

**Murder!**

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by Arnold Bennett

# 1927

## I

MANY great ones of the earth have justified murder as a social act, defensible, and even laudable in certain instances. There is something to be said for murder, though perhaps not much. All of us, or nearly all of us, have at one time or another had the desire and the impulse to commit murder. At any rate, murder is not an uncommon affair. On an average, two people are murdered every week in England, and probably about two hundred every week in the United States. And forty per cent of the murderers are not brought to justice. These figures take no account of the undoubtedly numerous cases where murder has been done but never suspected. Murders and murderesses walk safely abroad among us, and it may happen to us to shake hands with them. A disturbing thought! But such is life, and such is homicide.

## II

Two men, named respectively Lomax Harder and John Franting, were walking side by side one autumn afternoon, on the Marine Parade of the seaside resort and port of Quangate (English Channel). Both were well-dressed and had the air of moderate wealth, and both were about thirty-five years of age. At this point the resemblances between them ceased. Lomax Harder had refined features, an enormous forehead, fair hair, and a delicate, almost apologetic manner. John Franting was low-browed, heavy chinned, scowling, defiant, indeed what is called a tough customer. Lomax Harder corresponded in appearance with the popular notion of a poet — save that he was carefully barbered. He was in fact a poet, and not unknown in the tiny, trifling, mad world where poetry is a matter of first-rate interest. John Franting corresponded in appearance with the popular notion of a gambler, an amateur boxer, and, in spare time, a deluder of women. Popular notions sometimes fit the truth.

Lomax Harder, somewhat nervously buttoning his overcoat, said in a quiet but firm and insistent tone:

“Haven’t you got anything to say?”

John Franting stopped suddenly in front of a shop whose façade bore the sign:

“Gontle. Gunsmith.”

“Not in words,” answered Franting. “I’m going in here.”

And he brusquely entered the small, shabby shop.

Lomax Harder hesitated half a second, and then followed his companion.

The shopman was a middle-aged gentleman wearing a black velvet coat.

“Good afternoon,” he greeted Franting, with an expression and in a tone of urbane condescension which seemed to indicate that Franting was a wise as well as fortunate man in that he knew of the excellence of Gontle’s and had the wit to come into Gontle’s.

For the name of Gontle was favourably and respectfully known wherever triggers are pressed. Not only along the whole length of the Channel coast, but throughout England, was Gontle’s renowned. Sportsmen would travel to Quangate from the far north and even from London, to buy guns. To say: “I bought it at Gontle’s,” or “Old Gontle recommended it,” was sufficient to silence any dispute concerning the merits of a fire-arm. Experts bowed the head before the unique reputation of Gontle. As for old Gontle, he was extremely and pardonably conceited. His conviction that no other gunsmith in the wide world could compare with him was absolute. He sold guns and rifles with the gesture of a monarch conferring an honour. He never argued; he stated; and the customer who contradicted him was as likely as not to be courteously and icily informed by Gontle of the geographical situation of the shop-door. Such shops exist in English provinces, and nobody knows how they have achieved their renown. They could exist nowhere else.

“d afternoon,” said Franting gruffly, and paused.

“What can I do for you?” asked Mr. Gontle, as if saying: “Now don’t be afraid. This shop is tremendous, and I am tremendous; but I shall not eat you.”

“I want a revolver,” Franting snapped.

“Ah! A revolver!” commented Mr. Gontle, as if saying: “A gun or a rifle, yes! But a revolver — an arm without individuality, manufactured wholesale! ... However, I suppose I must deign to accommodate you.”

“I presume you know something about revolvers?” asked Mr. Gontle, as he began to produce the weapons.

“A little.”

“Do you know the Webley Mark III?”

“Can’t say that I do.”

“Ah! It is the best for all common purposes.” And Mr. Gontle’s glance said: “Have the goodness not to tell me it isn’t.”

Franting examined the Webley Mark III.

“You see,” said Mr. Gontle. “The point about it is that until the breach is properly closed it cannot be fired. So that it can’t blow open and maim or kill the would-be murderer.” Mr. Gontle smiled archly at one of his oldest jokes.

“What about suicides?” Franting grimly demanded.

“Ah!”

“You might show me just how to load it,” said Franting.

Mr. Gontle, having found ammunition, complied with this reasonable request.

“The barrel’s a bit scratched,” said Franting.

Mr. Gontle inspected the barrel with pain. He would have denied the scratch, but could not.

“Here’s another one,” said he, “since you are so particular.” He had to put customers in their place.

“You might load it,” said Franting.

Mr. Gontle loaded the second revolver.

“I’d like to try it,” said Franting.

“Certainly,” said Mr. Gontle, and led Franting out of the shop by the back, and

down to a cellar where revolvers could be experimented with.

Lomax Harder was now alone in the shop. He hesitated a long time and then picked up the revolver rejected by Franting, fingered it, put it down, and picked it up again. The back-door of the shop opened suddenly, and, startled, Harder dropped the revolver into his overcoat pocket: a thoughtless, quite unpremeditated act. He dared not remove the revolver. The revolver was as fast in his pocket as though the pocket had been sewn up.

“And cartridges?” asked Mr. Gontle of Franting.

“Oh,” said Franting, “I’ve only had one shot. Five’ll be more than enough for the present. What does it weigh?”

“Let me see. Four inch barrel? Yes. One pound four ounces.”

Franting paid for the revolver, receiving thirteen shillings in change from a five-pound note, and strode out of the shop, weapon in hand. He was gone before Lomax Harder decided upon a course of action.

“And for you, sir?” said Mr. Gontle, addressing the poet.

Harder suddenly comprehended that Mr. Gontle had mistaken him for a separate customer, who had happened to enter the shop a moment after the first one. Harder and Franting had said not a word to one another during the purchase, and Harder well knew that in the most exclusive shops it is the custom utterly to ignore a second customer until the first one has been dealt with.

“I want to see some foils.” Harder spoke stammeringly the only words that came into his head.

“Foils!” exclaimed Mr. Gontle, shocked, as if to say: “Is it conceivable that you should imagine that I, Gontle, gunsmith, sell such things as foils?”

After a little talk Harder apologized and departed — a thief.

“I’ll call later and pay the fellow,” said Harder to his restive conscience. “No. I can’t do that. I’ll send him some anonymous postal orders.”

He crossed the Parade and saw Franting, a small left-handed figure all alone far

below on the deserted sands, pointing the revolver. He thought that his ear caught the sound of a discharge, but the distance was too great for him to be sure. He continued to watch, and at length Franting walked westward diagonally across the beach.

“He’s going back to the Bellevue,” thought Harder, the Bellevue being the hotel from which he had met Franting coming out half an hour earlier. He strolled slowly towards the white hotel. But Franting, who had evidently come up the face of the cliff in the penny lift, was before him. Harder, standing outside, saw Franting seated in the lounge. Then Franting rose and vanished down a long passage at the rear of the lounge. Harder entered the hotel rather guiltily. There was no hall-porter at the door, and not a soul in the lounge or in sight of the lounge. Harder went down the long passage.

### III

At the end of the passage Lomax Harder found himself in a billiard-room — an apartment built partly of brick and partly of wood on a sort of courtyard behind the main structure of the hotel. The roof, of iron and grimy glass, rose to a point in the middle. On two sides the high walls of the hotel obscured the light. Dusk was already closing in. A small fire burned feebly in the grate. A large radiator under the window was steel-cold, for though summer was finished, winter had not officially begun in the small economically-run hotel: so that the room was chilly; nevertheless, in deference to the English passion for fresh air and discomfort, the window was wide open.

Franting, in his overcoat, and an unlit cigarette between his lips, stood lowering with his back to the bit of fire. At sight of Harder he lifted his chin in a dangerous challenge.

“So you’re still following me about,” he said resentfully to Harder.

“Yes,” said the latter, with his curious gentle primness of manner. “I came down here specially to talk to you. I should have said all I had to say earlier, only you happened to be going out of the hotel just as I was coming in. You didn’t seem to want to talk in the street; but there’s some talking has to be done. I’ve a few things I must tell you.” Harder appeared to be perfectly calm, and he felt perfectly calm. He advanced from the door towards the billiard-table.

Franting raised his hand, displaying his square-ended, brutal fingers in the

twilight.

“Now listen to me,” he said with cold, measured ferocity. “You can’t tell me anything I don’t know. If there’s some talking to be done I’ll do it myself, and when I’ve finished you can get out. I know that my wife has taken a ticket for Copenhagen by the steamer from Harwich, and that she’s been seeing to her passport, and packing. And of course I know that you have interests in Copenhagen and spend about half your precious time there. I’m not worrying to connect the two things. All that’s got nothing to do with me. Emily has always seen a great deal of you, and I know that the last week or two she’s been seeing you more than ever. Not that I mind that. I know that she objects to my treatment of her and my conduct generally. That’s all right, but it’s a matter that only concerns her and me. I mean that it’s no concern of yours, for instance, or anybody else’s. If she objects enough she can try and divorce me. I doubt if she’d succeed, but you can never be sure — with these new laws. Anyhow she’s my wife till she does divorce me, and so she has the usual duties and responsibilities towards me — even though I was the worst husband in the world. That’s how I look at it, in my old-fashioned way. I’ve just had a letter from her — she knew I was here, and I expect that explains how you knew I was here.”

“It does,” said Lomax Harder quietly.

Franting pulled a letter out of his inner pocket and unfolded it.

“Yes,” he said, glancing at it, and read some sentences aloud: “‘I have absolutely decided to leave you, and I won’t hide from you that I know you know who is doing what he can to help me. I can’t live with you any longer. You may be very fond of me, as you say, but I find your way of showing your fondness too humiliating and painful. I’ve said this to you before, and now I’m saying it for the last time.’ And so on and so on.”

Franting tore the letter in two, dropped one half on the floor, twisted the other half into a spill, turned to the fire, and lit his cigarette.

“That’s what I think of her letter,” he proceeded, the cigarette between his teeth. “You’re helping her, are you? Very well. I don’t say you’re in love with her, or she with you. I’ll make no wild statements. But if you aren’t in love with her I wonder why you’re taking all this trouble over her. Do you go about the world



helping ladies who say they're unhappy just for the pure sake of helping? Never mind. Emily isn't going to leave me. Get that into your head. I shan't let her leave me. She has money, and I haven't. I've been living on her, and it would be infernally awkward for me if she left me for good. That's a reason for keeping her, isn't it? But you may believe me or not — it isn't my reason. She's right enough when she says I'm very fond of her. That's a reason for keeping her too. But it isn't my reason. My reason is that a wife's a wife, and she can't break her word just because everything isn't lovely in the garden. I've heard it said I'm unmoral. I'm not all unmoral. And I feel particularly strongly about what's called the marriage tie." He drew the revolver from his overcoat pocket, and held it up to view. "You see this thing. You saw me buy it. Now you needn't be afraid. I'm not threatening you; and it's not part of my game to shoot you. I've nothing to do with your goings-on. What I have to do with is the goings-on of my wife. If she deserts me — for you or for anybody or for nobody — I shall follow her, whether it's to Copenhagen or Bangkok or the North Pole and I shall kill her — with just this very revolver you saw me buy. And now you can get out."

Franting replaced the revolver, and began to consume the cigarette with fierce and larger puffs.

Lomax Harder looked at the grim, set, brutal scowling bitter face, and knew that Franting meant what he had said. Nothing would stop him from carrying out his threat. The fellow was not an argufier, he could not reason; but he had unmistakable grit and would never recoil from the fear of consequences. If Emily left him, Emily was a dead woman; nothing in the end could protect her from the execution of her husband's menace. On the other hand, nothing would persuade her to remain with her husband. She had decided to go, and she would go. And indeed the mere thought of this lady to whom he, Harder, was utterly devoted, staying with her husband and continuing to suffer the tortures and humiliations which she had been suffering for years — this thought revolted him. He could not think it.

He stepped forward along the side of the billiard-table, and simultaneously Franting stepped forward to meet him. Lomax Harder snatched the revolver which was in his pocket, aimed, and pulled the trigger.

Franting collapsed, with the upper half of his body somehow balanced on the edge of the billiard-table. He was dead. The sound of the report echoed in Harder's ear like the sound of a violin string loudly twanged by a finger. He saw

a little reddish hole in Franting's bronzed right temple.

"Well," he thought, "somebody had to die. And it's better him than Emily." He felt that he had performed a righteous act. Also he felt a little sorry for Franting.

Then he was afraid. He was afraid for himself, because he wanted not to die, especially on the scaffold; but also for Emily Franting who would be friendless and helpless without him; he could not bear to think of her alone in the world — the central point of a terrific scandal. He must get away instantly... .

Not down the corridor back into the hotel lounge! No! That would be fatal! The window. He glanced at the corpse. It was more odd, curious, than affrighting. He had made the corpse. Strange! He could not unmake it. He had accomplished the irrevocable. Impressive! He saw Franting's cigarette glowing on the linoleum in the deepening dusk, and picked it up and threw it into the fender.

Lace curtains hung across the whole width of the window. He drew one aside, and looked forth. The light was much stronger in the courtyard than within the room. He put his gloves on. He gave a last look at the corpse, straddled the window-sill, and was on the brick pavement of the courtyard. He saw that the curtain had fallen back into the perpendicular.

He gazed around. Nobody! Not a light in any window! He saw a green wooden gate, pushed it; it yielded; then a sort of entry-passage... . In a moment, after two half-turns, he was on the Marine Parade again. He was a fugitive. Should he fly to the right, to the left? Then he had an inspiration. An idea of genius for baffling pursuers. He would go into the hotel by the main-entrance. He went slowly and deliberately into the portico, where a middle-aged hall-porter was standing in the gloom.

"Good evening, sir."

"Good evening. Have you got any rooms?"

"I think so, sir. The housekeeper is out, but she'll be back in a moment — if you'd like a seat. The manager's away in London."

The hall-porter suddenly illuminated the lounge, and Lomax Harder, blinking, entered and sat down.

“I might have a cocktail while I’m waiting,” the murderer suggested with a bright and friendly smile. “A Bronx.”

“Certainly, sir. The page is off duty. He sees to orders in the lounge, but I’ll attend to you myself.”

“What a hotel!” thought the murderer, solitary in the chilly lounge, and gave a glance down the long passage. “Is the whole place run by the hall-porter? But of course it’s the dead season.”

Was it conceivable that nobody had heard the sound of the shot?

Harder had a strong impulse to run away. But no! To do so would be highly dangerous. He restrained himself.

“How much?” he asked of the hall-porter, who had arrived with a surprising quickness, tray in hand and glass on tray.

“A shilling, sir.”

The murderer gave him eighteenpence, and drank off the cocktail.

“Thank you very much, sir.” The hall-porter took the glass.

“See here!” said the murderer. “I’ll look in again. I’ve got one or two little errands to do.”

And he went, slowly, into the obscurity of the Marine Parade.

#### IV

Lomax Harder leant over the left arm of the sea-wall of the manmade port of Quangate. Not another soul was there. Night had fallen. The lighthouse at the extremity of the right arm was occulting. The lights — some red, some green, many white — of ships at sea passed in both directions in endless processions. Waves plashed gently against the vast masonry of the wall. The wind, blowing steadily from the north-west, was not cold. Harder, looking about — though he knew he was absolutely alone, took his revolver from his overcoat pocket and stealthily dropped it into the sea. Then he turned round and gazed across the small harbour at the mysterious amphitheatre of the lighted town, and heard

public clocks and religious clocks striking the hour.

He was a murderer, but why should he not successfully escape detection? Other murderers had done so. He had all his wits. He was not excited. He was not morbid. His perspective of things was not askew. The hall-porter had not seen his first entrance into the hotel, nor his exit after the crime. Nobody had seen them. He had left nothing behind in the billiard-room. No finger marks on the window-sill. (The putting-on of his gloves was in itself a clear demonstration that he had fully kept his presence of mind.) No footmarks on the hard, dry pavement of the courtyard.

Of course there was the possibility that some person unseen had seen him getting out of the window. Slight: but still a possibility! And there was also the possibility that someone who knew Franting by sight had noted him waking by Franting's side in the streets. If such a person informed the police and gave a description of him, inquiries might be made... . No! Nothing in it. His appearance offered nothing remarkable to the eye of a casual observer — except his forehead, of which he was rather proud, but which was hidden by his hat.

It was generally believed that criminals always did something silly. But so far he had done nothing silly, and he was convinced that, in regard to the crime, he never would do anything silly. He had none of the desire, supposed to be common among murderers, to revisit the scene of the crime or to look upon the corpse once more. Although he regretted the necessity for his act, he felt no slightest twinge of conscience. Somebody had to die, and surely it was better that a brute should die than the heavenly, enchanting, martyred creature whom his act had rescued for ever from the brute! He was aware within himself of an ecstasy of devotion to Emily Franting — now a widow and free. She was a unique woman. Strange that a woman of such gifts should have come under the sway of so obvious a scoundrel as Franting. But she was very young at the time, and such freaks of sex had happened before and would happen again, they were a widespread phenomenon in the history of the relations of men and women. He would have killed a hundred men if a hundred men had threatened her felicity. His heart was pure; he wanted nothing from Emily in exchange for what he had done in her defence. He was passionate in her defence. When he reflected upon the coarseness and cruelty of the gesture by which Franting had used Emily's letter to light his cigarette, Harder's cheeks grew hot with burning resentment.

A clock struck the quarter. Harder walked quickly to the harbour front, where

was a taxi-rank, and drove to the station... . A sudden apprehension! The crime might have been discovered! Police might already be watching for suspicious-looking travellers! Absurd! Still, the apprehension remained despite its absurdity. The taxi-driver looked at him queerly. No! Imagination! He hesitated on the threshold of the station, then walked boldly in, and showed his return ticket to the ticket-inspector. No sign of a policeman. He got into the Pullman car, where five other passengers were sitting. The train started.

V

He nearly missed the boat-train at Liverpool Street because according to its custom the Quagate flyer arrived twenty minutes late at Victoria. And at Victoria the foolish part of him, as distinguished from the common-sense part, suffered another spasm of fear. Would detectives, instructed by telegraph, be waiting for the train? No! An absurd idea! The boat-train from Liverpool Street was crowded with travellers, and the platform crowded with senders-off. He gathered from scraps of talk overhead that an international conference was about to take place at Copenhagen. And he had known nothing of it — not seen a word of it in the papers! Excusable perhaps; graver matters had held his attention.

Useless to look for Emily in the vast bustle of the compartments! She had her through ticket (which she had taken herself, in order to avoid possible complications), and she happened to be the only woman in the world who was never late and never in a hurry. She was certain to be in the train. But was she in the train? Something sinister might have come to pass. For instance, a telephone message to the flat that her husband had been found dead with a bullet in his brain.

The swift two-hour journey to Harwich was terrible for Lomax Harder. He remembered that he had left the unburnt part of the letter lying under the billiard-table. Forgetful! Silly! One of the silly things that criminals did! And on Parkeston Quay the confusion was enormous. He did not walk, he was swept, on to the great shaking steamer whose dark funnels rose amid wisps of steam into the starry sky. One advantage: detectives would have no chance in that multitudinous scene, unless indeed they held up the ship.

The ship roared a warning, and slid away from the quay, groped down the tortuous channel to the harbour mouth, and was in the North Sea; and England dwindled to naught but a string of lights. He searched every deck from stem to

stern, and could not find Emily. She had not caught the train, or, if she had caught the train, she had not boarded the steamer because he had failed to appear. His misery was intense. Everything was going wrong. And on the arrival at Esbjerg would not detectives be lying in wait for the Copenhagen train? ...

Then he descried her, and she him. She too had been searching. Only chance had kept them apart. Her joy at finding him was ecstatic; tears came into his eyes at sight of it. He was everything to her, absolutely everything. He clasped her right hand in both his hands and gazed at her in the dim, diffused light blended of stars, moon and electricity. No woman was ever like her: mature, innocent, wise, trustful, honest. And the touching beauty of her appealing, sad, happy face, and the pride of her carriage! A unique jewel — snatched from the brutal grasp of that fellow who had ripped her solemn letter in two and used it as a spill for his cigarette! She related her movements; and he his. Then she said:

“Well?”

“I didn’t go,” he answered. “Thought it best not to. I’m convinced it wouldn’t have been any use.”

He had not intended to tell her this lie. Yet when it came to the point, what else could he say? He told one lie instead of twenty. He was deceiving her, but for her sake. Even if the worst occurred, she was for ever safe from that brutal grasp. And he had saved her. As for the conceivable complications of the future, he refused to front them; he could live in the marvellous present. He felt suddenly the amazing beauty of the night at sea, and beneath all his other sensations was the obscure sensation of a weight at his heart.

“I expect you were right,” she angelically acquiesced.

## VI

The Superintendent of Police (Quangate was the county town of the western half of the county), and a detective-sergeant were in the billiard-room of the Bellevue. Both wore mufti. The powerful green-shaded lamps usual in billiard-rooms shone down ruthlessly on the green table, and on the reclining body of John Franting, which had not moved and had not been moved.

A charwoman was just leaving these officers when a stout gentleman, who had successfully beguiled a policeman guarding the other end of the long corridor,

squeezed past her, greeted the two officers, and shut the door.

The Superintendent, a thin man, with lips to match, and a moustache, stared hard at the arrival.

“I am staying with my friend Dr. Furnival,” said the arrival cheerfully. “You telephoned for him, and as he had to go out to one of those cases in which nature will not wait, I offered to come in his place. I’ve met you before, Superintendent, at Scotland Yard.”

“Dr. Austin Bond!” exclaimed the Superintendent.

“He,” said the other.

They shook hands, Dr. Bond genially, the superintendent half-consequential, half-deferential, as one who had his dignity to think about; also as one who resented an intrusion, but dared not show resentment.

The detective-sergeant recoiled at the dazzling name of the great amateur detective, a genius who had solved the famous mysteries of “The Yellow Hat,” “The Three Towns,” “The Three Feathers,” “The Gold Spoon,” etc., etc., etc., whose devilish perspicacity had again and again made professional detectives both look and feel foolish, and whose notorious friendship with the loftiest heads of Scotland Yard compelled all police forces to treat him very politely indeed.

“Yes,” said Dr. Austin Bond, after detailed examination. “Been shot about ninety minutes, poor fellow! Who found him?”

“That woman who’s just gone out. Some servant here. Came in to look after the fire.”

“How long since?”

“Oh! About an hour ago.”

“Found the bullet? I see it hit the brass on that cue-rack there.”

The detective-sergeant glanced at the Superintendent, who however, resolutely remained unastonished.

“Here’s the bullet,” said the Superintendent.

“Ah!” commented Dr. Austin Bond, glinting through his spectacles at the bullet as it lay in the Superintendent’s hand. “Decimal 38, I see. Flattened. It would be.”

“Sergeant,” said the Superintendent. “You can get help and have the body moved, now Dr. Bond has made his examination. Eh, Doctor?”

“Certainly,” answered Dr. Bond, at the fireplace. “He was smoking a cigarette, I see.”

“Either he or his murderer.”

“You’ve got a clue?”

“Oh yes,” the Superintendent answered, not without pride. “Look here. Your torch, sergeant.”

The detective-sergeant produced a pocket electric-lamp, and the Superintendent turned to me window-sill.

“I’ve got a stronger one than that,” said Dr. Austin Bond, producing another torch.

The Superintendent displayed finger-prints on the window-frame, footmarks on the sill, and a few strands of inferior blue cloth. Dr. Austin Bond next produced a magnifying glass, and inspected the evidence at very short range.

“The murderer must have been a tall man — you can judge that from the angle of fire; he wore a blue suit, which he tore slightly on this splintered wood of the window-frame: one of his boots had a hole in the middle of the sole, and he’d only three fingers on his left hand. He must have come in by the window and gone out by the window, because the hall-porter is sure that nobody except the dead man entered the lounge by any door within an hour of the time when the murder must have been committed.” The Superintendent proudly gave many more details, and ended by saying that he had already given instructions to circulate a description.

“Curious,” said Dr. Austin Bond, “that a man like John Franting should let



anyone enter the room by the window! Especially a shabby-looking man!”

“You knew the deceased personally then?”

“No! But I know he was John Franting.”

“How, Doctor?”

“Luck.”

“Sergeant,” said the Superintendent, piqued. “Tell the constable to fetch the hall-porter.”

Dr. Austin Bond walked to and fro, peering everywhere, and picked up a piece of paper that had lodged against the step of the platform which ran round two sides of the room for the raising of the spectators’ benches. He glanced at the paper casually, and dropped it again.

“My man,” the Superintendent addressed the hall-porter. “How can you be sure that nobody came in here this afternoon?”

“Because I was in my cubicle all the time, sir.”

The hall-porter was lying. But he had to think of his own welfare. On the previous day he had been reprimanded for quitting his post against the rule. Taking advantage of the absence of the manager, he had sinned once again, and he lived in fear of dismissal if found out.

“With a full view of the lounge?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Might have been in there beforehand,” Dr. Austin Bond suggested.

“No,” said the Superintendent. “The charwoman came in twice. Once just before Franting came in. She saw the fire wanted making up and she went for some coal, and then returned later with some coal. But the look of Franting frightened her, and she went back with her coal.”

“Yes,” said the hall-porter. “I saw that.”

Another lie.

At a sign from the Superintendent he withdrew

“I should like to have a word with that charwoman,” said Dr. Austin Bond.

The Superintendent hesitated. Why should the great amateur meddle with what did not concern him? Nobody had asked his help. But the Superintendent thought of the amateur’s relations with Scotland Yard, and sent for the charwoman.

“Did you clean the window here to-day?” Dr. Austin Bond interrogated her.

“Yes, please, sir.”

“Show me your left hand.” The slattern obeyed. “How did you lose your little finger?”

“In a mangle accident, sir.”

“Just come to the window, will you, and put your hands on it. But take off your left boot first.”

The slattern began to weep.

“It’s quite all right, my good creature.” Dr. Austin Bond reassured her. “Your skirt is torn at the hem, isn’t it?”

When the slattern was released from her ordeal and had gone carrying one boot in her grimy hand, Dr. Austin Bond said genially to the Superintendent:

“Just a fluke. I happened to notice she’d only three fingers on her left hand when she passed me in the corridor. Sorry I’ve destroyed your evidence. But I felt sure almost from the first that the murderer hadn’t either entered or decamped by the window.”

“How?”

“Because I think he’s still here in the room.”

The two police officers gazed about them as if exploring the room for the

murderer.

“I think he’s there.”

Dr. Austin Bond pointed to the corpse.

“And where did he hide the revolver after he’d killed himself?” demanded the thin-lipped Superintendent icily, when he had somewhat recovered his aplomb.

“I’d thought of that, too,” said Dr. Austin Bond, beaming. “It is always a very wise course to leave a dead body absolutely untouched until a professional man has seen it. But looking at the body can do no harm. You see the left-hand pocket of the overcoat. Notice how it bulges. Something unusual in it. Something that has the shape of a — Just feel inside it, will you?”

The Superintendent, obeying, drew a revolver from the overcoat pocket of the dead man.

“Ah! Yes!” said Dr. Austin Bond. “A Webley Mark III. Quite new. You might take out the ammunition.” The Superintendent dismantled the weapon. “Yes, yes! Three chambers empty. Wonder how he used the other two! Now, where’s that bullet? You see? He fired. His arm dropped, and the revolver happened to fall into the pocket.”

“Fired with his left hand, did he?” asked the Superintendent, foolishly ironic.

“Certainly. A dozen years ago Franting was perhaps the finest amateur light-weight boxer in England. And one reason for it was that he bewildered his opponents by being left-handed. His lefts were much more fatal than his rights. I saw him box several times.”

Whereupon Dr. Austin Bond strolled to the step of the platform near me door and picked up the fragment of very thin paper that was lying there.

“This,” said he, “must have blown from the hearth to here by the draught from the window when the door was opened. It’s part of a letter. You can see the burnt remains of the other part in the corner of the fender. He probably lighted the cigarette with it. Out of bravado! His last bravado! Read this.”

The Superintendent read: “... repeat that I realize how fond you are of me, but

you have killed my affection for you, and I shall leave our home tomorrow. This is absolutely final. E.”

Dr. Austin Bond, having for the nth time satisfactorily demonstrated in his own unique, rapid way, that police-officers were a set of numskulls, bade the Superintendent a most courteous good evening, nodded amicably to the detective-sergeant, and left in triumph.

## VII

“I must get some mourning and go back to the flat,” said Emily Franting.

She was sitting one morning in the lobby of the Palads Hotel, Copenhagen. Lomax Harder had just called on her with an English newspaper containing an account of the inquest at which the jury had returned a verdict of suicide upon the body of her late husband. Her eyes filled with tears.

“Time will put her right,” thought Lomax Harder, tenderly watching her. “I was bound to do what I did. And I can keep a secret for ever.”