded itself, "Is he the same man?"

There could be no doubt of it, and the detective frowned at the nonsense he was indulging in. Mrs. Waverton, the French nurse, the servants at 64th-st., Rice (who had been Waverton's valet for seven years), the family lawyer (with whom Waverton must have been in constant communication of late),—none of these people had questioned his identity. Then, there remained Mrs. Delamar and Tearle, intimate acquaintances of the last twelve months, whose fortunes were bound up so curiously with Waverton's,—the notion had never entered their minds that the hero of so many wild escapades and the worn, tired man now nestling in a corner of the car were not one and the same person.

Steingall laughed softly to himself. "Guess it's a clear case of metamorphosis," he said. Then his brows wrinkled again; though he chuckled at some conceit that had occurred to him.

At New York it was Waverton who showed the greater self-possession. Steingall was about to bid him goodnight, when the other caught his arm.

"By the way," he said, "are you taking a taxi?"

"Yes."

"Good! You shall drop me at my hotel. Thus do I revenge myself for being regarded as a suspicious person. I waste your day, smoke your cigars,—by the way, let me have another,—and use your cab. Do you always treat criminals in this lordly way, Inspector?"

"If they conduct themselves well, Mr. Waverton," and Steingall grinned at the humor of the situation.

TALKING matters over with Clancy, he reverted to the singular contrariety of Claude Waverton's present manners and past history.

"Summing him up while he slept in the train," he said, "I called it a case of metamorphosis. One uses such terms loosely. Can you tell me just what metamorphosis means?"

"Yes," cackled Clancy. "It means exactly the opposite to that which you think it means. The word you wanted was metempsychosis."

"Oh, was it? Then perhaps you will be good enough to carry the correction a stage further."

"Metempsychosis implies the passing of a man's soul after death into some other body."

"Excellent! Let's put that in our diary. The joke will explain itself when we watch the Commissioner's face while he reads it."

"Commissioners are unimaginative mortals, or they would not be chosen for the job," snapped Clancy. "It is my firm belief that when Waverton was hammered into insensibility against the rocks at Palm Beach—

probably they were metamorphic rocks so you were 'warm,' as children say—his soul quitted his body for a time, and some prowling spook jumped the claim. How else can you account for the change in the creature? A Frenchman named Duchesne has a theory—"

"Look here!" said Steingall, waving a fat hand impatiently. "This thing is getting on my nerves. We are being surfeited with wonders, but facts are uncommonly scarce. The Waverton divorce has no concern for us except in its bearings on the death of Kyrle, and there we have to depend on the diary, the doctor's analysis, and some cigarettes, either whole or in part. The clues are substantial enough in their way, and they are backed by a strong motive; but, somehow, I seem to feel a clot of blood pressing on my brain when I begin to construct theories from the material at command. Mrs. Delamar is a clever woman, and I cannot bring myself to believe that she would deliberately build up evidence against herself. Then, she must still be pretty sure of marrying Waverton, notwithstanding the interview in the Waldorf-Astoria, or she would not have written Tearle in such determined strain. Yet we have Waverton himself vowing by all the gods that he will have none of Mrs. Delamar, and fiercely intent on spoiling Tearle's little game with his wife, whom he seems to venerate and detest in the same breath. What do you make of it?"

"Detest?" Clancy's eyebrows curved.

"I am choosing my words badly: I am tired, I suppose."

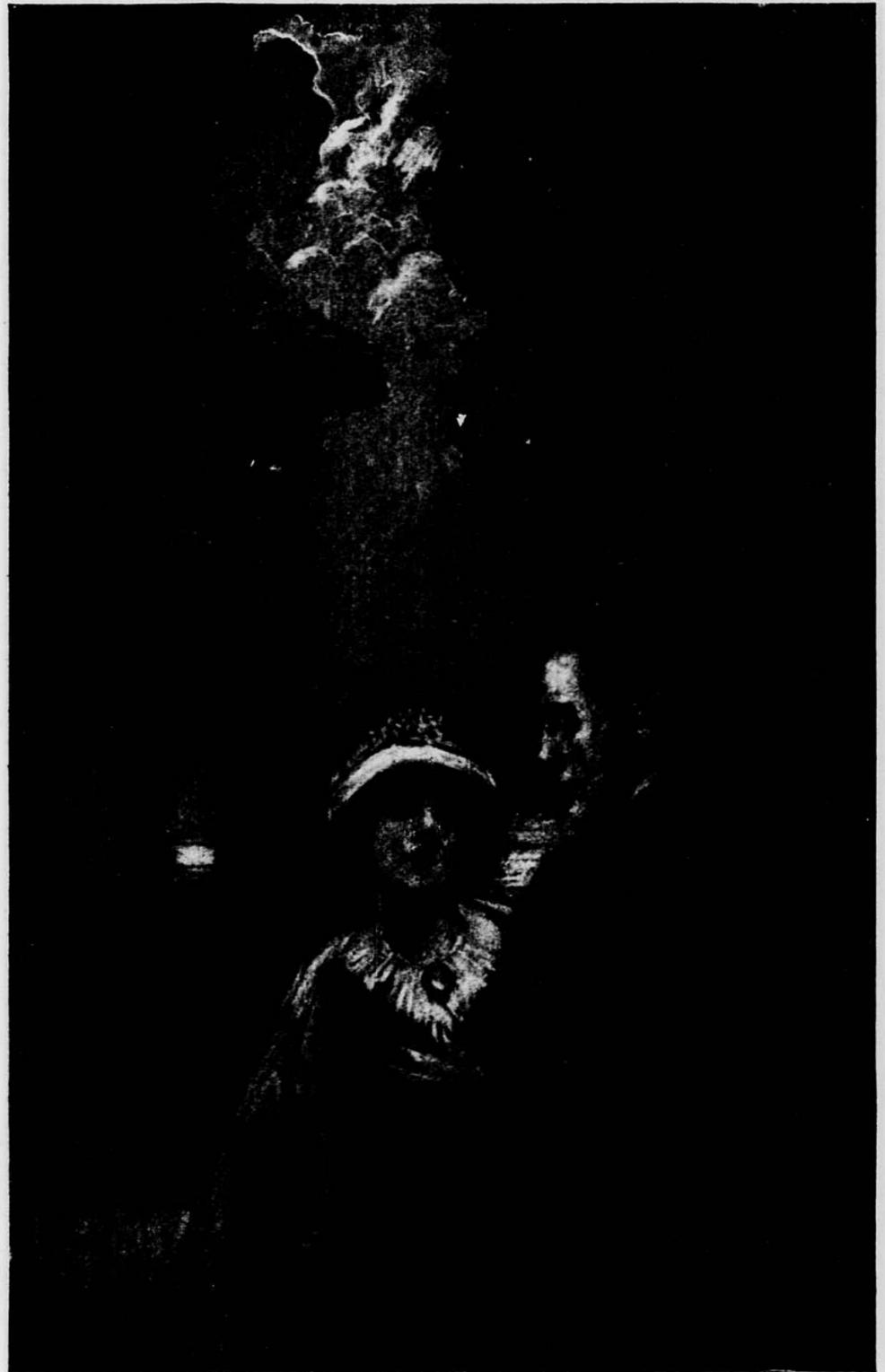
"Doctors call it logomania, one of the early symptoms of general paralysis of the insane."

"I wish you wouldn't try to be funny at this hour. If Waverton doesn't detest his wife, he avoids her, shuns her, will listen to no suggestion of burying the hatchet."

Then Clancy leaned forward over the table at which they were sitting, and propped his sharp chin on his clenched fists. "Now listen to me, Inspector Steingall!" he said. "You are top dog in our crowd, because you own everyday, Uncle Sam, commonsense ideas, and they carry you in a straight line so long as you don't enter my domain, which is that of the dreamer. While you followed your own methods you were keen on the Waverton suit as holding the key of the whole situation. You were right. Then you endeavor to clothe your robust form in my mantle of fantasy, and forthwith you abandon the true and direct trail you have nosed since the inquiry opened. That is where you are going wrong. Of course, a night's sleep will cure you; but why waste a night? Can I have a week's vacation?"

"What are you driving at?" demanded Steingall, almost morosely; for none knew better than himself how unerringly Clancy had found the weak spot in his armor.

"I really meant what I said. I want a couple of weeks off. Five days may suffice; but I had better stipulate



What a Different Man from the One from Whom She Had Fled!

for a longer time. You see, I can hardly ask the department to sanction a trip to Palm Beach, and I am going there. I shall return in time for the adjourned inquest."

"And what in the world do you expect to find at Palm Beach?"

"Of course, the name covers an area as well as a multitude of sins. For present purposes it stretches from the Asphodel House at Palm Beach to Schwartz's private casino at Boynton,—about nine miles as the crow flies; but nearer fourteen by automobile."

"Oh, I see. Well, have it your own way. When do you start?"

"By the two-twenty P. M. tomorrow."

"Meet me here at ten, and we'll go into matters fully. I shall not intrust this affair to other hands than my own while you are absent."

Clancy laughed, and took a crushed cigar from his waistcoat pocket. "That's the most sensible thing you've said during the last hour," he cried. "Now walk with me over to Broadway and I'll buy you a drink."

OFFICIALLY there was no excuse for sending Clancy to Palm Beach. The leave of absence gave Clancy liberty; for a detective on vacation is free to do as he likes with his time. As to the expense, that was provided for by what Steingall mentally called the Delamar Fund, of which there was no record whatever. Still, it was in the mind of each man that a costly journey to and from Florida was hardly warranted by existing conditions, so far as the inquest of Kyrle went.

Steingall's mental attitude was that of a man shut up in a room of utter darkness, and groping blindly for some mysterious presence that might or might not be there. He expected to find something; but his hands touched only empty air. If Clancy, if anything, was not keener than himself in this strange quest, he would