

self on him, had cajoled him, and had finally fled, leaving him to bear the brunt of her crime—hers or her accomplices. He had done all she asked, had aided her meekly, and at the end had placed himself in shame-faced jeopardy without even being asked. Harshly he laughed as he thought of it.

Then he threw out his hands. "There's no use in thinking," he muttered. "I'm a fool—but its stronger than I am. I must go on to the end—and lie and lie and lie."

CHAPTER V

AFTER all, matters went off very quietly. The murder of James Wilkins—until he was dead, Caruth had not known that his name was James—caused a surprisingly small sensation. Circumstances were against it. A prominent statesman had just denounced another prominent statesman for having accepted the tainted money of a wicked trust, and the accused statesman was calling heaven and earth as witness to his innocence; the champion heavyweight pugilist of the country had just given way to a new champion; and the Black Hand had blown up a restaurant whose proprietor had defied it. The papers had little space left for a plain case of robbery and murder such as that of Wilkins seemed to be. It had none of the elements of the sensational.

Caruth had told a straight story, which had been accepted at its face value. According to him, he had come home late and had sat down to smoke before going to bed. He had laid some money—about eighteen hundred dollars in bills—on the table beside him. Wilkins had been moving about and had seen the money and after a moment had left the room. When Caruth looked for the money an instant later it had disappeared. He had hurried down stairs in hopes of catching the man, and with the aid of the night watchman had found his body. On looking up the references Wilkins had brought him, he had found that they were forged. He suspected, therefore, that the man had entered his service with sinister intent, and had been murdered by a confederate who had come to join him in the robbery.

He felt no compunctions as far as Wilkins was concerned; the man's references really were forged, and he had really stolen the money, by whatever particular name the law branded his act.

To Caruth, this tale seemed very lame, but to his astonishment no one questioned it. So utterly was this the case that it irritated him; it seemed to him extraordinary that the actual sequence of events could have happened without in some way impressing itself on the intelligence of everyone who came within reach of it. He did not want to be suspected, yet the lack of detective ability on the part of the police angered him. Why this should be so, let psychologists explain.

The money borrowed from him by the so-called Miss Fitzhugh had been returned the afternoon after the crime in the form of a money order sent by mail, about as clever a way of combining safety in transmission with concealment of the sender as could well be contrived. Clearly she did not desire to continue the acquaintance.

Caruth did! For several days he carefully abstained from any search, fearing that to do so might excite suspicion, but after a week had passed and Wilkins seemed forgotten, he began to think it safe to start inquiries.

His search began at the steamship offices. He first examined the passenger list of the *Latourette*, the vessel on which Miss Fitzhugh had claimed to have arrived, and sought for her name, only to find that it was not there. Less hopefully, he examined the lists of the vessels sailing from New York during the week that had elapsed since the murder, only to find no trace of her. Finally something happened that determined him to enlist the aid of Joe Bristow, a newspaper man of his acquaintance.

Bristow was ship-news reporter of the Consolidated Press. His duties required him to remain at quarantine as long as any steamship was likely to arrive there. Ordinarily he left for the city at five or six o'clock in the afternoon, but if one of the great liners reported itself by wireless as intending to make port that night, he had to remain to see what news and passengers she had brought. Few steamships reached New York without being boarded by him, and few important visitors entered port without being interviewed by him. He, if anyone, would be likely to know if anybody answering Miss Fitzhugh's description had arrived recently.

Caruth, who knew him slightly as the occupant of a small apartment high up in the Chimneystack building took the first opportunity that afforded to

accost him and to invite him into his apartment.

Bristow accepted readily, though a faint smile curved his lips, as if some secret idea was stirring in his mind. He did not know Caruth very well, though he had frequently passed the time of day with him, and he had never before been asked to join the young fellow. Newspaper men are apt to grow cynical, and Bristow had learned to suspect the motives of those who sought him out.

Caruth led his guest to his den, and placed the decanters before him. Then, through the wreaths of tobacco smoke, he put his question, leading up to it with what he believed to be commendable astuteness.

Bristow listened quietly; then he answered one question with another. "The *Latourette*?" he repeated. "Yes! She arrived at eight o'clock on the night of March 5th. Her mails and two of her passengers were brought up to the city on the mail tug. Let's see! That was the night your valet was murdered, wasn't it?"



The electric lights threw a white glare upon the grating and upon a human form

Caruth blanched slightly. The reporter's inquiry was probably only casual, but it might easily be otherwise; perhaps he had erred in consulting this keen-faced newspaper man. However, there was nothing to do but to go on.

"Yes!" he answered, steadily. "It was the same night."

Bristow nodded. "I saw the lady," he stated, reflectively. "She was a looker all right. She had deep violet eyes and dark hair with a glint in it. She spoke English perfectly but there was something foreign about her." He paused and knocked the ash from his cigar. "I come up on the tug with her," he added, casually.

"Yes! And her name? I—I—have reasons for wanting to know."

Bristow smiled inscrutably. "I don't doubt you have," he answered, drily, "and, as it happens, I can probably give you some information. The question is whether I shall do it."

CARUTH colored. "I don't understand you, Mr. Bristow," he syllabled, anxiously.

"Probably not. I will try to explain." The reporter tossed his cigar into the fire, and leaned back in his chair. "Isn't it curious how things fit in together?" he began, reflectively. "Life is a mosaic made up of hundreds of separate facts. Each belongs in one place and only in one. Until rightly fitted, the whole is an unintelligible jumble. But when fitted, we see that they are all parts of one design. I am interested in Russia and Russians. My work has compelled me to be; some of the best 'stories' I have gotten for the Consolidated Press

have had to do with Russia. I am well acquainted in the Russian colony here; Professor Shishkin, the distinguished Russian scientist, is a great friend of mine. I'm telling you this so that you may understand why I was interested in this woman about whom you are inquiring. My interest did not decrease when she took a cab at the Battery and told the cabman to drive her to this building."

Caruth gasped, but said nothing.

"When I returned home after midnight," went on the reporter, "the elevator had stopped running and I had to walk up the stairs. Your door was ajar as I passed it and I distinctly heard a woman's voice—and yours. It was none of my business and I went on upstairs and to bed. The next morning I heard about your valet's murder and noticed that you said nothing about a visitor in your flat, yet a woman must have been there when your man fled; in fact I suspect that he had left your door open in his flight only a moment before I passed up the stairs. Your inquiry seems to bring all these facts into a somewhat curious consonance."

Caruth was breathing hard. "Well!" he asked. "What are you going to do about it?"

The reporter hesitated. "I don't know," he answered at last, frankly. "It all depends! But I want you to understand one thing, Mr. Caruth. I am not a police reporter nor a yellow sensation reporter. My duty to the Consolidated Press does not call on me to solve murder mysteries nor to pry into scandals. I don't know you very well, nor what you are capable of doing at a pinch. For the matter of that, nobody does know what a man is capable of—not even himself. I've seen too many unexpected manifestations of virtue and of crime to judge lightly. That is why I have kept silent, though I knew you were holding back something about this murder. I don't think tonight's developments will lead me to change my course, though I cannot be certain. If you have any explanation to make, I shall be glad to hear it. I shall not make a newspaper story out of it and I shall not repeat it without grave cause. More than this I cannot promise."

Caruth did not answer for a moment. His thoughts whirled, unsettled as dry leaves in an October blast. His secret, it seemed, was not his secret at all—had never been his secret. From the first this newspaper man had been able to shatter his glib story by a word, and had refrained from doing so. How many others possessed the same potentiality for mischief. He realized, as never before, that, whether or no the eye of God were always on him, the eye of man, in New York, certainly was. Abruptly he threw away his cigar and leaned toward his visitor.

"I'll tell you the whole story," he declared. "I don't know whether you'll believe it or not. Probably I shouldn't believe it myself if anyone else told it to me. It seems too preposterous to talk about plots and terrorists and all that here in New York."

"Not at all!" Bristow smiled. "New York is a hotbed of plots. Probably nine-tenths of all the political plots in the world are hatched here and here-

abouts. Just consider a moment! Anybody can plot in this country in perfect safety; and there are plenty of plotters handy. Is it a Russian plot? New York is the second largest Russian city in the world. It has thousands upon thousands of dwellers who have been driven out of Russia at the blow of the knout. Is it a German one? Berlin is the only city in the world holding more Germans than New York. Is it an Italian one? There are more Italians in and around New York than there are in Rome. Plots! Why! New York reeks with plots and plotters. Men lay their schemes, raise their funds, choose their emissaries, and a month or so later something happens in Europe—it may be the murder of a king. But it started here, beneath our noses."

"But—if there are so many plots—why are there so few results. We seldom hear—"

"Because if plotters are safe here, so are spies. Every European government maintains an army of spies in this country. Every assemblage of plotters has one or more traitors in the pay of those who are menaced. It's as broad as it's long. But go on with your story. I only wanted to assure you that it will have to be very remarkable to surprise me."

Caruth plunged in. "When I came home that night," he began, "she was waiting for me. I had never seen her before. She said she was a Russian—the daughter of a Russian man and an American woman. She gave me a name, but it was probably assumed. She wanted a letter that had been mailed to me in Stockholm ten days before—by mistake, she said. It enclosed another letter that had been picked up in a bottle floating in the Baltic. The address of

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