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Quintus Oakes

A Detective Story

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE THIRD DEGREE"

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CHAPTER I

The Rescue

It was a warm summer evening; the air was stifling and still. I, Rodney Stone, attorney-at-law, left my apartment to stroll along Broadway, seeking a roof garden wherein to spend a few hours of change from the atmosphere of the pavements, and to kill the ennui that comes to all of us whom business compels to accept such circumstances.

As I walked down a side street, I noticed ahead of me a colored man rush out from an apartment house, shouting something that I did not understand. His actions seemed peculiar for a moment, but a curl of smoke from one of the third-story windows made known the cause. It was fire. I found myself among the first to reach the spot. From Broadway a crowd was coming, such as collects readily under these circumstances. I was soon mingling with it, watching the police in their endeavors to rouse the tenants and to spread the alarm on all the floors. The numerous dwellers were soon rushing out, and I saw several deeds deserving of mention. As the crowd looked up at the apartment in which the flames were showing and from which smoke was pouring, a window was raised—evidently in a separate room—and a young girl appeared standing at the sill. The effort of raising the sash had been a severe one for her, for she was not over ten. Looking back into the room, she saw the smoke filling it, and quickly scrambled out on the window frame. The engines had not yet arrived, but I could hear them shrieking in the distance, and we all knew that help was coming.

"Don't jump! Don't jump!" was the cry from us all. I advanced instinctively, as did many, to be nearer, for we saw that fear had taken possession of the child and that she seemed about to slide outward and drop—to almost certain disaster.

A tall, handsome, well-built man in the crowd behind us spoke in a voice of confidence and assurance.

"Hold tight, little girl. You're all right!"

I noticed that he was breathing hard; he had just arrived in haste.

Even as he spoke, the little one's head moved from one side to the other, and she seemed in distress. Then something like an avalanche came from back of me, tearing the crowd asunder. A hand fell upon my shoulder, and I reeled to one side as the tall stranger sprang forward, saying: "She is going to faint." Quick wit and quick eye had detected what none other realized, that nature was being overcome and that the fall was inevitable.

The limp little body slid a second, then pitched forward. A groan went up at what seemed sure death. But the stranger's rush was timed to the instant, and as the child's body curved head downward in its flight, his strong figure reached the spot and his arms caught the child. The man braced as they swung downward to his side, depositing the unconscious girl in my hands and those of a policeman. She did not touch the sidewalk, but the young giant came to his knees by the force of the impact. It was a marvellous piece of work and the crowd cheered and closed in upon the rescuer and our burden. The child was taken away by those who had escaped. Then all hands looked at the man, and somebody started to speak to him, and to ask him his name.

He turned to me. "Sorry to have smashed into you that way, sir," he said. I answered, saying something about I was glad he did—and upon looking up, I saw he was gone. We watched him, and saw him turn into Broadway, bound on avoiding further notice.

"Who was he?" cried many.

A thick-set, tough-looking character spoke up: "Oh, he's de gazabo wot did the turn on de——" At this instant a policeman pushed toward us, and, shoving a club into the fellow's ribs, shouted: "Come, now, get out o' this, or I'll——"

The fellow was off, and with him our chance of identifying the stranger vanished. The police had been too busy with other matters to secure his name. Another good act to be credited to an unknown!

The fire was soon under control and I renewed my walk, emerging on Broadway as the shadows of night were coming on, and the street was awakening to its characteristic summer life.

Suddenly I saw him—the identical man—walking across the thoroughfare. I quickened my pace, although going rapidly at the time. It was my intention to get closer to him and notice him better, as I was interested. He turned up-town, and I saw that, although he was walking easily, his pace was quicker than mine.

What impressed me more than anything else was his graceful carriage and the fine cut of his clothes. He was dressed in a dark suit without waistcoat, and one of those soft, white summer shirts which have become popular of late years. On his head was a plain but expensive Panama. As he passed up the street ahead of me, gaining all the while with his easy stride, he saluted a few gentlemen, and the policemen seemed to know him. He evidently was a striking figure to other eyes than mine, for I noticed several men stop and half turn to look after him—a thing that one sees on Broadway but seldom. He turned into a side street, and again I lost him. I fancied he disappeared into one of the bachelor apartment houses of that section.

During the rest of the evening I regretted not having made stronger efforts to learn his name; then I laughed at myself for being so impressed by a stranger's appearance. The fact was, that the man's action and personality had affected me so strongly that for days I frequently found myself thinking of the fire and the rescue. I often looked along the street when walking, in a vague hope of seeing the handsome, clear-cut face of the man who had acted so promptly, but so unostentatiously.

Little did I then know how great a factor that man was to be in the moulding of my future—how circumstances were shaping, to link his active nature with my career, and to lead me into one of the most peculiar experiences that ever came to any one.

Over a month passed, and the first signs of fall were upon us. The streets were assuming the appearance of activity, and familiar faces reappeared in the public places, all invigorated and refreshed by the summer's outings.

Early in October I found myself with my friend, Dr. Moore, a well-known physician, standing in one of the popular theatres. We had dropped in for one act or so, and, like many others, were unable to secure seats owing to the hour and the popularity of the play. At first, engrossed with the performance, we paid no attention to the audience; but when the act closed and the lights were turned up, we glanced around as we prepared to leave for a stroll. My attention was called to some ladies in one of the lower boxes—two fair-haired and strikingly attractive young women, and an older one, evidently a relative, for there was a resemblance in features that was noticeable. The younger ones were certainly sisters; their similarity of complexion, face and figure rendered such an assumption a certainty.

My friend noticed them, and a change came over his face; he began to beam as one does who has seen a friend. We were far off, and in a position where we could admire, without impoliteness.

"Those are charming ladies," I said. "You seem to know them, Moore?"

"Yes, I have not seen them for quite a while; they are old patients of mine. Do you see any one with them? If I mistake not, he is somewhere in the box," continued Moore.

"He!" "Who?" As I spoke I noticed a gentleman—a tall, clear-cut fellow—lean forward and speak to one of the sisters. As he moved, his face came full in the light and I recognized him.

"It's he!" I cried. "I've found him at last!"

"Found whom?" exclaimed Moore.

"Him, that man!"

"Great Scott!" said Moore, "you must be sick. What ails you, anyway? Have you been dining at the Club?"

I turned to my friend and said: "Doctor, I've found him at last—that man in the box."

"Well, did not I tell you he ought to be there?" said Moore. "Because you found him, do you think you have accomplished a wonderful piece of work? Of course he was there."

"What do you mean? Whom are you talking about, anyway?" I asked.

Doctor Moore looked at me as though wondering if I were in my right mind, then said: "Stone, I am talking about the gentleman in the box; I said he should be there; he usually is with those ladies."

"Yes," I replied, "it is he!"

"Stone, what's the matter? Come and take something, old man"—and seizing me by the arm, my companion led me away to the nearest cafè, where he watched me closely as he poured out a bracer.

I seized it and said: "Here's to the man in the box! I've found him."

"Of course you found him, old man. I don't see what you are making such a fuss over that fact for; it's not a question of priority."

"No," I said, "it's a question of identity."

"Explain."

"Well, I want to know who *he* is. He has worried my mind for a month."

"Oh, is that all?" and Moore heaved a sigh of relief; he had been genuinely anxious about me, that was plain.

"Have you run up against him anywhere?" he asked.

"No, he ran up against me," I answered.

"Here, sit down," said Moore. "What, in heaven's name, has got into you?"

"Nothing. Only I desire to know that man's name. I have had an experience with him."

"Indeed! You're not the first, then; have you been up to anything shady, Stone?" said Moore, laughingly.

"No, only smoky—a fire. This man saved a child's life in a magnificent manner. What's his name?"

"Oh! I see. His name is Oakes. You should know that. He left college just a year or so after you and I entered. Don't you remember the fellow who saved those boys from drowning in the harbor that day?"

"You don't tell me! Is that Quintus Oakes? I never met him, but of course I knew him; everybody at college did, after that."

"Yes, that's the same fellow."

"Well, I certainly did not recognize his face. Only saw it a moment, but there was something about him that seemed familiar—that *walk* of his—I remember it now."

As the memories of youth crowded upon me I recalled him well, and realized that the years had filled out his figure and face; but it was the same man, the same walk and carriage—I had seen them hundreds of times. The quick, easy stride, erect figure and commanding bearing that had marked him so in his youth

were as noticeable now, in his full manhood, as in those years of the long ago.

My companion and I did not return for the last act of the play, but strolled out in the street, where I told him of the episode of the fire and the part that Oakes had played in it.

"His actions, both at the time and afterwards when he tried to avoid notice, are characteristic," said Moore. "He is reputed as doing things vigorously and opportunely. His presence of mind is marvellous, I am told. You remember, he had that gift years back in college. Now, it seems to have developed greatly, until everybody who knows him well speaks of it."

"Are you well acquainted with him? You seem to know all about him."

"Yes, indeed," answered my friend. "I met him one night several years back, and I became so attracted to him that I cultivated his acquaintance wherever possible."

"Then you will understand how I was glad to identify him," was my rejoinder.

"Yes, indeed; if you like, you can easily manage to meet him."

I expressed my earnest desire, and Dr. Moore promised to arrange it so that we could meet some evening at the Club.

"By the way," said my companion, "he is probably the best informed, all-round man you have ever met. He did not cease learning at college."

"Lucky for him," I exclaimed laughingly.

"Well, don't be surprised if he starts in to discuss law with you, and holds you up at your own profession; he is a surprise party, sometimes."

"All right, but what is his business?"

Moore looked at me, and said: "He is one of the most original detectives in the country."

"Oh, a detective. Along what lines? He surely is no ordinary one at that business."

"No. He used to work alone on unusual occurrences, but his success was so great that now he has a large number of subordinates who do the ordinary details, and he limits his work to the important points on select cases. He is not heard of

much, and is seen very little, but his work is in great demand."

I was interested, and asked if he had ever done any special work of prominence.

"Yes," said Moore. "He solved the matter of the 'Red Rose of Trieste.' Do you remember hearing of that?"

I exclaimed in amazement: "He! Is *he* the man who solved that affair? You must be mistaken. That occurred, or began, in Europe."

"Exactly," said Moore. "Quintus Oakes works there, as well as here. He speaks German, French, Italian, and perhaps more languages, fluently, and can secure evidence anywhere. He has travelled over the world several times. One year he was away ten months on a case, and secured the necessary evidence for conviction in Sydney."

"I see. He is something decidedly out of the ordinary, as his appearance suggests."

"He is on a new case just now, and he has promised to let me go, if I want to. It's a very short affair, and perhaps I will take a vacation that way. I have not been away yet this year," continued Moore.

We now parted for the evening, and as he started to go, I called out after him: "Say, Moore, get me into it, if it's exciting. I have had no vacation yet myself. Introduce me to Mr. Oakes as soon as you can, anyway."

"All right. I'll arrange for a night at the Club, provided Oakes is not too busy."

I returned to my rooms, little knowing how things were shaping, from an entirely independent direction, to throw me, willingly I confess, for a few brief weeks into a vortex of turmoil, to fight through it side by side with my friend Moore and vigorous, cool, quick-witted Quintus Oakes.

CHAPTER II

Quintus Oakes at Home

It was, therefore, a great deal in the nature of a surprise when, a few days after parting with Moore, I received a note at my apartments by messenger requesting me to call on Mr. Quintus Oakes that evening on professional business. It was written in a brisk, courteous style, but made no mention of Dr. Moore. Was it

possible that I was to meet Oakes through other channels? I realized that my profession of the law might give many opportunities for such an interview with him, so I ceased to wonder, and started up Broadway just before the hour appointed. I turned into the long, dimly lighted side street near Long Acre Square, and found that the number designated was a bachelor apartment house. It was where I had lost him the day of the fire.

Taking the elevator to the third floor, I was directed to the door and admitted by a Japanese servant, a bright-eyed fellow of about twenty. He was dressed in our fashion and spoke English well—the kind of a chap that one sees not infrequently nowadays in the service of men who have seen the world, know how to live, and how to choose for personal comfort. It was evident that I was expected, for I was at once led into the front room and there met by Oakes himself. The instant he saw me, a look of recognition and mild surprise came over his face, and as he shook hands he said: "We have met before, at the fire the other day, Mr. Stone! Won't you please step into my sanctum? We can be more comfortable there."

He led me through a short hall, into a large airy room, furnished as half-lounging room, half office. There was a large flat-top mahogany desk in the centre, with a sofa and several upholstered chairs, evidently for use as well as ornament. On the walls were pictures of value, views of foreign places, and oil paintings that a mere novice could see were works of art. There was that in the room which suggested education and refinement.

A telephone was on the desk, and loose papers partly written upon bore evidence that the detective had been busy at work when I arrived.

At a motion from my host I seated myself in one of the large arm chairs facing him, while he remained standing.

I saw that he was a man about thirty-eight or forty years old, straight as an arrow and splendidly proportioned. He was dressed in a well-fitting gray suit.

The light was from above, and Oakes's face showed well—the clear-cut nose and generous mouth of the energetic American.

He looked at me critically with deep-set, steady blue eyes, then smiled slightly in a well-controlled, dignified manner.

"Mr. Stone, I am very glad that you were able to come tonight. Make yourself at

home," he said.

I made an appropriate answer of some kind, and then Oakes took the seat near me and began, without further ceremony:

"I have arranged that our friend Dr. Moore shall come here this evening; meanwhile, I will inform you briefly of the subject in hand."

"A few months ago Mandel & Sturgeon the attorneys, whom you doubtless know, consulted me regarding the unpleasant happenings at the mansion of one Odell Mark, up-State, in the town of Mona.

"Now, Mandel & Sturgeon suggested, also, that you might care to help unravel the matter, acting as their legal representative.

"I have completed my arrangements for starting on the case, and am particularly glad to find that you are a friend of Dr. Moore and that you had expressed to him a desire to enter into some such affair. I assure you, however, that Mandel & Sturgeon had previously spoken of you and that this offer was coming as a business proposition. The fact that you and Dr. Moore had spoken of such a trip is merely a coincidence."

He spoke with a well-modulated voice, and a fluency that told of the intelligence of the man. His eyes fixed me, but not in an embarrassing manner; it was the habit of observation that prompted their concentration—that was obvious.

His forehead was high and slightly furrowed with two vertical wrinkles between the eyebrows. His face was mobile and expressive at times, then suddenly calm. In my very brief observation I knew that he was able to govern its expression well.

In the days that were coming, I learned that in the presence of danger or possible trickery that face became stony and immovable, a mask that talked and commanded, while hiding the suppressed energy of the man.

The bell rang before Oakes could proceed with his statement, and Dr. Moore was shown in. His coming enlivened us both, and after a few words of greeting I found the opportunity, and said:

"Mr. Oakes, it is not exactly clear to me why Mandel & Sturgeon recommended me as their representative. They have so many men in their office whom they might use in that capacity."

"Doubtless you will hear from them yourself before we go, Mr. Stone. Meantime, I may explain. You were in their employ at one time, I believe?"

"Yes, a great many years ago."

"They think that some legal matters might arise, where a man on the spot would be of value, and it seems best that their representative with me should be one not easily identified as working with them. You know, Mr. Stone, we are not advertising our mission."

"I have been in Mona as Mr. Clark, their agent, looking after the Mansion and other property, and if I return there, it must be under some business pretext, or people will suspect me. You, being an independent party, not known as connected with the firm in any way, can accompany me in the rôle of a friend on an outing, or as a possible purchaser. You see, we are trying to solve a mystery, so the less attention we attract the better."

"I see. So you have been there already, Mr. Oakes?"

"Yes, gentlemen. I will tell you about this affair very briefly now. You will learn more later, if you enter upon its solution with me.

"The Mansion was originally the property of George Mark, who died some years ago, leaving it to his two sons, Winthrop and Odell. Both were single men at that time, but Odell married a couple of years ago and persuaded his brother to sell his share of the property to him. Winthrop, who was the older, did not care to part with it, but finally disposed of his interest to his brother, who immediately moved into the place with his bride. The old servants were still in charge, and everything had been kept up to a high standard of excellence, although no one had lived there since the old man died.

"Odell had travelled some, and lived mostly in the city, while Winthrop had been engrossed in amassing a large fortune in speculation. He had resided in Mona, keeping his own place, saying he did not care for the Mansion as a home after his father died."

"Then why did he not care to give up his interest to his brother?" asked Moore.

"That is as yet a mystery. But, as he was a great business man, it is supposed by some that he saw opportunities to convert the vast grounds into town lots, and sell at a great advance some day when Mona should boom, as the town will sooner or later, owing to its natural advantages. He told many, however, that it

was merely a sentiment with him, the place having belonged in Colonial times to the family. Be that as it may, however, he finally sold, and never would buy it back again, even after the mystery had made it practically valueless.

"His brother offered to sell it back for next to nothing, but Winthrop only laughed, and refused. This conduct seemed to dispose of the supposition that he was in any way responsible for the occurrences there which had such a depressing effect in the value of the property."

"Then, if mixed up, he had a deeper motive," said I.

"Yes—if he has really been involved in the mystery at all. You must remember, however," said Oakes, "that his story may be true. Having disposed of his share of the property, he may have seen no reason for bothering with it again, at least until it was clear of the depressing occurrences which had lowered its value from half a million to practically nothing."

"Goodness! What were these mysteries?" said Moore, with a feigned shudder. "Evidently, they are unpopular."

Oakes proceeded slowly.

"They consist of a series of assaults on those who have occupied the house, and they are conducted in such a way that detection has been impossible.

"One evening Mrs. Mark was heard to shriek in her bedroom, and when found by her husband was insane from fright. In her ravings she spoke of a terrible thing choking her, and of a swishing sound. She never regained her reason, and is now in an insane asylum. Alienists at first thought that she had an experience common to those going mad—that she had been subject to a delusion. But evidences were against this, as she had in no way shown any signs of mental trouble before. While she was being cared for at the Mansion, the two nurses in charge had similar experiences. They reported hearing a tread on the stairs one night and of seeing a figure disappear into the dining-room. One stated up and down that it was a woman.

"The patient was removed from the place. Then Mr. Odell Mark received such a scare one night that he packed up and left the Mansion for good. He was assaulted by an invisible party from behind, and only escaped after a severe struggle. Whoever, or whatever, assaulted him disappeared in an instant, and he swore that he heard the closing of a door somewhere downstairs.

"Everything was done to keep the truth quiet, but of course it leaked out and the place has been regarded as haunted ever since. The servants left, save a few of the oldest, who live away from the Mansion under a separate roof, and have never seen anything unusual."

"That sounds very thrilling," I said; "but the affair may all be founded on nervous dread and hysteria."

"So I thought," said Oakes. "I went up there alone recently, however, and am glad to say that I got back alive."

"What! Did you see it?"

"No, gentlemen, I did not. There was nothing to see; but I learned enough to know that murder stalks there in the Mansion—that the mystery is a deep one, and my conduct nearly cost me my life.

"I have faced danger often, but I never faced an invisible violence, or had such a fight for my life as I had at the Mansion about three weeks ago."

Quintus Oakes was speaking earnestly, and we both were deeply interested. That the celebrated detective should have met such an experience placed the tale outside the realm of fiction. He was a calm man, used to facing danger, and not one to be easily deceived or frightened.

"Great Scott!" said Moore, "you must have had a fine time. Tell us about it. It must have been what the boys call a 'lalapazooza' of a time."

I had to smile at my friend, able and successful, and already a professional man of reputation, but ever fond of an occasional slang expression as a relief from the care with which he was usually burdened. He was well to do, but had been no idler, and knew the meaning of hard work.

"Yes," said Oakes, "I had a fine time."

At this moment the telephone on the desk rang, and Oakes reached forward and placed the receiver to his ear. After a few words of business he replaced it, but I felt a curious sensation of something missing, something unusual.

His hand had shot forward toward the hook and deposited the receiver thereon in one quick, instantaneous movement. The action had been so exact that the contact had given rise to no sound save the after-tinkle of the bell. Moore noticed

it too, and looked at me, as much as to say: "How was that, for measuring distance?"

Then Oakes wheeled so as to face us again.

"Excuse me for the interruption. Now I will tell you my story in a few words."

CHAPTER III

Oakes's Experience

Oakes began:

"Mandel & Sturgeon gave me a letter to the chief care-taker, Cook, and I went to Mona as Clark, their agent, giving as an excuse for my presence there that Mr. Odell Mark contemplated making radical alterations in the Mansion before returning to it. Cook and his wife opened that portion of the Mansion which I thought best adapted for my temporary residence—about half of the place, I should say. I spent a few quiet days looking around the estate and the house. I was always on guard, however, lest I appear too inquisitive and thereby betray my true mission.

"There was an old maid-servant, Annie by name, and several gardeners about. These latter, I found, were never admitted to the Mansion. My meals were served in the dining-room, and this room was the one in which I spent most of my time. The servants gave me but little information regarding the mysterious doings that had so frightened their employers. I could tell by their action that they were genuinely afraid to be alone in the place, and they all cautioned me repeatedly. They seemed anxious that the affair should be investigated, and said that Mr. Odell should have had detectives at work on the mystery. It was evident they were afraid that they would lose their positions if no one returned to live at the Mansion soon.

"I noticed a strong under-current of contempt for Mr. Odell; they seemed to think he was a cowardly fellow, none too anxious to remain, or he would have investigated the affair. In fact, they behaved sometimes as though they thought that he might have been at the bottom of the mystery. Occasionally, Cook and his wife and Annie had stayed in the Mansion, cleaning up, and had never seen anything unusual. Nothing had occurred since Mr. Odell Mark had left—which certainly was peculiar.

"I could see that my true identity was not suspected. My presence seemed to have inspired confidence in them all. I called Cook and his wife, or Annie, into my rooms for a talk quite frequently. Nothing happened, and I began to feel that there was exaggeration somewhere; but, nevertheless, I moved with caution and slept in the back room over the dining-room with the doors carefully locked. I insisted that Mr. and Mrs. Cook sleep in the front room. The servants at first demurred, but finally consented when I told them that if they did not do so I would not remain, and would report unfavorably as regards the remodeling of the Mansion. I noticed that they bolted their doors carefully every night and kept a light burning in their room. This I knew, as its rays shone through under their door into the hall.

"This satisfied me that they were on guard and afraid, and consequently unaware of the real nature of the mystery.

"Late one night, after about a week, I was looking out of one of the windows in the dining-room, watching a boat passing. The lights upon her and the throbbing of her engines, half a mile away, were plunging me into a reverie, when suddenly I felt a peculiar sensation of uneasiness. I glanced along the porch, and at the windows; everything seemed all right. I turned, and saw Annie some distance up the hall attending to a lamp at the foot of the stairs. The afternoon paper lay on the table. I walked over to it and picked it up, stationing myself a few feet away from the hall door, where I commanded a view of the entire room, the windows and the balcony. I heard, or fancied I heard, a step or shuffle, and then instantly something closed around my throat and I was pulled backward and downward. I heard a rush in the hall and saw Annie's terrified face looking into the room, but she did not see me. I tried to cry out for help, but was unable to raise my voice. Realizing that I was being killed without aid, I struggled with all my power. I have an indistinct recollection of a shriek in the hall, then a rustling sound, as of garments, near me. The next I knew, Annie, Cook and his wife, with two gardeners, were working over me. One of the gardeners had opened my shirt and thrown water upon my throat. I was unconscious for some minutes, they said; but when I recovered my senses I ordered all hands to keep their mouths closed, under pain of instant dismissal. Inquiries instituted by me revealed that Annie had first heard my struggles, and the shriek that had been given was hers. Response had been quick, but when Cook first entered the room, backed up by the wife and old Annie, I was lying limp and unconscious, face downward on the floor, as though I had been thrown violently forward."

The recital of this narrative had been given in a quiet, dignified manner—one of absolute conviction. It was an impartial statement of fact, and we were profoundly impressed.

Dr. Moore turned to me and said: "Well, do you feel like joining us?"

"Ah! Then you are in this too?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, Mr. Oakes is going to let me have my vacation in his company."

"I certainly shall go," I said; "it appears to me that this matter is a serious one."

"It is very serious," Oakes repeated. "There is a deep mystery at the Mansion, and its solution may be a dangerous one. There is murder in that method of attack, and terrible strength behind it."

"What is it? A man?" asked Moore.

"That is conjecture as yet," said Oakes. "I certainly beard the sound made by a woman's skirts, or something of that sort, but the strength was too great for most women hereabouts."

"Yes, if you were overcome by it," I remarked.

"The servants are firmly convinced that the whole business is supernatural. That is hardly worth discussing. I have no doubt that you two gentlemen, as possible purchasers of the Mansion, will have opportunities to settle the question for yourselves."

There was just the shadow of a smile on Oakes's face as he spoke.

"Did you notice anything peculiar about the people at the Mansion—the care-takers?" I asked.

"No, I thought their actions were natural, especially when I was assaulted. One of the gardeners, who did not do very much to help me, seemed preoccupied and made advances for a better acquaintance before I left. I think he will bear watching closely; he knows something."

"How long did you remain at the Mansion after the assault?"

"Only a few days," said Oakes. "I could learn nothing alone. It was too dangerous. When we return, it will be in greater numbers. If our mission is suspected we will be obliged to work through other channels, but I think we can

fool the care-takers; they will say nothing to you about the mystery, and they will think that I am more anxious than ever to dispose of the place. Should our work be suspected, however," continued the detective, "we will be face to face with complications. We may have to be reënforced by men from my agency, but they will probably not be known even to you."

"The reward for the solution of this mystery is a large one, and the prosperity of the town depends upon it. This matter at the Mansion has not only affected its own value, as I said, but has helped greatly to depreciate the worth of the surrounding properties."

Then, turning to Moore:

"I think your professional knowledge may come in handy in several ways, so you may consider that your time will be well paid for, and your vacation a profitable one—that is, of course, if you return alive."

This was so seriously said as to cause me a momentary feeling of discomfort.

We now discussed details and arrangements for our start, for we had decided to go. Oakes and I were to leave first, while Doctor Moore was to come a few days later, owing to his inability to get away at once.

Having finished with his story and the necessary details of instruction, Oakes changed his manner and offered us cigars. The Jap brought in a few glasses and a bottle, which opened up the social side of our interview.

Noticing that our host had not lighted a cigar, I ventured the remark that he was not a heavy smoker.

"No," said he. "I very rarely use tobacco during business; it is a peculiarity of mine, I am told."

His face was quite smiling now.

He continued: "With some it acts as a concentrator of ideas—at least, so claim its devotees. With me, it dissipates them; I use it simply as a pleasure when work is done."

While he spoke, I was again impressed with that peculiar celerity of movement in small actions which I had noticed before.

He passed the cigars in an ordinary, deliberate manner, conversing the while; but

when he reached for a match, I was amazed at the lightning-like rapidity of the movement. His hand shot out, selected it from the stand on the table, lighted it and the cigar, and returned the burned stick to the tray with a rapidity and evenness which made of it almost a continuous act.

It reminded me forcibly of the movement with the telephone receiver. I felt that, given the necessity and the occasion, his general action would be roused to quickness of the same kind—sure and instantaneous. He impressed me as a man with a tremendous reserve of strength and vitality.

When we left for the evening, Oakes shook my hand with a stout, firm grasp, the kind that means friendliness and inspires confidence. When outside, I asked of my companion what he privately thought of the affair at the Mark Mansion.

"There is something extraordinary there, surely," answered the physician. "Knowing Oakes as I do, Stone, I am fully convinced that he is deeply worried over the matter. He would never think of having us in such an affair unless he desired our company. He is as brave as any man—his record shows that; but he is also noted for caution. He sees, or thinks he sees, a dangerous game here—a plot, perhaps—where our presence will be a support. He has often told me in conversation, that he regards the legal and medical minds as particularly adapted to pass judgment on certain problems of a peculiar nature. He has an idea that our training will perhaps help him in the matter, I think."

With this remark, we parted at Broadway and Forty-second Street, and went to our respective homes.

CHAPTER IV

The Departure

Next morning, while at breakfast, I received a letter from Mandel & Sturgeon which was satisfactory to me, and I went down to my office and notified my partner, Hart, that I was about to take a vacation.

Fortunately, we had just successfully finished a long legal fight in the courts, and my excuse was a natural one.

I then went out and bought a good revolver, such as Oakes had told me to get when we discussed details the night before. He had insisted upon our being armed all alike, and furnished with the same kind of cartridges. We could then

exchange weapons in an emergency, and still be supplied with ammunition.

Having completed my purchase, I went to the Club, where Oakes was awaiting me. We lunched together, and during the conversation he told me to express my baggage to the Mansion that afternoon, and to meet him at the Central Station at eight o'clock P.M.

"And be cautious in your movements," he said. "Here is your ticket. Wear serviceable clothes and a heavy dark overcoat, such as you had on last night, with a black Fedora hat. Don't notice me, but enter the same car as I do on the train. I will contrive to be with you before we arrive at our destination."

"Why all this?" I asked.

"Well, I wish to be able to identify you easily in a crowd. If I know how you are dressed, it might be valuable in several other ways also. We may have to change our plans, in which event it will be easier for me if I know how you look."

"I do not exactly understand," said I, "but I presume you do."

"Precisely. You may learn in time."

As we emerged from the Club a newsboy came up to Oakes, from whom he bought a paper, and as he did so, the boy said:

"Martin says you are followed, sir."

Oakes turned to me: "Meet me as I said; and do as I do afterwards in everything. I shall be forced to change my plans."

The boy had gone after another customer, and Oakes continued: "Martin is my aide; he has posted me. Good-by! See you later. Explain some other time."

We parted, and I went about my preparations for departure with that exhilaration that men feel when about to enter into some strange undertaking. It was to be a novel experience for me, and I frankly confess that certain misgivings haunted me. That I was entering, willingly, to be sure, upon a journey of many possibilities I did not for one moment doubt; that I should need the weapon already purchased, and the utmost coolness that I could muster, seemed to me more than likely. At this date I felt nothing akin to fear, and the knowledge that Quintus Oakes was to be our leader prevented a too serious estimate of the possible consequences.

Later on I did feel some regrets at having hurled myself into the episodes that followed, but this feeling vanished soon in the excitement of the events that transpired at Mona.

Shortly before the appointed time I arrived at the station and strolled about the rotunda in search of Oakes.

I espied him at the paper stand, dressed in a dark heavy overcoat and a hat like mine. His recognition of me was instantaneous, but he made no movement until, after buying a paper, he walked past me to the door.

Looking at me with a glance that warned me, he stepped out and into a car that was approaching. I jumped on the same car, and in a very few moments he and I were going up the Sixth Avenue Elevated stairway, but acting as strangers to one another.

There were many persons boarding the Harlem train with us. It was a tiresome ride to the terminus, but when Oakes and I stepped out and down to the street, he jumped into a carriage in waiting, drawn by a pair of horses, and beckoned to me. I stepped in also, and sat by his side on the back seat.

The driver started at a quick pace across the bridge and into Jerome Avenue.

Oakes turned to me: "It seems that my movements are watched by men in a rival agency. I have detected no followers, but time will tell if they exist. I saw a fellow watching me at the station, and we may have easily been followed on the elevated train; in such a crowd one cannot detect."

"Why do they watch you, Mr. Oakes? Are they suspicious that we are going to Mona?"

"No, not at all," answered Oakes. "They are watching to see *where* I am going. You see," he continued, "I am working on several other cases, and perhaps they are, too. You realize there are times when men of my profession cross each other's paths, and it is advantageous to know what the other fellow is doing."

"I see. Keeping tab on one another!" I said. "Rather expensive work, is it not?"

Oakes smiled. "Yes, but it is business. I like to know when a rival leaves town. I keep a pretty close watch myself on some of them."

We drove rapidly, and soon pulled up at an out-of-the-way roadhouse.

"Come," said Oakes, alighting.

A portly German was behind the bar, evidently the proprietor.

Oakes made a sudden movement of his hand, and the door was locked. We two were then shown into a rear room where two other men were seated—both tall, well-built fellows, and both dressed as we were, in dark overcoats and black Fedora hats.

They saluted Oakes, and after a word or two stepped into the bar-room, where the German served them with drinks. In a minute they were in our carriage and driving away toward Yonkers.

"I see now why you were particular as to my dress."

"Yes, a substitution like this is useful sometimes. I thought I might be forced to make one. Much better than nonsensical disguises. We will soon know if any one is coming after us," he continued. "This is really the last place before the fork of the road, and anyone following us would have to be in sight all the time, or else stop here for information."

The proprietor motioned us upstairs to a front room, and Oakes said to him: "Remember, we have gone to Yonkers." But the good-natured German evidently knew his business, for he only smiled and went off muttering something to himself about a "damned good mix-up."

In a few minutes two men drew up in a buggy, and were admitted below by the obsequious old fellow.

Then we heard the question: "Have you seen two tall gentlemen in black coats and soft hats hereabouts, Dutchy?"

The German thought a moment: "Yah, yah; dare vas two big fellers just here; dey vas took some viskey and got away quick."

"Which way?" asked the men.

"Dey vas gone up dar Yonkers Road."

Oakes chuckled. "The old fellow is all right; an old friend of mine."

Then we heard the men say: "Here, Dutchy, here's something for you," and we knew they had given him a tip.

In a moment they were gone, and the old fellow was to be heard chuckling audibly to himself: "Five dollar for von great big mix-up."

Oakes watched the team turn up the Yonkers Road after our decoy, and then he said:

"Come, Stone, move quickly." He led the way downstairs to the back entrance, and to the stable, where we found a man with a team. He saluted us. It was the carriage in which Oakes's men had come out.

"Drive hard for the Harlem Station; we can catch the 10:30 train," was the order.

Our driver evidently knew what to do, and we soon passed out of the carriage-way.

At the side of the door we halted a moment, and I saw Oakes give the German a twenty-dollar bill.

"Remember," he said, "not a word."

We caught our train after a long drive to the east, and back over the Harlem River. When we seated ourselves in the sleeper, Oakes turned to me quietly. "Please remember, Stone, that you are a possible buyer, and that I am Charles Clark, agent for the owner of the Mark Mansion. We have had a pleasant evening together so far, have we not?"

He smiled in his quiet, unruffled manner as he spoke.

"Yes—rather active," I said. "I presume those other fellows are thinking so too, probably."

"Only the last two," said Oakes; "my men are home by this time."

Shortly after midnight we arrived at the station at the foot of the hill which hid the beautiful town of Mona.

"Keep your senses alert," said Oakes as we left the train, "for we are now in the region of uncertainty. We had better not walk to the hotel, although it is only about a mile. The hour is too late."

The solitary hackman, seeing us approach, roused himself from his sleepy lethargy and soon we were slowly ascending the hill. The well-kept road was lighted here and there by electricity, an agreeable witness to the civilization

around us.

I saw Oakes place his weapon in his outside overcoat pocket—as he said, the most convenient place for it to rest, clad as we were.

The action was a vivid reminder of the experiences of his last visit, and of the caution of the man.

Without further adventure of any kind we arrived at the little hotel, with its sleepy night clerk and its gloomy office. This opened right on the sidewalk by means of a large wooden door, hung a low step above the pavement, and fitting so poorly in its frame that the rays of the light from within sought exit beneath it.

CHAPTER V

The Letter

While Oakes and I were in the first stages of our journey, Dr. Moore stood in his back office at the close of business hours, wondering if the adventure that Oakes had so well described to us could in any way have been originated by other than physical forces. Moore was a deep student of mental phenomena. He had on more than one occasion heard histories of terrible tragedies, so real in their wording that the picture conveyed was the practical guarantee of their origin at human hands; but, nevertheless, these histories had been proved to be but the imaginings of a diseased mind—products of a delusion.

In every other respect the narrators had been, in appearance at least, perfectly sane individuals. While he hesitated to think that Oakes might have been suffering from an overworked brain at the time, still he knew that it was not impossible.

The struggles that the servants had heard had been those of Oakes; the actual evidences so far of assault were vague. Oakes was in a partially unconscious condition, to be sure; but what evidence of violence was that?

Moore's cool professional judgment told him that queer sensations are common after a severe shock, whether delusional in origin or not.

He had known Oakes for years, and the good judgment and coolness that he had always shown spoke greatly against a recently developed mental disorder.

Still, Moore was uneasy; he longed for more evidence of physical force from

without—something more positive.

Of course, Oakes was not alone in his experience—there had been others—but it was possible that the mere contagion of terror might be in part responsible for some of these. There had been no witnesses. The statement of violence rested on the word of the victims alone. Dr. Moore knew that men thinking constantly of the same thing, to the exclusion of all else, might develop similar delusions. The physician had seen many strange things, and was not a man to be easily deceived. Could it be that Quintus Oakes was the victim of a mental process?

It was this very power which Moore possessed—of thinking along such lines—that made him, in Oakes's opinion, a particularly desirable addition to the party. Little, however, did the detective imagine that the trained mind of the physician would first weigh the possibilities of Oakes's own mental instability.

While Moore was deep in thought, he was suddenly interrupted by the bell, and the receipt of a note which had been delivered by the postman.

He glanced at the postmark, and saw that it was from Station O and was mailed at 4:30.

Somehow, he felt an instinctive dread of its contents. Of course, he as yet had no adequate cause for misgivings; but there was that in the subject of which he had been thinking that seemed to forecast evil and dread. His mind was in a state of unrest at the very thought of the possibilities. He tore the letter open, and read:

> "DEAR DR. MOORE: You may not deem it wise to pay attention to an anonymous communication, but let me assure you that, if you value a life, you will pay attention in this case.
>
> "It has come within my province to know that a great tragedy may be averted by you.
>
> "Some short while ago a man, tall, straight as an arrow, and with blue eyes, went to the town of Mona and stopped at the Mansion. There he came near being murdered, and if he ever goes back, I personally know that he will be killed in short order.
>
> "His business was said to be that of an agent for the owners. I saw him in New York several years ago, and he was pointed out to me as a celebrated detective, but I cannot remember his name, or that of the person who informed me.

"At Mona he was known by another name. I cannot go there, however, or learn any more particulars. The reason I address this to you is that I know that you are acquainted with him, as years ago I used to see him often in your company.

"Now please communicate with this man; you are the only thread that I have to his identity.

"*Reach him, if possible, at once.* Warn him. Tell him to turn back—to abandon his quest, for death to him is the only alternative.

"Do not attempt to trace my identity. *Act*, and *act quickly*, if you wish to prevent a great horror."

The letter terminated abruptly. Dr. Moore realized in an instant that Oakes's movements were known to some outsider already—someone who had either been in Manhattan that day, or who had sent the letter there to one who had mailed it.

He saw the whole matter in a most serious light. Oakes was in danger from forces he did not suspect, perhaps, and the assault he had described had been known to others besides the immediate household of servants. For who, of that household, could have written such a letter?

Moore thought of his plans gone astray, of his business engagements, but they all paled into insignificance in the face of the danger to Oakes.

He decided to follow up Oakes by the very next train. Finding he had time for one or two calls, he rushed in his carriage to make them, and as he entered his office upon his return he found an energetic young man awaiting him. He knew him as Martin, one of Oakes's aides.

"Good evening, Doctor! You're on the rush tonight. My! but I had to hustle."

"Good evening! But how did you know so much of my movements—how, why, did you have to hustle?"

"I just arrived here a few seconds ago. I have been watching you this evening. Mr. Oakes told me to take care of you and keep you out of mischief. You see, he feared trouble of some kind. I was told to report to you once in a while—and here I am."

The physician understood, and then they discussed the recent development. It was agreed that Dr. Moore should leave for Mona; and this, after arranging his business by telephone and hastily making ready, he succeeded in doing.

As he boarded the train he asked of Martin, who was with him, if he was to go to Mona also.

"That depends upon who enters after you. If I think you are followed, I go too." And Moore realized that Oakes's hand of caution had been shown once more.

CHAPTER VI

The Murder

The rising sun was invisible from the little station hidden in the gloom of the hill, but away out on the river its rays reached the water and marked out sharply the shadow of the high ground.

Further down the stream the rugged outlines of the Mansion were cut in silhouette on the surface of the river, which was, as yet, smooth as a mill-pond, but which soon would be moved by those thousands of ripples advancing from the opposite shore.

As the sun shot his beams clearer and sharper, the mist of the distance unfolded and the rays struck the ragged granite cliffs of the shore, and revealed them yellow and gray in the bluish haze of the morn.

Away up, miles beyond, the river broadened and the mountains of both sides rose abruptly and ruggedly, apparently from the water's edge, causing the effect of a wide, placid lake.

All was quiet, lonely and dark on this side of the shore under the hill, but beyond, where the rays of the sun had reached, was beginning life and activity.

A schooner, becalmed until now, began to move with the breeze that greeted the waking of day.

The train had but just left the little station, and again had two strangers alighted. One, the older, trudged up the hill covered with a great-coat, and with hands in his pockets. He walked rather rapidly, looking sharply around once or twice. As he neared the top, where the country rolls off into the plain, he turned to admire the spectacle of the breaking day. His glance followed the road, and he saw

below the second figure walking along in a hurry, as though to make up for lost time.

He smiled and said to himself: "That fellow Martin is a persistent youngster, anyway."

A few yards more brought him to the crest of the hill; then he suddenly stopped, for before him was unfolded a stretch of rolling ground, well filled with trees in autumnal foliage, and beyond, the spires and the sky-line of a sleeping town. To his right he beheld a large wooded tract extending for at least a mile down the river, and in the dim distance the shaded outlines of an old mansion. Over all was the glorious yellow sun. The new fresh rays caught the leaves on the trees and on the ground, and kissed away the frost of the October morning. The traveller drew a long breath.

"I have been over the world, almost, but never did I know such splendor was so near my office," said he, half aloud. He had discovered what some few had already known, that here at our doors, if one is not too indifferent, can be found the scenery one seeks in a month's journey.

While walking along, Moore, for he was the man, was overtaken by a milk-wagon which rattled by with its two horses; the driver, lashing his whip, seemed to mark the actual awakening to life of this rural community.

"Say, how far to the hotel and which way?" asked Moore.

"Down the road a piece. Come, get in. I'll drive ye."

Moore jumped up alongside, and was thankful for the lift.

As they sped along, he started at a sound in the distance like the faint crack of a whip, but duller.

"What was that—a shot?" he said.

"Yes; rather early, but poachers like to get on to the Mark place 'most any time. Didn't sound like much of a gun, though."

They were now at the hotel, and Moore registered in the old dilapidated book, and went to his room before his breakfast. As he lay down for a moment to rest, all of the vivid experiences of the last twenty-four hours coursed through his brain. He followed the events of the evening before, and congratulated himself

on being now relieved from anxiety, for a time at least.

He had seen my name and that of "Clark," whom he knew to be Oakes, on the register, and had located our rooms as right opposite his own. Perhaps he had better communicate with Oakes and myself, now it was six o'clock, he thought. He looked into the corridor and saw no one about, for no attendant watches in these little hotels in the country. He locked his door, and knocked at Oakes's. In a moment he heard the key click, and Oakes looked carefully through the partially opened door. The recognition was quick and Moore was admitted.

In another moment I had joined them, for Oakes's room and mine communicated; he had thought it best that we should have access to each other at all times, if possible.

We two hastily dressed, and Dr. Moore presented the cause of his visit as briefly as possible.

"Let me see the letter," said Oakes.

He read it carefully. "One thing is certain—it is written by a person of some education. That proves nothing, however. It may have been dictated originally by a very illiterate person."

"It was sent from New York."

"Oh, yes," said Oakes wearily, "but it may simply have been written there. It may have gone under cover in different language—from any place almost—and been copied or put into shape by an accomplice."

"Hard to trace it," said Moore.

"Yes, practically impossible, along those lines. But in any event it was written on a woman's paper; see the texture."

We all noticed its fineness and agreed.

"And the odor of musk is not a man's favorite, either," remarked Oakes, as we noticed the scent. He was standing erect, with a slightly abstracted air. He was thinking.

"Well," said Moore, "we cannot find out much then."

"Oh, yes, you can."

"The letter speaks of the color of my eyes. The originator has seen me many times at close range. This is an unintentional clue. The style of the writing, the paper and the perfume point to a woman, but the wording is a man's, as is the description of myself, I judge."

"Well, what do you think?"

"I hazard a guess that the letter was written or dictated by a man of some education, and rewritten by a woman as a disguise."

"Ah! And where was it written?"

"That it is impossible to say. Perhaps in New York—but it may have been here in Mona. As I said, the originator is a man, probably, who knows me by sight, and knows Mona and its affairs very well, but who also knows New York and your city address, Moore; for the letter went there. By his knowledge of late events in Mona I should imagine that he perhaps lives here, but has recently been to New York, or else has an accomplice there—a woman—who rewrote and remailed the letter for him."

At breakfast we contrived to keep the waitress busy filling orders, for we wished to discuss our affairs and had no mind to be overheard. Oakes had prepared the proprietor for Moore's arrival, saying he expected him at any time; so his coming excited no particular attention. While the girl was out, the doctor narrated his morning's experience as far as the walk up the hill. We addressed Oakes as Clark, as had been previously agreed.

"Did Martin follow you?" asked the detective.

"Yes, I saw him ascending the hill after me."

Our leader thought a moment. "Curious! Why has he not made himself visible here? The chances are you were mistaken, Moore."

"Oh, no. I feel confident it was Martin."

We left the cheerless, low-ceiled dining-room and walked out into the corridor, where the porter was mopping the floor, and the cigar-stand opening for business.

I went over and bought something to smoke. Moore took one, but Oakes refused. That meant he was worried, and not at his ease. Presently the doctor remarked: "Seems to be shooting around here."

"How? What do you mean?" asked Oakes.

"Yes, I heard a shot when I was in the wagon. The milkman said it was poachers

on the Mark property."

Oakes wheeled and regarded Moore austerely.

"You heard shooting on the Mark grounds? Why did you not say so? You tell a poor story."

At this moment we heard a commotion outside, and the cry: "A runaway!"

We all stepped to the sidewalk, where a few early risers had gathered, and looked down the road. Coming over the crest of the hill from the station was a milk-wagon, rushing along at a terrific rate. The horses were leaping, with heads hung low. The smashing of cans was audible, even at the distance.

"That is no runaway," said Oakes. "Look at the horses' heads—they are low. Those animals are not scared."

We all looked, and beheld what Oakes had already noticed.

"Look at the driver," said a by-stander.

He was standing up on the dashboard plying his whip without mercy. By his side was a boy, hanging on for all he was worth.

In the quiet, self-possessed way that marks a leader in all emergencies, Oakes spoke up: "That is a race for help, boys, not a runaway."

Down the long road came the wagon—a heavy affair. Milk-cans were falling out and the roadway seemed scarcely enough for the swaying team. The driver, a strapping fellow, balanced himself as best he could, holding the reins with one hand and using the whip with the other. The intelligent animals were straining to their limit in dumb, intense brute desire to get there, or die. A murmur of applause arose from the crowd, and the country apathy gave way to subdued excitement. Never did Roman charioteer drive better! Never did artillery horses pull harder!

In a minute or so the team came abreast of us, and the driver, by a wonderful control of his animals, pulled up abruptly. He dropped his whip and held up his hand.

"There is a gentleman dying on the road by the top of the hill!"

"Who? Who?"

"I don't know, but he's on his face—with blood all over his back. He's been shot!"

Oakes turned to Moore. His arm made that quick, silent movement so peculiarly his own and rested lightly on the physician's shoulder.

"The shooting you heard," he remarked.

Moore turned pale and seemed almost to stagger. "Meant for me!" he blurted out.

"Yes, and Martin got it instead," said Oakes. "Come!" and in an instant he was off down the road.

We followed, and the crowd of about thirty closed in. It was a quick dash down that turnpike. Never had early-riser in Mona had such an experience before. The terrific flight of the milk-wagon and its dramatic ending had inspired life in the crowd. Hotel porters, barmen and milkman, gentlemen and loafers, all went down that road with one object in view—the succoring of a fellow being. As we ran, the strongest forged ahead. Moore and myself came abreast in the rear of the leaders, but near to the bunch.

"Terrible! Poor Martin!" said Moore.

"Keep quiet," I said between breaths.

A murmur arose in the crowd. "Look at that fellow," said a runner near us.

We looked. It was Quintus; he was steadily distancing all. "Gosh! Ain't he a beaut?" said another.

"Look at Oakes," said I.

"Shut up," said Moore. "Call him Clark, now."

The heavy breathing around us became noticeable; men were tiring now. It was a hard run. Away up in the lead was the solitary figure of our friend, running with body pitched a little forward and the long, even stride of the athlete. My mind now recalled that Oakes was a runner in college—a noted one in his day. Swish, swish! thump, thump! went the feet of those around us—and always that tall figure in the lead, taking the ground like a thoroughbred, and steadily increasing the distance between us.

As we reached the crest of the hill to turn down, the milk-wagons were

beginning to rumble behind us and the sounds of the approaching crowd of vehicles and belated citizens became distinct. We dashed down the slope and beheld Oakes—in the lead—halt, and bend over a figure. He seemed to be speaking to the injured man. As we drew near, we saw the blood and heard the sighing breathing.

"Dying!" said Moore, by my side.

We all encircled the victim, and Dr. Moore bent over him. Then he and Oakes straightened up suddenly, and removed their hats. We all knew what had taken place. The motley crowd uncovered, panting and pale-faced.

"Dead!" said Oakes, and turned to Moore, who had joined me in the crowd.

"Be careful," he said. "The murdered man is *not* Martin."

The rougher of the followers started to move the body, so as to see the face.

Again Oakes showed his power to lead. "Stop, men; this is a crime. Don't touch the body. Wait for the police and the coroner."

They obeyed. The first official now arrived on a wagon. He hesitated as he saw the bloody back; and then turned the face so that all could see it.

Several stepped forward, and a cry of consternation arose: "*It's Winthrop Mark!*"

CHAPTER VII

The Inquest

At the suggestion of Oakes, we mingled with the crowd for a short time and then returned to the town with some of the hotel employees, leaving the others in their excitement to await the action of the authorities.

"This man Winthrop Mark seems to have been very well known?" Oakes inquired of the hotel porter by his side.

The latter, anxious to identify himself with the town and its people, and also to please the stranger beside him who had made himself so prominent during the last few moments, gave much information.

"Yes, Mr. Clark, the murdered man has lived hereabouts for a long time; his brother owns the Mark Mansion over yonder; the town has been very proud of it,

you know."

"Yes, a beautiful old place."

"It is, sir. But no place to live in; there has been something dangerous about it, sir."

"Seems to me I heard something of it when I was last in Mona," said Oakes.

"Did you have any experience, sir?"

"Experience! What do you mean?"

"I do not know, sir, but *it* always appears. Something that scares people."

"Hurts the town, doesn't it?"

"Yes, indeed, sir; and this murder will spoil everything here now."

"I cannot quite follow you."

"Oh, sir, you don't know how good Mr. Mark was: Always improving the roads; always giving the town money; forever clearing up jealousies," said the porter.

Oakes looked at him: "Say, my man, how long have you been a porter? You don't speak like a man brought up in such work."

"I was not, sir. I used to be a merchant, years ago; burned out; no insurance; broke; went to work as a porter; nothing else to do. The old story, Mr. Clark; I am not the first one!"

We knew Oakes was seeking some information, so we remained quiet.

"Sad enough," said he; "perhaps times will improve for you."

The porter, Reilly by name, smiled and looked at Oakes with that expression of hopeful despair we have all seen, we who rub the world in our continuous efforts.

"Who could have shot Mr. Mark?" asked our companion, "did he have many enemies?"

"No, Mr. Clark. I know of none. But——" and the man paused.

"Well, what?" said the detective in an off-hand way.

"Well, it's peculiar," said Reilly, "very peculiar to me. Two or three years ago, sir, Smith, the leading man of the town, was shot at the very same spot in the road."

"What!" I cried; but a look from Oakes silenced me. "Indeed! quite a coincidence," said he. "Who shot him?"

"Nobody knows. I was just going to work when it happened."

"Early in the day, then?"

"Just about six o'clock, sir—and he was shot right through the chest," volunteered our informant. "Well, I hope they catch this fellow," said Oakes. "You have a good police chief here."

"Yes, sir, very. He came up here first for his health; but he was once chief in some large city."

"Ah, then he will get the murderer surely. Mona is fortunate in having such a man."

Reilly looked pleased at the compliment, and it seemed as though Oakes had won another follower.

Before we reached the hotel, we saw that the town was now wide awake. There were groups of men talking excitedly before nearly every business place—the bank, the dry-goods stores, drug-stores and newspaper offices. It was about their opening hour, and rumor had travelled fast.

On the main street, Oakes left us with a word of caution. "Be careful what you say. There may be a connection between this affair and the Mansion mystery, but—we know nothing of either. The inquest may tell us something. Meantime, you two find out what you can by mingling with the crowd. Learn all about Reilly; and anything you can pick up of the Smith murder he mentioned. I am going to see the Chief of Police; and, if possible, telephone to my office in New York."

Moore and I walked around in the fast-increasing crowd, and talked with those who were returning from the scene of the murder.

The people were settling down into a dull, sullen silence, as people will, after a great tragedy. This was a blow to the inhabitants here. The death of Mr. Mark was the loss of a friend to many, and of a leading citizen to all. Those engaged in business in what had been until recently a most prosperous little town foresaw

the probable after-effect on confidence and the town's future.

The demon of vengeance was rising in many hearts. The report of the coroner's jury was awaited with anxiety. The murderer would probably have escaped by that time—but better so—if once his identity could be discovered, than have another mysterious horror in the community.

The police headquarters, a trim little brick building facing the square and the hotel, was the centre of real activity.

Oakes made his appearance alone at the top of the steps coming out from the corridor that led to the Chief's room. As he stood at the door glancing calmly around at the crowd, I thought what a magnificent man he was. He stood erect and composed, as though inviting scrutiny. His long overcoat was not carefully closed—its collar was turned partly up. He had put it on like the rest of us, after our return from the run, and he had done it quickly. His left hand was hanging down in a natural position; his right was in his overcoat pocket. The Fedora hat was slightly tilted back. He looked a half-careless, indifferent fellow, but the keen eyes missed nothing; they rested on me, on Moore and then on the crowd. He was the embodiment of searching coolness. The crowd recognized him and knew that he had seen the Chief of Police. They reasoned as one man that something important had been done. The tall city fellow had been first at the side of the victim; they had seen that. What did he know? And then they thought of that run and the exhibition of physical perfection that his powers had shown; and like a gentle ripple on the brook came a murmur of admiration. Oakes stepped down and was the centre of much questioning. All the time the right hand remained in the coat pocket. I knew that it held death at command; that the revolver lay well in his grasp; that Quintus Oakes was now on guard, and the field was one with which he was well acquainted.

Soon he entered the hotel, and we followed him to his room. "You must be at the inquest—both of you. Dr. Moore, you are well known as a surgeon and will view the body with the local doctors. They wish you to do so. They say you are known to them by reputation. You will be required as an expert witness. I have made my identity known to the Chief of Police."

"Indeed," I said; "then everybody will know it."

"No, they won't," said Oakes. "The Chief knows me by name. I know all about him; he is a good, shrewd man. I have explained our mission here, and have disclaimed any desire to have anything to do with this mystery, unless—unless it

touches the other. The Chief, Hallen, wants my evidence, and he knows enough to see that we can all stand in together."

"He may help in the Mansion affair later," said Moore.

"Yes," said Oakes. "I thought I might need him. Anyway, this murder is for the police at present. I succeeded in getting long-distance telephone, and found that Martin did not come here at all. He returned to the office after seeing Dr. Moore off on the train."

"Good!" we exclaimed. "And what did you learn from the dying man? He spoke to you, we thought."

"I learned something that has great possibilities," said Oakes. "Wait for the inquest. What have *you* learned?"

I answered for us both: "Reilly is well known here and reliable. We could learn nothing of the Smith murder save that it had occurred about as this one, and was never solved. The old Chief of Police resigned on account of public opinion of his incompetency; the new Chief, Hallen, came in here a year or so ago."

"Well," said Oakes, "so far—so good; but it looks to me as though there is some connection between these murders. I do not envy the local officials a bit; the people won't stand much more mystery up here. Suspicion of one's neighbors is a terrible thing in a small community. By the way, when I give my evidence, watch me but little—watch the audience more. The criminal might be there!"

"Yes," said Moore, turning to me; "they often seek the court under such circumstances, don't they?"

"I believe it has been recorded," I rejoined. Then seeing Oakes move away, I asked where he was going.

"I am going to look around for a while."

"Better be cautious; you may be the next to get a bullet, for the criminal probably knows that you saw Mark alive. He may be anybody in town," I said.

"Anybody! Nonsense. You may clear the women and children at least. That wound was made by a heavy-calibre weapon; it takes strength to handle such."

Then he walked away.

The coroner empanelled the jury that afternoon. It was composed of milkmen, porters and farmers, and some men of more substantial condition; for instance, the leading banker and the secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association. They were all alert to the importance of their position, and anxious to appear well in this drama that was opening in Mona.

The jury viewed the body in the anteroom, and the wound was examined carefully. They marched into the court-room next to the apartments of the Chief of Police, and were seated before the bench. The large room was filled to its utmost with the representative men of the place. To my eyes, the scene was novel indeed. My practice had been in the courts of the metropolis, and the methods here interested me. They were simple, straight-forward people. The intensity of their faces, the hush of the crowd, was awesome. I obtained a seat facing most of the people, and Dr. Moore was by my side.

The room looked on a lawn which extended to the next street, and opposite to me were three windows, the centre one of which was open. At the open window was a young negro, handsome and well built. He leaned on the sill with folded arms, and, judging by the height of the window from the ground, I knew he was standing on a box or a barrel. A couple of other faces were visible outside the closed windows. The crowd within was uneasy, but quiet—a volcano in its period of inactivity.

Then the milkman who discovered the body related his story. He had come up the hill from the station and saw the body near the top of the hill. He saw the wound from his seat on the wagon, for, realizing what had happened, he did not alight. Fear had seized him. He knew he was perhaps watched by the assassin, so he had lashed his horses and rushed for the town and aid. The little boy who had ridden by his side was brave and cool in the court-room; the Chief of Police had his arm on his shoulder in a fatherly way. He corroborated the milkman's story, and said he was scared even more than his uncle, the driver.

One or two others certified to the finding of the body and spoke of the stranger, Mr. Clark, who had reached the place first, and of the wild run from the town.

Then came the coroner's physician, who certified to the nature of the bullet, a large one undoubtedly. Then he said in a courteous, professional way: "Gentlemen, we have by accident among us Dr. Moore from New York, who witnessed the finding of the body, and who has viewed the injury. Dr. Moore is a well-known surgeon, and perhaps he will favor us with an opinion—only an

opinion—of the nature of the weapon used."

The coroner bowed and motioned to Dr. Moore, by my side. The physician hesitated a moment, then advanced before the crowd of strangers. He was a surgical lecturer, but this was an unusual audience.

"Dr. Moore, you have seen many wounds from firearms, have you not? Please state where."

Dr. Moore answered in his pleasant voice: "I have seen quite a number in hospital service in the last ten years, and very many in Cuba during the Spanish War."

A murmur arose—the crowd hung on every word.

"State what your opinion is, please," said the coroner.

"To begin with," said Moore, "the bullet entered the breast; the point of entrance is large, about the size of a 44-bullet. I know it entered there, because a part of the coat was carried into the wound. It came out at the back under the right shoulder-blade and pierced that bone, tearing it partly away from its muscles. In piercing the bone it also fractured it, and made a large hole of exit, as was to be expected."

"Explain, please."

"Under some circumstances a bullet losing its speed pushes the tissues before it and makes a larger hole of exit than entrance, especially if it shatters the bone."

"What do you think of the nature of the weapon used?"

"In my opinion it was certainly no modern pistol or rifle; they are of smaller calibre and the powder used gives greater velocity, and less tearing is evidenced."

"How is that?"

"Well, a small bullet going at great speed makes a clean hole usually, at ordinary range. This was a large bullet, going only at moderate speed."

"Could a rifle have done it?"

"Yes, if fired at a long distance, so that the speed was slackening."

"What seems the probable weapon to you?"

"A revolver, because a rifle of large calibre, to have produced such a wound, must have been discharged at considerable distance, for the bullet was losing its velocity when it found the victim. Now, to have seen the victim from afar was impossible, the banks on each side of the road and the incline of the hill would prevent it. That, to my mind, excludes a rifle.

"The assassin could not have seen Mr. Mark much more than one hundred and fifty feet away, owing to the configuration of the ground. Had he been *much* nearer than that distance, the bullet would have travelled with greater speed than it did, and would probably have pierced the shoulder-bone without so much crushing and pushing effect.

"Thus we see that a rifle in this case could not have been used far enough away to cause such a wound. A heavy revolver discharged at good distance for such a weapon would have met the requirements, however; and I believe such a one was used. The assassin could not have been farther off than the configuration of the ground permitted—about one hundred and fifty feet—and judging from the wound, he was not very much nearer."

The crowd shifted and a deep sigh of emotion arose.

"Now, Dr. Moore, you arrived in town this morning! Please tell us what you know about the events that transpired," asked the coroner.

"Well, I arrived at six o'clock A.M. and walked up the hill. As I reached the top, I noticed a man coming up behind. A milkman came along and offered me a ride to the hotel—there he is," and he pointed to the fellow. "As we rode along, we both heard a shot, and I remarked upon it. The man in the wagon with me said it probably was a poacher. I have no doubt, sir, it was the murderer at work."

This was getting near the horror, and the court-room seemed to echo the deep breathing of the listeners.

Then the milkman, who had picked the doctor up, gave his testimony. He had entered the highway at the Corners and had seen a man coming up the hill. He drove in toward Mona, and picked up Dr. Moore, as related.

He corroborated Moore in his statements, and ended by saying that he went about his business after leaving Moore at the hotel, and knew nothing of the finding of the body by the other milkman and the boy, until about eight o'clock.

"I remember the shot; it was short and dull. We said it didn't seem like much of a gun."

"When did you hear the shot?"

"About 6.30, sir," was the answer.

"And, gentlemen of the jury," said the coroner, "Mr. Mark lived until seven, when he was found."

"If that shot was the one, he lived a long time. I believe he might have done so, however. The hemorrhage was not very severe. He may have lain unconscious for a while. As you know, the autopsy showed that the bullet entered in front and, striking a rib, followed that around and came out behind. It followed a superficial deflected course, as bullets frequently do. Men sometimes live a long time with such wounds."

More evidence, of an unimportant nature, was given. The station-master remembered the man getting off the train and following Moore. He knew him well; he was Mr. Mark, and had lagged behind and spoken to him.

The body was undiscovered before, because most milk-wagons entered the town at the Corners, and no one had alighted from the seven o'clock train to climb the hill.

Charles Clark was now called, and the spectators made room for Oakes, as he walked down and faced the audience. Watching the crowd, I saw its excited expectancy. Here and there was a man, pale as death, nearly overcome by the strain of the evidence. Everyone in that room knew that the important part was at hand. Many expected the name of the assassin. A man behind me sighed and said: "Gosh! why don't you hurry?" I knew that he was nearly ready to collapse.

Oakes, or, as Mona knew him, Clark, crossed his hands behind him and inclined his body a little. He glanced coldly around, then at the clock, and instinctively the audience followed the movement. I noticed that the time was four, and that the ticking was very heavy and noisy. Then I remembered Oakes's orders, and watched the crowd. The coroner went through the usual formalities, and Oakes began his testimony.

He spoke in that fluent style of his: "I reached the man ahead of the others; he was breathing. Realizing that his name was important, I asked him for it. He was conscious; he opened his eyes and looked at me. 'Mark is my name; all Mona is

my friend,' he answered. At mention of those words I heard a sob and then another outbreak; the audience was going to pieces."

Oakes resumed: "I then asked him, 'Who did this deed?' He seemed to be losing consciousness. I repeated the question. This time he answered, in an almost inaudible voice: 'The man—the man—with the great arms.'" As Oakes uttered this sentence, he did it in a strong whisper—heard clearly all over the court-room. He paused. Moore and I noticed that one-half the men in sight mechanically put their hands to their arms—curious is the effect of such scenes.

Others, seeing the actions of their comrades, glanced at them harshly and suspiciously, but instantly began to smile.

Just then the fat grocer thought it was funny, and laughed outright in a paroxysm of hysteria. The crowd began to titter, and then a roar, short, sharp, of pent-up emotion—a laugh of suppressed excitement—pealed forth like a thunder-clap; then all again was intensity.

Oakes now continued: "He did not say more, so I again asked quickly, 'Who did it? Speak, man! Speak!' Then he answered distinctly—it was a last effort."

The audience leaned forward in awed expectancy. The faces of some were hard and set, and the eyes of all were riveted on Oakes.

Moore whispered to me: "Watch the negro." I looked and saw him leaning forward over the window-sill, his face ashen gray; one arm held on to the sill, the other hung limply into the room.

"Mr. Clark, what did Mr. Mark say to you then, just before he died?" asked the coroner.

"He said: 'It was the fellow—the man with the blue cross on his left arm.'" As Oakes spoke, his voice became metallic and incisive, while his quick eyes suddenly swept the audience.

There was a shuffling of feet, a turning of bodies, and a man of weak nerves cried out: "The blue cross on the left arm!"

The negro made a lunge forward, swung both arms into the room, and cried out: "Oh, Gawd! Oh, Gawd!" then dropped on the other side of the wall.

The Chief of Police stood up and pointed to the window.

"Catch that coon," he cried.

The tumult which followed was a relief, but the crowd lost sight of the negro. No one had ever seen him before, and he escaped—at least for the time being.

The jury brought in a verdict "that Mr. Mark came to his death at the hands of a party or parties unknown."

As Dr. Moore and I discussed matters later, we could but agree that the identity of Quintus Oakes had apparently been well hidden in that of Charles Clark, the agent, and that our first day in Mona had been a memorable one.

CHAPTER VIII

The Mansion

Mona was situated on a plateau terminating rather abruptly at the river on the west, and elevated well above its waters. In the neighborhood of the station it was high, and a long climb. A mile farther down stream, where the Mansion sat on the edge of the cliff, the elevation was not so great—perhaps a hundred feet or more above the railroad tracks by the river. The Mansion end of the plateau was lower, therefore, than the town. Beyond, up the river, the land lay at the same elevation as Mona. The beautiful place itself was some distance back from the crest of the plateau and was approached from the river by the highway we had known so well that day. This was intersected at right angles on the plain above by River Road, which ran parallel to the waters below.

The junction of these two roads was known as "The Corners." Upon following River Road for nearly a mile toward the south one would arrive at the Mansion gate.

The other road—the Highway, as it was called—led directly to Mona, in the centre of the plateau which gradually terminated to the north, south and east in the rolling hills of that region.

Never was town site better selected; never was place more hopeful until recently, when the blackness and gloom of the unoccupied Mansion, with its tale of dread, seemed to have extended to men's minds and laid its grasp of uncanniness and uneasiness on business and pleasure. And now, to make the slough of despond deeper, had come the sharp, quick act of a murderer—above all, an unknown assassin—and a crime similar to one scarce forgotten.

The Mansion gate opened directly from River Road, and a walk of about two hundred yards brought the visitor to the front door. The back of the Mansion faced the river directly to the west, the balcony of the back parlor and dining-room half-circled the south and west sides of the house, and had evidently been much used. The woodwork was old and the flooring quite worn. The front of the place was pillared in old Colonial style, and was of stone, hewn in the rough and built in a permanent fashion.

Across River Road, right in front of the gate, came an uneven roll of the country, or break in the plateau. The ground billowed deeply for at least a quarter of a mile, parallel to the road. The slope from the road was gradual to a little pond of considerable depth at the bottom of the depression. On the farther side the ground rose more abruptly, but not so high as on the Mansion side. The pond itself was about one hundred feet in width; and one standing by the Mansion exit could see both the pond and the ascent beyond, and, over the crest of the billowy ground, the distant woods and the country to the east.

Down from the road a little path dipped, and at its foot a frail bridge crossed the pond; for here the two shores were quite close. Either shore projected into a point, and about fifty feet of bridge had been built with logs, resting half-way on a rude pillar of stones in the water. This bridge continued the path up the far slope and over the crest beyond. It was a short cut to the country and the southern suburb of Mona.

Within the grounds of the Mansion, extending northward to the Highway and the scene of the murder, and southward into the uninhabited country, was a forest of oak and of elm, interspersed with an occasional fir. One could easily wander between the trunks of these trees, but having entered a few rods, all traces would be lost of the outside world. It afforded an excellent shelter for anyone desiring to escape detection.

We noticed all these points as we drove to the Mansion next morning. We found the care-takers awaiting us, and more than glad to again see Mr. Clark, as they knew Oakes.

The events of the day before had crowded fast upon us, and had left us well known in the town. The name of Clark was on every tongue. Oakes remarked that morning, before we started for the Mansion, that he hoped the people would not identify him. "If they do, we cannot help it, however," he said; "we cannot control events like these." Then he suddenly asked me: "How about that negro?

He was handsome, you say?"

"Yes, rather black, with remarkably clear-cut features."

"Indeed! Then he may be traced through his good looks."

"Do you think he is the murderer?"

"That's difficult," said Oakes; "but I should think not. Had the deed been done by a negro boy, the victim would have remembered it; they are uncommon here. He would have said, 'A negro, good-looking,' or something of that sort. His color would have impressed the dying man."

"Well, why was the negro so scared?" I asked.

"Probably recognized the description as that of someone he knew."

"Perhaps not," said Moore. "He may have been just emotional; the race is very superstitious."

"If I make no mistake," continued Oakes, "Mona is going to see queer doings. The people's minds are at a great tension. In any event, this affair is not ours. That is—not as we see it now."

Our welcome from the servants seemed genuine in its sincerity, and Cook and his wife ushered us up to our rooms. The hall from the front door was a long one, and the stairs leading to the upper floor was broad and well carpeted. Our rooms, two in number, were over the parlor and the dining-room, the latter the scene of the occurrences so frequently described. Oakes was given the back room looking on the river, and over the balcony; Moore and I occupied the front room, over the parlor. On the other side of the hall were two large rooms—guest chambers, we were told. They formed the roof of the dance or reception hall below—to the right of the door as we entered—and always kept locked, as Annie told us. In fact, the dance hall and the two large chambers overhead formed the north side of the house and had not been used for many years. According to tradition, the hall had been a gay centre in the years gone by, when the Mansion was the leading house in the village. It had now lost its prestige to new and magnificent residences of the rich New York men of affairs, who had recently come into the town to make it their home and to transform all its social conditions and to add life and new energy to the country around.

During the forenoon we examined the downstairs rooms pretty thoroughly. We

did it in an unostentatious manner. The rooms had several windows, and the front one facing the road in the distance had a large fireplace. Oakes examined this carefully and shook his head in a negative manner.

The back room facing the river on the west, the lawn and the estate on the south, was the dining-room. Its four large windows, two on each side, extended down, in the old style, to within a foot of the encircling porch. Again there was a large fireplace, and I looked over it closely; but it was solidly built and seemed to have been undisturbed for years. The entire room was paneled in oak, and this appeared to be new.

"It was right here that I had my experience," said the detective, as he stood by the windows to the west.

I was near the centre of the room, leaning upon the table, and Moore was farther along on the other side of the fireplace, near the eastern wall. We were quite interested in the place, and I am sure I felt anything but secure.

Dr. Moore laughed in his careless way. "Look out, old fellow," said he, "it will catch you again."

Oakes and I stepped out on the balcony, through the low-silled window, and looked across the river. I heard a rustle, I thought—a half-muffled tread; a swish, a peculiar noise—and Oakes jumped to the centre of the balcony.

"Look out! That's the noise," cried the detective.

We both glanced toward Moore, and saw a terrible sight. The strong man was unsteady on his feet, his knees were bent, and his head thrown forward. Great drops of perspiration were rolling off his pale face. He looked like a man about to fall. "Help, for God's sake, help!" he cried, and clutched at his neck.

That instant the physician came across the room, hurled by terrific force. I caught him as he fell, and saved him from an injury against the table. He was overcome completely; he held his neck in a pained position and groaned.

Oakes, weapon in hand, advanced to the hall. We all heard a distant muffled noise, preceded by a slam. At that instant our attention was called to the balcony. A figure jumped on the porch from the west side and dashed past the windows, leaving the balcony near its southern end, and disappearing in the trees beyond.

"A man!" said Oakes, "and he was hiding behind the porch."

"Yes, but *he* did not do it; how could he have run there so quickly?" I answered.

"Better take Moore upstairs," saying which, Oakes jumped from the room, and instead of going out of the front door, he sprang to the west end of the hall near the dining-room, and opened a door I had not noticed.

"Where are you going?" said I.

"Into the cellar. Don't follow, unless I shoot." He was gone.

I partly carried, partly helped Dr. Moore up to his room and placed him on the bed. He was pale, and I realized he was shocked. I found my flask, and gave him a good drink, and then saw that the back of his neck was bleeding. I bathed it, and tied it up in a clean towel.

As I worked, he held his revolver in his hand and watched the door, talking quickly and earnestly. He told me about how he had wondered if Oakes were insane, then of the assault on himself; how he had heard the noise and had certainly been attacked by some living being, and was satisfied that his suspicions could not be correct. He had been thoroughly converted. All this took some time, and now we were wondering what had become of our friend. The minutes passed, and I decided to descend and see what the servants were doing, and raise an alarm.

Just as I was setting off we heard two pistol cracks, muffled, but the noise from cartridges such as we carried, nevertheless. I grasped my weapon and started downstairs. As I reached the top of the landing, I heard the cellar door close with a bang on the floor below, and heard a slow tread ascending the stairs. I retreated, so as to aid my wounded companion.

The tread advanced along the hall. It was that of a man, limping. The next instant we recognized Oakes's voice: "Where are you, anyway?"

We spoke, and the next instant he appeared on our threshold, revolver in hand, with his face pale and drawn, and his figure less erect, less self-reliant than usual.

He was bloody from a wound on his head, and his clothes were torn in shreds. He steadied himself with his left hand against the door frame.

"Great goodness, Oakes, what is wrong?" said Dr. Moore, rising to help his friend.

"What the devil!" I exclaimed. "Where have you been?"

"In the cellar," said Oakes.

"What have you been doing?" said Moore, in a most excitable way.

Back came the answer in a feeble tone: "Really, I don't know. Having a little practice, I guess."

"Catch him, Stone," cried Moore.

I jumped forward, and the stalwart figure dropped vertically—collapsing at the knees, then pitched headlong into the room.

I saved the face before it struck the floor.

CHAPTER IX

Distrust and Suspicion

The day following the murder of Winthrop Mark was one of uneasiness and dejection for the towns-people of Mona. The court scenes of the day before and the great excitement caused by the discovery of the crime had left their stamp. Disquietude was bred and nurtured by the crime itself, and the absence of clues save those of the arm. It was rumored and reiterated that Chief Hallen had failed to discover the slightest evidence as to the perpetrator, and that the bullet even had remained unfound, as was most natural; but people look at things in a narrow light sometimes, and this was an occasion of deep trouble and much gossip for the town.

The peculiar action of the negro, whom few had seen but all had heard, and who was pronounced a total stranger by those who had seen him, pointed strongly to him as the possible assassin. With his escape had come mutterings against Chief Hallen. Why had the court-house not been watched? Where were the local authorities? Why had he been allowed to get away so easily? All these questions remained unanswered, for few stopped to think that there were *no* local detectives, and only a few local policemen.

Then in the midst of these disgruntled thoughts and assertions appeared the mental picture of Clark, known in the town before, and now the most conspicuous man in it, towering above all in his active personality, as in his figure and sayings. Talk is cheap in such a place, and talk has made or unmade

many a man. The great run of Clark to the victim's side and the dramatic and terrible evidence he gave at the inquest was spoken of—at first with awe, and then with alarm. And to think he had gone to the Mansion to spend a short time again, gone to the place of all others that one should avoid at this time—gone to the house where terror dwelt and at the end of whose grounds the murder had been committed! Hallen, whose word was known to be "law," had vouched for this. The personality of Clark—stood silhouetted on the sky of lowering discontent.

The only clue worth having was that one relating to the arms of the murderer, and, given to the public as it purposely had been by Clark in a moment of suspense, it had found deep rooting place in all minds. Who was the man with the great arms, and with the "blue cross" on one of them—the left?

Here was a small town—perhaps one thousand grown men. Who had the cross—who? Might it be *anyone*? Yes, almost *anyone*! Did anyone know of such a scar? No, but who knew of his neighbor's arms? Who could vouch for his friend? Some few had been associated, one with another, as boys. What of that? It was years ago.

Suspicion was growing like a prairie fire, first a light that goes out, then flickers again and smoulders, anon meeting resistance and apparently dying; but all the while treacherously gaining and advancing in the roots and the dry stubble below, then suddenly bursting into flame. With the first flame comes the inrush of air; then come the heat and the smoke and the low wall of fire; then the glare, the roar and the conflagration sweeping all before it.

So came suspicion to Mona. And friendship, respect and brotherly love fled at its breath, as wild animals of the prairie flee before the advancing destruction.

By evening of the second day the far-sighted and most influential citizens detected the condition of affairs. The older residents had noticed the peculiar similarity of this murder to that of Smith. The coincidence of time and place was another factor. Could it be the same assassin? Had he dwelt with them all the while since? The most respected and wealthy of the inhabitants shared the unenviable position of being under suspicion; there was no relief for anyone.

The two local newspapers published "extras," and could scarcely supply the demand. The murders of Smith and Winthrop were reviewed carefully, and their similarity much written about. The hotel and the two leading business streets were filled with suspicious, muttering groups.

Nothing had been found missing from the dead man; his watch and money were untouched. His arrival by such an early train was not unusual. He frequently went to New York for an outing, and returned before breakfast to his magnificent place on the hill to the east of the town, where he lived with two old maiden aunts—his mother's sisters.

Now all this uneasiness and suspicion had been noted—by Hallen, the Chief. He was a man who, after living in the country for many years, had finally pushed himself to the top of a large police force in a city of importance. The physical strain had told on him, however, and now he found himself back in a small town, recovered in health, but shut in as to future prospects. The murder of Mark had come to him as a thunderbolt from a clear sky, but he saw opportunities in it. When Oakes had visited him and made himself known, he had at first been jealous; but the former, with his wonderful insight, had made a friend of him.

"Hallen, if you manage this affair well, you will be famous. They are looking for good men in New York all the while. My work is in the Mansion; if our paths cross, let us work together."

So had suggested Oakes. He had known about Hallen, as he knew the history of all police officers, and had thus given hope to the man who had been used to better things. Instantly Hallen had seen that to antagonize Oakes would be foolish; to aid him, and perhaps obtain his advice and friendship, would ultimately redound to his own future credit and, possibly, advancement. For Oakes's work had brought him in contact with police heads in all the large cities. His boldness and genius for ferreting out mysteries were known to them all, and they had paid him the compliment of studying his methods carefully.

Hallen had agreed to have Oakes's testimony at the inquest taken at just the proper moment for effect, and had agreed to call Dr. Moore as an expert.

Of course, the coroner did what the Chief asked.

As Oakes had said: "If you want expert evidence, get it from Moore; if you don't ask him, you won't get it in Mona."

The idea of Oakes bringing in his testimony as he did was part of the plan to watch the audience. The planning of the Chief and himself had accounted for the somewhat informal presentation of the evidence that I had noticed. In rural courts, affairs are not conducted as they are in the city, and I had observed a quick swing to affairs, hardly accounted for on the ground of practice. I

recognized the hand of Quintus Oakes, and knew that the scene had been carefully manœuvred.

Hallen sat in his office on the evening of the day after the inquest, reviewing the happenings that had crowded so fast in Mona, and thinking, not without misgivings, of the wave of suspicion that was rising to interfere with the affairs of the town.

At this moment the editor of the "Mona Mirror" entered—a whole-souled, fat individual, breezy and decidedly agreeable. He was one of the natives, a man of growing popularity and decided education. Dowd was his name, and he hated *that fellow Skinner*, who edited the rival newspaper, the "Daily News."

Skinner had "bossed" things in a free-handed fashion until Dowd (a clerk in the post-office until middle life) had decided to enter the field of journalism—less than two years before. Dowd was inexperienced, but he was bright, and he wielded a pen that cut like a two-edged sword; and the love that was lost between the two editors was not worth mentioning.

As Dowd entered and found Hallen alone, he took off his hat and overcoat, and laughed sarcastically. He really liked Hallen, and was on intimate terms with him. Hallen looked up. "Well, what's ailing you now?" he said.

"Oh, nothing. Only this town is going loony, sure as fate, Hallen. What are you going to do?"

Hallen chewed the end of a cigar viciously. "I am going to do the best I can to solve the mystery; if I cannot do that, I can at least keep order here. Give me a few 'specials' and the necessity, and I will make these half-crazy people do a turn or two."

The burly chief turned the conversation into other channels, but Dowd was satisfied. He knew the speaker well.

CHAPTER X

The Cellar

Meantime our first experience at the Mansion, previously recorded, bade fair to be a serious one. When Oakes had collapsed on his return from the cellar Dr. Moore fortunately was sufficiently recovered to reach his side in a few seconds.

"Elevate his feet, Stone. He'll be all right in a few minutes; he has fainted."

I did as directed, and Moore threw the half of a pitcher of water on the unconscious man's neck and face. Gravity sent the blood back to his head, and when the water touched him, he gasped and presently opened his eyes. Then we carried him to the bed.

In an instant he attempted to rise, but the Doctor refused to allow it, giving him instead an enviable drink from his flask. "Keep your guns by you," said Oakes, "and give me mine."

The tension had told on me, and Moore was now by far the best man. He smiled and ordered me to take a drink also, and to sit down. I obeyed, for I felt, after the excitement, as limp as a boy after his first cigar.

Dr. Moore was examining Oakes's head. "Fine scalp wound," said he, and proceeded to sew it up and dress it. His pocket case came in handy. He had been wise to bring it. "Hurt anywhere else, old fellow?" asked he.

"No; sore as the devil all over, that's all," and Oakes arose, took off his coat, and began to bathe his face. "Keep an eye on that door," said he.

I was myself now, and took my chair to the hall door, sitting where I could command the head of the stairs and could also hear anyone who might approach from below.

"What happened?" asked Moore.

"Well, nothing very much," said Oakes; "only I guess I got a mighty good licking."

"You look it," said I. "Did you shoot for help?"

"Yes, I did. I could not *shout*. The shots saved my life."

"How? Did you kill anyone?"

"Don't know, only the other party kindly quit killing me when I began to shoot. I heard something drop, however, and there may be a dead body somewhere."

The shots had aroused the household, and we heard shouting and cries from the Cooks and from Annie. Soon they appeared, hunting for us, all distraught and frightened. They said they were in the kitchen when they heard the shots, and did

not know whence they came. This was probable, as the cellar was away from their section. Annie cried when she saw Oakes, and ran out to bring in more help. One of the gardeners returned with her, and as he came into the room I received the impression of a silent, stern-looking man, past forty and rather strong in appearance, although not large. He had seen better days.

"Ah!" said he; "ye have run up aginst it agin, sorr. It's nerve ye have, to go nigh that room after what ye got last time." Oakes looked at me and at Moore, and we saw he wished us to keep silent.

"Yes! I shan't try it again in a hurry. What's your name?" he asked.

The question came quick as a flash. I knew he was trying to disconcert the fellow.

"My name is Mike O'Brien, sorr, gardener; you remimber, 'twas me that helped you last time, sorr."

"You mean you stood by and let the others help me, Mike."

We knew now that this was the indifferent gardener of whom Oakes had spoken.

"Thrue for ye, sorr; 'twas little enough I did, and that's a fact; I'm not used to being scared to death like ye be, sorr." Was that an unintentional shot, or was it a "feeler"?

Oakes had a sharp customer before him, and he knew it.

"Where were you when you heard the shots, Mike?"

"In the woods at the front of the house. I was raking up the leaves, be the same token."

"What did you see?" Oakes spoke in a commanding voice and fingered the breech of his revolver in a suggestive way.

"I seen a shadow come out av the cellar door."

"What door?"

"The *only* cellar door; near the side av the house, sorr."

"What sort of a shadow?"

"'Twas the shadow av a man, and a big one. The sun cast it on the side av the house, sorr."

Oakes thought a moment, then arose and said: "Step here, Mike, and point out the side of the house you mean."

Mike hesitated. The other servants withdrew at Oakes's suggestion that he wished to talk with the gardener. The latter advanced. We felt that Oakes was trying to spring a trap.

"The side of the house where the cellar door is," reiterated Mike.

"Nonsense, O'Brien. Your story is impossible. The sun was then in the east and the shadow would have been thrown on the east wall. There is no door on that side; it is on the west side of the house."

O'Brien looked at Oakes defiantly.

"Yer intirely wrong, sorr. *There is* the cellar door to the east." He pointed to a hatch, opening about forty feet from the house, near the well. "The door *ye* saw on the west is niver opened—'tis nailed up."

The tables were turned. Oakes was disconcerted.

"If what you say is true, you have my apology. I have not investigated closely."

"So I thought, sorr," was the answer. And we all wondered at the amazing coolness and self-possession of the man. It was one against three, and he had held his own.

"Sit down, Mike," said Oakes. "How long have you been here?"

"Only a matter av six weeks. I came from New York and tried for a job. Maloney, the head man, giv me wan."

"Where is Maloney?"

"He was in the tool-house whin I come by, sorr. He didn't hear the commotion, being sort o' deef."

"All right, Mike! Stay where you are a moment." Then Oakes turned to us.

"Just after Moore was attacked I heard a sound like a quick footstep, and having certain suspicions of my own, made a dash for the cellar. I found there was no

cellar under the north wing; but toward the west, and directly beneath the dining-room, was a door. As I opened it all was dark; but my eyes soon accustomed themselves to the light, and I made out a good-sized chamber—and what I took for a man near the farther end. I remained silent, pretending I had seen nothing, and, closing the door, made a movement back up the cellar stairs. There I waited for about five minutes. The ruse worked. The door of the chamber opened, and a man, dressed in a dark cloak and a mask, partly emerged, and, I *thought*, started for the other stairs at the west end of the cellar. I jumped and grappled with him, but he struck me with the butt end of a revolver, and I was dazed; in another minute, he was punishing me severely. I fired two shots, then he threw me away from him and disappeared. He was stronger than anyone I ever met," said Oakes, apologetically, "a regular demon, and he got in the first blow. I think I wounded him, however."

"What shall we do?" said Moore.

"Go quickly and investigate," was the answer. "Here, Mike, you lead the way."

Mike did not hesitate. If playing a game, he did it well.

"Want a gun?" said Oakes.

"No, sorr, not if youse all are armed. Guess we can give him all the scrap he wants."

We descended the stairs, Oakes last, as became his condition. He touched Moore and myself, and pointed to Mike. "Watch him; he may be already armed," he whispered.

The cellar was lighted by one window at the western end. A door at the same end, which evidently led to some stairs, was padlocked, and, as Oakes said, had not been recently opened. The dust lay upon it undisturbed and the padlock was very rusty. This corroborated Mike's story. The door above that opened on the ground. It was boarded up, he said.

No means was found of passing beneath the dance hall, as Oakes had said. From the lay of the ground, we concluded that the cellar was very low there and not bottomed—a shut-in affair such as one finds in old buildings of the Colonial epoch. Across the cellar, to the other side—the south—the same thing pertained except at the western extremity under the dining-room; there a door opened into a cellar room or chamber.

"Here! take this," said Oakes, handing Mike a small pocket taper. "Light it."

Mike did as told, and stepped into the room, I after him. Oakes held the cellar door open, and I, happening to look at him, saw that he was watching Mike as a cat watches a mouse. He had dropped a match at the moment, and, with his eye still on the gardener, stooped to pick it up. His hand made a swift, double movement, he had the match and something else besides; but Mike had not observed, and I, of course, said nothing.

The room was low and without windows, but the air was remarkably clean and fresh. "Plenty of ventilation in here," said I.

"Yes, and blood too," said the gardener.

Sure enough, the floor was spattered with it.

"Mine, I guess," said Oakes. "Moore, kindly fetch a lamp from upstairs. Ask Annie for one."

Moore went, and soon brought down a small lantern. We could hear Cook's voice at the head of the stairs; also his wife's and Annie's. It was the long-expected hunt that no one had ever before made, and which might clear up the mystery at any time.

By the better light we saw evidences of the struggle that had taken place—a strip of Oakes's coat, and a piece of glazed red paper an inch or so long, and perhaps half as broad—white on one side, red on the other.

"Piece of a mask," said I; and Oakes placed it in his pocket.

Dr. Moore walked to the east side of the room, where he and I saw a door in the wall, and some plastering on the floor under it. Mike was busy examining a heap of rubbish at the other end. His conduct had been most exemplary. Moore turned the light on the door, and we three observed it for a moment. Mike had not seen it distinctly, if at all.

"Moore, come here," said the detective, retreating; and the Doctor followed with the light.

"Come on, Stone." I left the room with them.

"Curious!" he heard Mike say behind us.

"What is curious?" asked Oakes.

The smart hired man answered. "Mr. Clark, the air is good in here. Where does it come from?"

"I guess we have learned all we need this time, Mike," was the reply, and the gardener came out reluctantly.

Oakes had seen the door in the wall: it was all he wanted to know. He closed the outer entrance of the room, and called to Cook for hammer and nails. The man brought them quickly; then the leader took a board that was standing against the wall, and Mike and Cook nailed it across the door from frame to frame.

"Mr. Clark, ye will *have* the devil now, sorr," said Mike.

Oakes took a pencil out of his pocket and wrote "Clark" on one end of the board; then with a single movement continued his hand over its edge carefully, and on to the frame, where the line terminated in a second signature—"Clark."

"Anyone removing that board has got to put it back to match that line," said Oakes, "and that with a board is practically impossible where nailing has been done. Now for the exit that opens near the well."

We went back through the cellar hall and found at the east end a door ajar. It did not lock, and was hung on rusty hinges. Beyond was a dark passage.

"Where does this lead, Mike?"

"To the opening by the well, sorr."

"How do you know?"

"I don't know, myself, but Maloney said the outside opening by the well led into the cellar; Cook says so, too. 'Tis a passage they used in wet weather, sorr."

"Mike, you and Cook go round and guard that outer door by the well. Open it. I'm going through."

"Mr. Clark, don't go in there alone!"

"I'll attend to that," said Oakes. "You go with Cook."

The two went to the well and lifted the hatch door. As they did so, Oakes held a lighted match inside one end of the tunnel. It blew strongly toward us; the air

was rushing in, and we knew the passage led to the opening. We heard their voices calling to us. Dr. Moore spoke.

"Oakes, you shall *not* go in there; you have done enough to-day; you are a wounded man." I caught up the lantern and my revolver, and Moore followed.

"Hold on!" said Oakes. "You are in the most dangerous part; don't be rash. Here, Stone, you go first—and Moore, you follow about ten feet behind, without a light, in order that you may be undetected. Take matches. I'll stay here with the taper, and watch. When you get to the other end, don't go up the steps leading to the ground until both Mike and Cook show themselves. We know nothing about them, you know. Be cautious. The man we want went out this way, whoever he is."

I threw the light ahead and advanced some ten feet. I heard Moore following. "Careful!" said he in a whisper.

Again I threw the light ahead, and beheld only the walls of the square tunnel. I could hear the breathing of Moore behind me. I knocked on the wall here and there with my revolver; it rang true and solid. We gradually advanced until we beheld the daylight and saw the men waiting at the head of the stone steps.

I ascended. Moore took the lantern and called back to Oakes, addressing him as Clark. In a moment he came.

"Stay where you are, Stone," said he to me. "Come here, Mike."

Mike descended willingly enough. I watched Cook and looked all around.

"Open that door." Oakes pointed to a little wooden opening in the side of the stairs. Mike obeyed, but instantly closed it again with a bang.

"A man!" said he.

Oakes and Moore levelled their revolvers.

"Come out," said the detective, "or take the consequences. I shall shoot."

Mike opened the door again, hiding his figure behind it for protection as it swung out. I expected to see some one shot, but Moore threw the light in, and instantly Oakes dived forward into the alcove of stone. We could hear him chuckle. Cook, at my side, was standing on one leg in his excitement. Then Dr. Moore burst into laughter.

"What is it? What's the matter?" I cried. I could not see very well, and ran half-way down. Oakes was standing beside Moore, trying to look grave. In his hand was a red paper mask and a long black robe!

O'Brien looked on, his eyes twinkling, but his face serious. "I'm thinking it's lucky, Mr. Clark, sorr, that ye saved yer ammunition," said he.

"Yes," retorted Oakes, "and it's still more fortunate you're a good actor."

O'Brien's somewhat insolent manner changed instantly to one of civility, and Oakes turned to us.

"No wonder some said there was a woman in this affair."

Then he ordered the hatch door nailed down, and handed the things to me. "Please take these upstairs, Stone; we must investigate this more fully," and we withdrew to discuss our findings.

"What do you think of O'Brien, Oakes?" I asked. "He seems to be a cool sort of a customer."

"Yes, he is no ignoramus. He's a shrewd fellow, and a deep one; but I have learned a few things."

CHAPTER XI

The Night Walk

Events were following each other rapidly at the Mansion. After leaving the cellar, Oakes led us back through the grounds, around the south side of the house. There was no entrance to the cellar there, apparently.

When we reached our rooms and I had deposited the mask and gown on my table, Oakes turned to the care-taker, Cook, who accompanied us: "You have been several years here, have you not?"

"Yes, Mr. Clark."

"When did the first trouble begin?"

"About three years ago, sir, following some repairs that were made after Mr. Odell Mark bought the place from his brother."

"What do you know of those repairs?"

"Well, sir, as perhaps you have noticed, the door from the dining-room to the parlor opens on a short hall about three feet deep. Now, sir, Mr. Odell Mark had the wall thickened between the rooms; he thought it was weak, and this hall represents the thickness of the wall."

Oakes stood at the window, his hands in his pockets, looking out.

"Did you see that wall being built yourself, Cook?"

"I didn't notice particularly, sir."

"Well, Stone, we'll try the simplest theory first. Will you kindly go with Cook up to the roof and look around carefully. I have an idea that the wall is double, and that you will find an opening up there somewhere."

We went, and, as Oakes had surmised, soon found a small opening like a chimney, grated in solidly and protected by a covering, and so reported.

"Good!" said Oakes. "The wall is double—in part at least—and the opening was carried into the cellar room and a door placed there."

"What for?" said I.

"Perhaps to ventilate it. We may find some other reason."

"We seem to be solving the mystery," was Moore's comment.

Oakes looked at him quizzically. "Are you satisfied, Doctor, that there is a physical agent at work here?"

Moore grew red. "Certainly," he said. And Quintus smiled.

"I thought probably you would be convinced in time. A thorough licking is an excellent argument. It is my belief that the escapes were made through that double wall, and that we shall find movable panels in the dining-room."

"But the motive! We are strangers; we gave no provocation," I cried.

"We have yet to learn the motive; also *why* a man should wear a robe. The mask is sensible enough, but why he impeded himself with a robe is beyond us as yet. It would hide his body, to be sure, as the mask would hide his face, but it would

certainly greatly affect his chances of escape, if pursued. Cook, why was no investigation ever made before?"

"I don't know, sir. Mr. Odell was very timid."

"Did you ever go through the tunnel to the well?"

"Yes, sir. I used to go before the mystery began, but never afterward."

"How about the place in the stairs where the robe was found?"

"That was always there, sir, and used for the gardener's tools."

"Then the gardener knew of it?"

"Maloney, the older one, did, I am sure; he has been here a long time."

"Was he here before the mysteries?"

"Yes, sir, he has been five years on the place."

"Cook, what do you think of the murder of Winthrop Mark?"

It was one of those sudden questions that sometimes bring results.

"I don't know, sir—it is terrible, sir, of course."

"Where was Maloney yesterday, Cook?"

The man looked long at us. "He was here when I got up at six o'clock, raking the leaves on the front walk."

"Indeed!" said Oakes. We could not tell whether the answer surprised him, or not.

"I suppose Mike worked all day?"

"Yes, sir, he was about on the place the entire time."

Oakes made no remark whatever at this, but dismissed Cook.

"We cannot go too far in presence of the servants," said he, "for I am only Clark the agent here, you remember. The time is coming when we may have to declare ourselves and we may need police help to make arrests, but," he smiled, "we have Hallen as a friend, I guess."

Oakes was calmly sanguine, I could see, but of course he did not know that collateral events were brewing of grave importance to us all.

"Now for the robe and mask," said he.

I handed over the mask, an old affair and considerably worn from usage. A piece of it was missing, which Oakes replaced with the fragment of paper picked up in the cellar; it fitted exactly, settling the fact that the mask had been worn by the man who fought him in that place.

The detective looked it all over and said: "This is such as was sold in New York years ago. It is ordinary, and offers no clue as to the owner or the place of purchase. I know the kind."

The robe was fairly long, and made of old velvet lined with satin, quite shiny inside and out. The name of its maker had been carefully cut away. It was spotted with blood—Oakes's, no doubt—for it was fresh.

"It served a good purpose this time, anyway," said I; "saved the man's clothes from being marked."

"Medium chest measure," said Oakes. "Try it on, Stone."

I did so, and it just met around me.

"Good! The fellow who wore it is not a giant in chest measure, at all events, though larger than you, probably, since he wore it next to his undershirt."

"How in the world do you know that, Oakes?" said the doctor.

"Look at the discoloration of the lining on the shoulders, and also across the chest and back. The soil is old, but there is a moisture about the front yet, the moisture of fresh perspiration—it has been used quite recently. *That* would not have come through a coat or a vest. I should not be surprised if he had worn it over his naked chest."

"Where do you suppose the outfit came from?" I asked.

"Probably a relic of some masquerade ball of many years ago. This house used to be a popular place for entertainments."

"What did you pick up in the cellar when you stooped for the match?"

"Oh, you noticed that? See for yourselves," and he showed us an old-fashioned

heavy-calibre cartridge.

"And how about the closet in the steps, from which you took the robe?" I pursued.

"I happened to see the door, although both of you missed it. The person who hid the disguise there is quite familiar with that exit, evidently. That narrows the search considerably," said Oakes. "But the robe is a mystery; it is a senseless thing to use under such circumstances."

"Yes—senseless; that is the word," spoke up Moore.

Oakes's eyes searched the physician's, but the latter made no further remark. I thought Oakes was sizing him up as pretty far from "senseless" himself.

We now examined the robe more carefully, and saw that it was soiled with what appeared to me to be soot. Oakes shook his head. "No, it seems to be wood ash of some kind; see how light some of it is," he said.

He ran his hand along the inside of the robe, and found a small, well-worn slit—an opening to a deep pocket. Instantly he turned it inside out, and a small roll of paper dropped from it. He carefully unfolded it and spread it on the table.

"It is a piece of an old newspaper," said he, "and has been read much. It has been thumbed till it is ready to fall apart. Read it, Stone. Your eyes are best."

I studied a while, and then began:

> "DAILY NEWS, *October 30, 189-*.—The body was found face downward, on the main Highway, just below the crest of the Mona Hill. It was first seen by John Morney, who was going to the reservoir in advance of his gang of laborers. They were in sight when he discovered it; the time was therefore shortly before seven. The men were going to work at 6.30 from Mona. They recognized it instantly as the body of Orlando Smith, our beloved and esteemed citizen. Death had occurred only a short time before, and the murder must have been done about daybreak. It was evident that Mr. Smith was returning from his factory, where he had spent the night, the shift having been doubled recently, owing to the pressure of business. Later examinations showed that the bullet entered the chest and was from a large revolver, a 44 or 45 calibre. The ball was not found.
>
> "We are unable to give any more particulars now, before the time of going

to press."

"That is all," I said.

We remained standing while we thought over the matter. There was a satisfied air about the detective that I could not quite fathom, and Dr. Moore seemed to be quite pleased also.

"Well, what is it?" I asked.

With a voice that betrayed traces of elation, Oakes answered me: "The man in the cellar wore this robe; if he thumbed this paper, the murder of Smith interested him. The murder of Mark was similar, and I believe our Mansion affair is going to involve us in a peck of unexpected trouble. The clues are showing now, and we must know more about the Smith murder, as well as the Mark affair."

"Yes," put in Moore, "and all about the suspected motives in the Smith affair."

Oakes smiled. "Don't be too previous, my boy. If Hallen looks for our help, well and good. Otherwise, remember, I have given my word not to interfere with his search at present. Meanwhile, we must get into town and look around."

"You must remain here," said Moore. "You cannot go out until that wound begins to heal—in a day or so."

"That is so," said Oakes. "But perhaps Stone can find out what is going on."

So it was arranged that I should call on Chief Hallen that evening and spend a few hours in Mona.

At supper, Oakes said that tomorrow he would have men from the city who would make a complete search of the walls, and perhaps tear down some partitions. "Masons, and other workmen, you know," said he; and I saw a twinkle in his eyes and realized that he was going to surround himself with men, in case of an emergency.

"Are you expecting trouble?" I asked.

"No," said he, grave again in a second, "but I believe in being forearmed. This matter is capable of developing into a very serious affair for all hands, especially if we have a band of conspirators against us."

"*A band!*" said I.

"Yes, certainly. Has it never occurred to you that there may be several desperate characters in this affair and the murder? This is no boy's play; we are facing unknown dangers. Now, Stone, go about town carefully, and send this cipher to New York first thing. When you come back, tell Chief Hallen that I want you escorted to the Mansion by two men. Remember! He will understand, for he spoke to me of the advisability of giving me aid."

It all seemed strange to me, but I was not fearful when I left just at seven for the town.

I took the short cut over the bridge, and up the hill beyond, and they watched me as I crossed the rolling plains to Mona.

It was a clear night, and I could see well over the hills, the three-quarters moon giving me excellent light. I could not help thinking how careful was this man Oakes, and what a peculiar nature was his; alert, severe even to austerity at times; then solicitous, friendly and even fond of a joke. I was more than glad that I came, although I realized that perhaps it was foolish to interfere in such affairs. Of course, that murder of Mark had been cast upon our notice by curious circumstances, and unexpectedly.

As I walked over the rolling ground, I kept my eyes well upon my surroundings; but not a living thing did I see except myself and the night birds until I entered the town.

There was an air of subdued excitement about the place. As I walked to the post-office to send my despatches the loungers seemed numerous, and some were amiss in their greetings; others, whom I knew, approached in an affable manner enough, but there seemed no genuine friendliness.

The telegraph manager took the cipher and smiled when he saw it. Then he said to me in a whisper: "Tell Mr. Clark there is trouble coming."

To my look of surprise he answered: "Oh, that's all right; I had a visit from your friend before he went to the Mansion."

Again I recognized the work of careful Oakes, and understood why he did not hesitate to send the cipher—a thing unusual in a small town.

The indications of impending trouble in town were quite impressed upon me.

The little hotel was the centre of a lounging crowd, large, and composed of representative men as well as the usual hangers-on. There were evidences of much interest around the police building also—much more than would occur under normal circumstances in a town of this size, and even more than was present the night before.

I noticed a couple of brawls, and considerable raising of voices; many men were walking about as though watching the others. The prairie fire had been lighted; the sparks were burning near the roots of the grass; the air was uneasy—ready to rush in as wind, to fan and feed the first flame.

I visited the Chief, who was with his subordinates. He invited me into the private room, and then said:

"Mr. Stone, I am doing all I can to detect this murderer and to satisfy the public demand for his apprehension, but the clues are practically worthless. The populace is uneasy and suspicious."

Then he detailed to me all that he knew. I then told him how the people's actions had impressed me.

"I am going to have all I can do to keep order. I am going to ask your friend Oakes to take a hand."

"He will do it," I said, "for he is greatly interested."

"It is for the welfare of the town which I serve that I ask him to join me in this matter. Go to him, and tell him I shall see him in the morning if possible."

I was glad that affairs were taking such a turn, for I knew the facts in our possession, and that Oakes's counsel would be valuable.

I then requested an escort of two men to accompany me on my return to the Mansion, as Oakes had suggested.

"Certainly! I had no intention of letting you go back alone," he said; and then he summoned two of his men clad in citizen's clothes and introduced them to me. "Now take a walk to the outskirts, and return the same way by which you came. My men will follow you at a short distance."

Before I left I noticed my companions—fine-looking fellows both of them—and saw the tell-tale pouching of the hip pockets, and knew that we were all well

armed.

"In order not to attract attention, we will walk some distance behind you. We will keep you within sight and hearing. If we fire a shot, return to us."

I started across the rolling country, and saw the two figures behind me. Why were they so careful? Why did they not accompany me? They separated, and we advanced, I myself following the narrow path.

The night was still. I halted occasionally and looked back—a dim figure would halt on my left and on my right. It was lonesome, but I felt I had company.

I neared the slope to the pond, and looked down; there was nothing visible, and I began to descend with an easy stride. Although nearing the Mansion, I felt an unaccountable dread. This was the trying part of the journey, and my followers were now invisible to me, being on the plain above the crest of the hill. I gripped my revolver firmly, and stepped rapidly on to the bridge; but as I did so I heard a pistol shot from above, and knew instantly that I was in danger—that my companions had signalled me to return.

I faced about, and commenced my ascent of the hill.

From somewhere near a voice came to me clearly. "Run for your life," it said.

I could see nothing, but retreated hurriedly, and was soon with the others at the top of the hill.

"Why did you tell me to run?" I panted.

They looked at me. "We said nothing," was the answer; "we merely signalled you to come back."

"Well, someone ordered me to run for my life."

"Ah!" said they. "We thought we heard a voice. We saw a figure at the other side of the pond. We came over the crest cautiously, and he did not expect us. He was crossing in range of the light from the Mansion gate when we detected him. So much for following you!"

"Well, but who spoke to me? He could not have done so; his voice would not have sounded so near."

"No, evidently someone near you was watching him; he was about to waylay

you, and the watcher knew it and warned you."

We heard a commotion and saw a figure dash from the bridge, away toward the north end of the pond, and disappear.

Then another figure showed at the crest on the River Road and followed him at breakneck speed.

"See—the man on the bridge was the fellow who warned you. The other is after him. He won't catch him, however."

"Come!" I cried; and we darted down and over the bridge to the road above, but nothing was visible. Suddenly a couple of figures emerged from the darkness by the Mansion gate. We recognized Oakes and Moore, who had been awaiting us.

We related the circumstances of our return to the Mansion to them.

"Yes," said Oakes, "we were watching the man near the road. He had a gun, and was evidently waiting for you. We were just going to make a rush at him when we saw you run back at the signal."

"Who was he?" asked I.

"I will answer the question by asking: Who was the man who warned you?"

"I haven't the least idea," said I.

"You see, you were in great danger, and only that man's foresight saved your life. But there are *two* unknowns now—the friend and the enemy."

We watched my escorts descend and cross the bridge, mount the ascent and disappear over the crest toward Mona. Then the moonlight silhouetted their figures for an instant, as they turned and waved a farewell.

CHAPTER XII

The Witness

Mr. George Elliott, aristocratic, well-to-do clubman and all-round agreeable fellow, lived in bachelor apartments on the upper West side of New York.

He was engaged now in the brokerage business, but, times having been dull, he found it rather difficult to occupy himself and was anticipating taking a vacation

—but where, he had not yet decided.

Events were shaping themselves, however, to bring him into the happenings at Mona as one of our party.

On the corner, near the apartment, was a boot-blacking stand, presided over by one Joe, an intelligent and wide-awake colored youngster, whose general good-nature and honesty had made him popular with many. Among his patrons and general well-wishers was Mr. Elliott, to whom Joe had taken a particular liking, and whose opinions the young negro had often sought in an off-hand way; for, despite his general air of reserve and hauteur, Elliott was kindness itself at heart, and a man who could be easily approached by those who were suffering from worry and hardship.

At about the time of the beginning of this story, Joe's mother had been taken sick and had died in Troy, and the boy had gone up there for a few days.

Then he had gone to Lorona, a little town farther south, and from thence to Mona on his way home to New York. At Mona he had seen a terrible thing—a murder.

Bewildered, frightened, overawed by his fateful knowledge, he had managed, however, to reach New York, where he sought out Mr. Elliott for counsel; he knew the latter was kind and good and would tell him what to do. Joe realized that he needed advice—that he was in a terrible fix, being the only witness, so far as he knew, of a crime of the worst kind.

As Joe told Mr. Elliott the things he had witnessed, that gentleman realized the tremendous value of the evidence being told him.

By adroit questioning, he determined that the celebrated Quintus Oakes was in Mona. The boy said he recognized him, for he had frequently "shined" Mr. Oakes's shoes in times past on Broadway. Elliott realized that as he was called Clark at the inquest—according to Joe—the people in Mona did not know him as Oakes; he must be travelling under an *alias*, on important business probably. Elliott also grasped the fact that Oakes was there at the time of the murder by coincidence only. He had read of the affair in the evening paper, but only in a careless manner. It was all of deep interest now.

What should he do with Joe?

If he allowed the boy to think that he was in a tight place, he might run away,

and that would defeat justice. There was the alternative of telling the police; *that* would mix himself up in an unpleasant affair, and Joe might not be believed—might be falsely accused of the murder.

Again, he knew Mr. Oakes. He had seen him at the Club, and he did not desire to frustrate whatever investigations the detective might be making.

The best solution would be to find Quintus Oakes and tell him. He certainly would be able to give some attention to the murder, even if not in Mona for that purpose. Meanwhile, he himself would hold the boy at all hazards.

With skill scarcely to be expected from one of his easy-going type, he told Joe to remain and sleep in his flat that night and that he would fix things for him. The terror-stricken negro was only too glad of sympathy and protection from one of Mr. Elliott's standing, and complied; for he was at the mercy of his friends. What could he, a colored boy, do alone?

After tired nature had asserted herself and Joe had fallen asleep in a room which had been given him, Elliott called up Oakes's office by telephone. In less than an hour a dapper young man sought admission to the apartment, and was met by Elliott. He introduced himself as "Martin—from Oakes's place." In a few words Elliott explained matters, and Martin said:

"Let Joe go to his boot-blacking stand in the morning. Get your shoes shined, and place your hand on his shoulder in conversation, so that he can be identified before you leave. Our men will be in sight. Then meet me at the elevated station, and we will go to Mona together, if you care to do so."

"Good!" said Elliott. "I am willing; I will take my vacation that way."

And that was how, several hours later, Joe went to his boot-blacking stand, feeling secure in being near friends, and oblivious of the fact that strange eyes were watching all his movements.

A little later Elliott patronized the stand, and in leaving placed his hand on Joe's shoulder and said: "Nobody will trouble you, old fellow. Don't say a word; it will all come out right. I will back you to the limit."

And after that several pairs of eyes watched every movement of the boot-black. Several affable strangers gave him quarters for ten-cent shines. Joe was not in the police net, but he was in the vision of those silent men whom one cannot detect—those experts employed by men like Oakes. Escape was impossible for

the negro.

Joe remained in good spirits, for had not Mr. Elliott befriended him? He was ignorant of the doings of those brief hours when he slept.

Elliott's going to Mona was perhaps unnecessary, but he felt a natural curiosity to know Oakes better, as well as to see the outcome of the case and the effect of the evidence the negro possessed. He was also actuated by a desire to do all he could to establish the accuracy of the boy's statement, and to see that he obtained as good treatment as was consistent with the ends of justice.

He and Martin arrived at Mona the day after the murder—our first one at the Mansion. The two stayed at the hotel and studied the town, finding it impossible to go to the Mansion without creating talk.

As Martin said: "We must go slowly and not appear too interested in Oakes, or rather Clark, as he is known up here—so the office informed me. So far as we know he has nothing to do with the murder case, and we, being strangers and consequently subject to comment, must be guarded in our actions. I have seen and heard enough to realize that there is much suppressed excitement among the people. We must communicate with Oakes quietly, and find whether it is wise to see him. He may not desire our presence at the Mark place."

CHAPTER XIII

The Plan of Campaign

Next day, as we were at breakfast at the Mansion, the masons and carpenters came. Curiously enough, one of them brought a note from Martin, asking if it would be convenient for him to bring a stranger, with valuable information, to see Mr. Oakes that morning; and the man found it convenient to drop into town a little later and incidentally to meet Martin and let him know that Oakes expected him. Then he went to the hardware store and bought a few trifling things, as any carpenter or mason might do.

"Looks as though I am going to hold a reception this morning," said Oakes: "The Chief of Police making an engagement last night for an interview this morning, and now Martin asking for another."

"What is Martin doing up here?" asked Moore.

"Well, don't get impatient. He has something important, anyway. Just wait." I think Moore felt aggravated at Oakes's apparent indifference. Of course it was simulated, but he seemed so calm and oblivious of the mass of happenings that had put Moore and myself in a state of extreme excitement.

It was not long before Martin and Mr. Elliott were with us. Oakes received Elliott in a most agreeable manner, which placed us all at ease. He said he knew Mr. Elliott by sight, and esteemed it greatly that he should extend information to him. Also he was sure it must be of great value, since the gentleman had travelled all the way from New York to place him in possession of it. And this was said before any information was given. We saw that our friend was a diplomat.

Quickly Mr. Elliott gave all the particulars of the negro's confession, and the detective said: "If I am called into the case by Chief Hallen, I shall want to see the boy; if not, the information should be given to the Chief, as the matter belongs to his jurisdiction."

Looking out of the window at that moment, I espied Hallen coming up the walk.

"Good!" said Oakes. "Now, Mr. Elliott, will you kindly retire with Dr. Moore, while Stone, Martin and I hear what the Chief has to say."

When Hallen came up, he seemed very cordial, but worried, and made no attempt to disguise the fact that he anticipated trouble with the unruly element in Mona by Saturday night.

"You see," he said, "we are few here, and I have been kept busy with the brewing uneasiness in town and cannot handle the murder affair satisfactorily. I have come to ask you to help me, if you are sufficiently at leisure. We cannot get any clues at all, save that the man was killed by a bullet of large calibre in the hands of a good shot, as the distance from which it was fired would seem to show. The road has been searched but nothing found, and the crowd that went with you to the dying man's side trampled away all clues on the ground.

"My men have reported to me the curious affair of last night," continued the Chief. "I suppose you have a explanation for it; in any event, it must be followed up. The people must be diverted, and more must be done at once than I can do. Will you help me?"

"Yes," said Oakes. "Of course!"

"Hello, what ails your head?" said the Chief, after thanking him.

And then Oakes told him as much as was necessary of the events of the day before.

"I am very glad your *carpenters* have arrived," said the Chief; "they may help." He smiled, as did Oakes. They understood one another—they were in similar lines of business.

"Now that I have a hand in this thing, let's all get acquainted," said Oakes; and he called in Moore and Elliott, and the discussion became general.

Elliott was admitted unreservedly to our councils, especially as Oakes knew that he held the keys to the conviction of the assassin—the witness.

Oakes, in his fluent style, acquainted the Chief with the fact that the negro was already under surveillance and that, in his opinion, he should be brought to Mona for further examination.

"Yes, but we must smuggle him in. It would be unwise to let the populace know we have him now; they might infer he was the murderer and violence would certainly be done him. At present, I have all I can do to keep order in the town," said Hallen.

Then he gave a lucid account of the wave of suspicion and of the evidences of nervous tension the citizens were showing.

"Why," said he, "almost every man suspects his neighbor. Life-long friends are suspicious of one another and business is nearly at a standstill. One man looked at another in an absent-minded sort of a way to-day, and the other retaliated with a blow and an oath, and asked him if he would look at his own arms—not his neighbor's."

"Yes," said Oakes, "we have here a great mental emotion—*suspicion*—to deal with, which may amount to a public calamity unless checked. One must always take account of the actions and reasonings of communities. Emotional waves rush through them as through individuals sometimes. Look at history, and consider the waves of religion, emotional in character, that have occurred. Look at the unreasonableness developed in our own country from ignorance and fear, when witches were burned at the stake!"

"Oakes," said Moore with a smile, "you seem to make mental processes and

conditions as much of a study as the physician does."

"Certainly," Oakes replied. "It is most important. Did we not study the workings of a criminal's mind, for instance, we would often be baffled. You see, the determination of the probable condition of such a one's mind is often paramount, especially in such a case as this. In other words, was the *motive* one that would naturally sway an ordinary healthy individual under the conditions appertaining to the crime—the so-called *sane* motive? Or was it in any way dependent upon peculiarities of the criminal's reasoning—a motive built up of something unreal, a *delusion* in the mind of one not in his right senses?"

I myself had frequently had cause to study such mental processes in the practice of my profession, but I was amazed at the knowledge shown by Oakes, and stated in such a broad, untechnical manner. The man was no ordinary one, to be sure, but I had scarcely expected him to show such education in these matters.

I now recalled what Moore had once told me of Oakes's all-round attainments.

Dr. Moore broke the silence.

"You are a lalapazooza, Oakes."

Oakes did not notice the remark, but said: "I don't know what other men do, but I have tried to bear in mind such things."

"Yes," said Hallen, "and consequently there is only *one* Quintus Oakes."

"It seems to me," continued Hallen, "that your work here at the Mansion will soon lead to results, and I trust that you will find time to consider the murder also."

"Gentlemen," said Oakes very seriously, "from what I saw after the Mark murder in town and from what you report, I feel that Mona is in a very serious plight. I shall make time, Hallen, to do what little I can."

And thus Quintus Oakes became the leader in the unravelling of the Mark murder mystery.

After a few remarks of no particular consequence and a more or less general conversation, he resumed:

"Suppose, Chief, that we now smuggle the negro into Mona as soon as possible, and bring him here. I believe that if Mr. Elliott goes back with Martin and they

explain things to the boy, he will come without much trouble. It must be impressed upon him that he is regarded in the light of a *hero*: appeal to the innate weakness of the race—desire for flattery."

"I believe we can bring him here easily," said Elliott, "for he has confidence in me."

"If he refuses to come," said Hallen, "we can get him here in plenty of ways."

"Yes," said Oakes, "Martin knows how; leave it to him. Only, we must have him soon, and he must come here by way of another station, incognito, lest the people become too excited."

This being agreed upon, the conversation became more general, and in answer to questions we found that Oakes had not as yet formulated any solution to the mystery of the identity of the murderer. As he said, the affair of downstairs might be connected with the murder, indirectly or directly, but as yet we had not had sufficient opportunities for studying the surroundings of the house or the life of its attachès to venture an opinion. He laid particular stress upon the fact that opinions should never be formed on poor evidence, since a biased mind was incapable of appreciating new discoveries or new clues. To theorize too much was very easy, but sometimes fatal to detection of crime. He preferred to work along several lines of investigation before concentration on any one idea.

"The affair of last night, in my estimation," said he, "is one of very grave import. Unquestionably, from what you saw, Stone, and from the evidence of us all, there were two men near the place you were going to pass. That the first one warned you and was, in a sense, a friend, is mysterious enough—it needs solution; but that the man who warned you should have run away and been pursued by the other is peculiar, to say the least. The signals of your companions were heard by the man at the bridge undoubtedly, and he ran to escape detection himself. The other—the one on this side, who was a probable assassin—would under ordinary circumstances have run away when he saw you were warned. He did run, but it was after the man who warned you."

"To my mind, the explanation is this," continued the detective. "The man at the bridge is friendly, but cannot expose his identity or risk capture. The would-be assassin was convinced that the man who warned you knew of his purpose. He therefore pursued him—to finish him in self-protection."

"I don't see why," said Moore; "he could have escaped instead."

"Exactly," said Oakes. "He could have done so, but he did not wish it. He has not completed what he wants to do around here. He wished to come back, and to do so with safety he must rid himself of the one who knew of his doings."

"Looks as though he was planning more trouble. He may have been the man of the robe, or the man with the arms," I ventured.

"Or both," said Oakes.

"At all events," said Hallen, "I wish that we could divert the minds of the people in town; the tension is great—too great for safety."

"Perhaps, Chief," said Oakes, "that you and I can arrange a little matter that will distract their attention and which will tend to make them believe that progress is being made."

He laughed as he spoke, and we knew that he was thinking over some little scheme to help Hallen back into popular favor.

CHAPTER XIV

Clues

The carpenters and masons came and went in a very business-like way all that morning, while we were closeted upstairs with our companion and Chief Hallen.

After he left us, Moore and I walked down to the gate and around the grounds, leaving Oakes to attend to details with Martin. Carpenters were very busy around the dining-room, carrying in boards and implements, and examining the woodwork and the balcony.

A few of the masons were about the grounds, engaged on small details, and all seemed to be on good terms with Cook and his wife, and Annie. Mike was busy at one end of the garden, and Maloney was not far off.

"This, Stone, is to be a day of events here. But things are being done very quietly, are they not? You would suspect nothing out of the way—far less a hunt for a murderer or the investigation of a mystery, would you?"

"No; were I not informed, I should think that Oakes had merely a gang of laborers at work."

"He has that; but he has also a body of the best detectives, for the purpose, to be had. Maloney and Mike are puzzling him considerably, Stone; they are very close to one another always, and seem quite intimate."

"Yes," I replied. "I have noticed it. They both show a great deal of interest in these alterations. Have you noticed how Maloney is watching O'Brien? He keeps him continually in sight."

We had approached the front door of the Mansion as we spoke. Oakes was standing just outside, his eyes likewise upon the two gardeners. Our last remarks were made in his presence, and he entered the conversation with a quiet observation to the effect that Maloney seemed to fear that Mike might not attend to his business, but that Mike *would*, nevertheless.

I was obliged to acknowledge that I did not quite understand.

"Oh, Mike is a good laborer," he explained; "he needs no such watching," and there seemed to be a peculiar significance in his words. They were stated in a slow, indifferent manner that caused me to look at the speaker, but his face wore the inscrutable expression which I had frequently seen before, and I learned nothing. I knew him well enough by this time, however, to realize that something was taking shape in his thoughts.

"Now, let us go inside," said he. "After lunch we will attack the final solution of the manner in which these mysterious assaults were performed. Like all such things, it will be simple enough, I know, and the point remaining to determine will be not *how* it was done, but *by whom*.

"I feel confident that that door in the cellar room leads upward to an interspace which communicates with the dining-room through panels in the walls. The peculiar noise—the swish—that I heard, resembled the sudden sliding of a board, and it was the conviction that the person who assaulted Moore disappeared into the wall which made me run downstairs. I felt sure there would be some explanation of it below."

That afternoon a systematic search of the entire house was made. The cellar room in which the assault upon Oakes had occurred was thoroughly lighted and examined. The heap of rubbish which Mike had been investigating at our previous visit proved to be composed of plaster and bricks.

The wall in which the door was cut was found to be about three feet thick, and

one of the foundations of the house. It was solid, save for a chimney-like opening which had been trapped with the door. Above, at the level of the dining-room floor, the great wall ceased. From one edge was continued upwards the original partition between that room and the next—the parlor; but it was thin, and had evidently been recently strengthened by another wall, slightly thicker, and built from the opposite edge of the foundation, leaving a space between the two. Into this space entered, at a certain point, the opening from the cellar room below.

It was a peculiar arrangement. As Oakes remarked, the new wall had been made with no regard to the economizing of space; for, had it been built immediately back of the old, considerable room would have been saved for the parlor. One of the "carpenters" thought that the original idea had been to utilize the space for closets. The only other possible use for it, so far as we could discover, was the one which Oakes had surmised—ventilation for the cellar. Still, to our ordinary minds, a chimney would have answered that purpose quite as well.

A little further investigation, however, showed the top of the foundation wall to be covered with cement well smoothed, and the walls themselves were plastered. It was generally conceded, therefore, that the first idea had been to use it as closet room, which could easily have been done by cutting doors through the walls. As Oakes said, the notion had evidently met with opposition and been abandoned, so communication had been made with the cellar instead, and the roof opened to afford ventilation.

The opening into the cellar was large. A man could easily enter it, and, standing, reach the top of the foundation wall; then, by a little exertion, he could raise himself into the intermural space. Oakes, Moore and I proved this by actual experiment and found that the passage was quite wide enough to accommodate a man of average proportions.

I have said that the dining-room was finished in oak panels. These had been reached from our side of the wall by removing the bricks and mortar—the same stuff evidently which helped to form the rubbish heap in the room below. One of the larger panels had been made to slide vertically. It had been neatly done and had escaped detection from the dining-room because of the overlapping of the other panels. Some dèbris still remained between the walls.

"The fellow we are after knew of the space between the walls and worked at the panel after the repairs were completed," was Oakes's remark.

"How do you know that?" asked Moore.

Oakes looked at him and smiled, then said: "Moore, where is your reasoning ability? Do you think, if the panel had been tampered with at the time the repairs were made, that the dèbris would have been left behind? No! It would have been removed with the rest of the dirt."

We had gone to our rooms upstairs while the men were hunting through the tunnel to the well. They found nothing; everything was as we had left it after our adventures there.

It seemed to us that, all things considered, the work on the panel must have been done by someone within the household, or, at least, that some of its members must have been involved in the matter.

"It may have been accomplished at night, however, and by an outsider," said Oakes. "The servants' quarters are separate from the house. Anyone might easily have entered the cellar by the tunnel route. Still, there may have been collusion also."

"It seems a nonsensical idea to leave the dèbris in the cellar," I said.

"No, I think not," was the answer. "The care-takers are afraid even to enter that place. The miscreant knew that detection would be probable at the hands of strangers only."

That evening Elliott and Martin left for New York. They were to bring the negro boy, Joe, to Mona. Late at night, before we retired, Oakes asked us to go with him into the parlor.

"What for?" said I.

"To forge another link in the chain—the strongest yet," he said.

"What?"

"Do you remember the cartridge I found in the cellar?"

"Yes, yes; but you did not pay much attention to it, I thought."

He looked gravely at me. "Stone, that cartridge probably corresponds in calibre to the one which was used in the murder of Mark."

"Ah!" said Moore. "I had a notion of that myself. Why did you not tell us your

opinion before?"

"Because, when I found it, we were working on the Mansion affair only. I divined the value of the find; but why should I have mentioned it? I was not hunting the Mark murderer then."

"Quintus, you consummate fox—you worked Hallen well!"

"Not at all; business is business. What is the use of gossiping? There are no ladies to be entertained in *my* profession, Doctor."

He led the way to the parlor—we meekly following—to where a cluster of arms hung upon the wall: one of those ornaments of crossed swords, guns and a shield, so common in old houses.

He remarked that he had noticed these arms on his previous visit. He looked at a revolver hanging across the shield, with a pouch beneath it, and then suddenly, in surprise, said: "Last time I was here, a few weeks ago, there was a large old-fashioned revolver here of 44 or 45 calibre. I remember it well, being interested in firearms.

"This one now here is of a similar pattern and appearance, but of smaller calibre, and newer. Look! The cartridges in this pouch are of about 45 size; they belong to the old weapon and cannot be used with this one."

"Again, some of them are missing; there were at least a dozen before, now there are only three or four. The old revolver and some cartridges have been taken away, and a newer weapon substituted."

"Indeed! But why?" said Moore sceptically.

"Partly because"—and Oakes was decisive, curt, master of the situation —"because this one cannot be loaded. See!" He then tried to turn the chamber and showed us that the mechanism was faulty.

"The old revolver," said he in a low tone, "and some cartridges were taken away, and in order that its absence should be less noticeable, this one was left here—it being useless.

"Now, boys, the cartridge I found downstairs on the cellar floor is a 45-calibre and belongs to those of the pouch and the original revolver, as you see."

He took it from his pocket and showed us that it did *not* fit the weapon in his

hand but matched the cartridges in the pouch. It belonged to the *old* weapon.

"We are closing in," said I.

"Yes—the man of the robe has the old revolver and cartridges; he took them within the last few days, finding his own weapon out of order. It is he who is responsible for the mystery in this house—and in all probability it is he who shot Winthrop Mark. You remember, the evidence at the inquest showed that a heavy revolver had been used—a 44 or 45 calibre—exactly such an one as the old weapon which I saw here."

"Excellent, Oakes," remarked Moore. "There's only one objection."

"Yes, I know," said Oakes. "You were going to ask why the fellow did not take all these cartridges and put his own in the pouch to match the weapon he left here."

"Exactly," said Moore.

"Well," said the detective, "he either had no cartridges of his own handy, or else, like all criminals, however smart, he tripped—the brain of no man is capable of adjusting his actions precisely in every detail."

"Guess you're right. No man can be perfect in his reasoning, and, no matter how clever the criminal, he is almost certain to make an error sooner or later," said Moore.

"Yes, but it takes peculiar power to discover it," I chirped. The events of the day had tired me, and my mind was growing confused. I desired to go to bed.

Oakes smiled slightly. "No, Stone; it takes study, worry and patient reasoning to discover the faulty link in a clever criminal's logic—that is why there is a profession like mine."

I was half asleep, but I heard him continue: "We may consider we have excellent cause to look for a man who has in his possession an ancient revolver and some very old dirty cartridges covered with verdigris, like these here."

"Murder will out," I interpolated.

"Yes, eventually, sometimes. However, it is easy to say, 'he who had that revolver did the murder,' but as it may have been destroyed since then, or thrown into the river, it is another thing to find the *man*."

We were crestfallen. Oakes himself looked wearied.

"I wish the whole Mansion was in the river, and there were a decent cafè round here," protested Moore.

"You're a vigorous pair of assistants, I must say," said Quintus. "I have some samples in my room. Come!" and we all adjourned.

CHAPTER XV

The Ruse

After all, however, the doctor and I decided to spend the night at the hotel and acquire any information that we could as to occurrences in town.

We chose to walk along the River Road to the Corners, keeping ourselves on the alert for any treachery. The night was cool and bracing and the sky cloudless. As we journeyed, the moon rose, throwing its rays athwart the tangled outline of the wood. The great high trees were just beginning to drop their leaves. Occasionally a woody giant, separated from the rest, would fix our attention, standing silhouetted against the background of forest—majestic, alone, like a sentinel guarding the thousands in column behind. An occasional flutter of a night bird or the falling and rustling of the dead leaves was all that we heard as we walked rapidly the mile to the Corners.

As we were about to round into the Highway and leave the forest of the estate behind us, Moore grasped my arm, and led me to the deep shadow of a tree by the roadside.

"Hark! That sounds peculiar," he said. We listened, and heard a thumping sound, repeated at intervals.

"An uneasy horse standing somewhere in the woods hereabouts," said I.

"Yes. What is he doing there at this time of night—and in *these particular* woods?"

We consulted together and waited. Then, having satisfied ourselves that the noise came from the woods of the estate near the crest of the hill, we decided to investigate as quickly as possible, and entered the forest stealthily and with but little noise. Unused to the life of the woods, we doubtless made more rustling than was necessary, but we were favored by the fact that the trees were not very

close together, and in consequence the carpet of dead leaves was not thick.

Halting behind the trunks of trees occasionally, we listened for the sound which came from further within the wood. Soon we came to an opening—a glade—perhaps two hundred feet from the road. The moonlight fell upon the far side, but on the side next us all was shadow—dark and sombre. We stood well within it among the trees. I fancied I heard a horse whinny. The animal was certainly restive. I saw the doctor take out his revolver and lie carefully down behind a tree; I remained standing. We both waited; we were within a few feet of one another, but did not speak.

Suddenly, on the far side we saw a figure walking towards the shade and heard him say a few words to the horse. Quickly he led the animal away into what appeared to be a path. Moore whispered to me: "Watch the road; he is going there."

We retraced our steps and soon saw the horse appear on the edge of the wood. He was a large, powerful animal, and seemed to act as though he understood what was expected of him. The man was still leading the horse, but was now also speaking in a low voice to someone else, who disappeared toward the town and came out on the Highway further down, walking rapidly toward the village, as any belated citizen might.

"See!" said Moore. "He brought the horse and is going back. Watch the rider."

The latter had been standing in the shade looking after the man who had gone, when suddenly, seeming satisfied that he was not watched, he vaulted into the saddle. He came out into the moonlight in a second or two and rode rapidly up River Road, past the Corners and northward away from the town. We had managed to get near the road, and as he dashed into the open we saw that he held the reins with the left hand, his right resting on the horse's neck, and in it, as we both recognized, a revolver.

"A splendid rider," was my remark.

"Yes," said Moore. "Did you recognize him? It was Mike, I thought."

"Yes, Mike it was, and acting in a very suspicious manner. He has done this before, evidently—knew the road and the horse, and was on the lookout for trouble, for he was armed."

We decided to follow the first man, it being useless to attempt to overtake the

rider. Taking the darkest side of the road, we walked on after the figure in the distance.

Soon my companion's spirits began to rise and he laughed at our *adventure*, as he called it.

"Stone, I cannot help thinking that you and I are destined to become great sleuths. We have been away from the Mansion only a short half-hour, and already have detected a man on horseback who is carrying a revolver—and have identified him as Mike."

"Yes, we're improving—but why did you lie down behind that tree? Afraid?"

"No!" answered Moore, with a laugh. "I have been studying caution. I want to see Broadway again." Then he continued: "Stone, this adventure is becoming more and more complicated, and occasionally I wonder if I was not foolish in coming here. It is so different from practising surgery—this being assaulted by invisible foes—seeing victims of murder and things like that, to say nothing of men chasing one another by moonlight."

He was half-serious, and I acknowledged that the affair *was* rather nerve wearing. Then we looked ahead, and suddenly realized that the figure we were following had vanished.

Moore gasped in astonishment. "Hang it all! we certainly are a pair of apes to let that fellow get away. Won't Oakes be disgusted?"

"Yes, and he will have good cause."

The lesson was a needful but costly one. Thenceforth when on business we ceased to discuss our feelings and endeavored to use our eyes and ears more, and our tongues less.

We received a cordial welcome from the people at the hotel and gossiped around the corridor for some time. The crowd outside was sullen, but within the atmosphere seemed less strained. We learned that Chief Hallen had made several arrests that afternoon, a measure which had had a sobering effect. The saloons had been warned not to abuse their privileges. Many persons spoke of the work done by Hallen as excellent; indeed, we were both impressed by the fact that the sentiment toward him, of the better citizens, was friendly. Considerable disgust was expressed, however—privately, of course—at the lack of evidence, so far, bearing upon the murder itself. In the course of the evening we managed to see

Reilly the porter, and he pointed out several men to us.

"These fellows are new in town—they must be detectives. If they discover things, well and good; but if they don't, the people here won't stand it—they will resent what they call 'outside' work."

"Hallen must have gone in for business," said I.

Reilly grew confidential. "No, it ain't Hallen, they say. There's a lot of talk about some New York man coming up here to run things."

"Who?"

"Oh, they say that Quintus Oakes—you've heard of him, of course—is coming soon, and these are some of his men."

"Indeed!" And Moore and I exchanged glances.

"But, say," continued the porter, "that is confidential; only we fellows round here know it."

We parted from Reilly. Moore said: "If they know about it in here, of course half of the town has heard already."

"Yes. The tale was doubtless started by Hallen as a great secret; he knew it would spread."

"Evidently Oakes has not been recognized by the people as yet."

"No," I rejoined, "but the fact that the rumor is out shows to my mind that Hallen and Oakes have some little scheme on hand. At any rate, we must know nothing of Oakes; remember that he is *Clark* to all but a select few."

We decided to go to one of the newspaper offices, after a brief call on Chief Hallen, who gave us no news of value, but was nevertheless very agreeable. He advised us to see Dowd, and gave us a note to him. We found the newspaper man at his office, just finishing his night's work. He was very attentive in furnishing us back copies of his rival's paper, the "Daily News." He said he kept them filed as samples of "daring journalism." "I have only been a couple of years in this business, but I have the pedigree of the town in these newspapers. I got them from people who had saved them—as country people will. Skinner would not sell me any—the rascal. Whenever he grows fresh and criticises things improperly, I investigate what he has previously said on the subject and then

publish a deadly parallel column. He has a rather poor memory—and I worry him once in a while," he remarked with a laugh.

We found the paper which corresponded in date to the piece we had taken from the robe. There was a full account of the murder of Smith, which we read, but nothing that seemed to us of any value. On that occasion no clues whatever had been found. *Only,* again the local physicians had thought the wound was made by a large ball.

The old chief of that time had been succeeded by Hallen, who had never been able to gain any definite clue to the murderer. The interest had then died out, and the mystery became a thing of the past.

Dowd discussed the similarity of the recent murder to that of Smith, and hinted, moreover, that he knew the identity of our friend Clark. He said Hallen had made a confidant of him, as he might want to make use of his newspaper.

"By the way, speaking of the old murder, there is something that has never been published, but which some of the old codgers about here have cherished as perhaps relating to it."

"What is it?" asked the doctor.

"Well, a couple of old men who have since died, both milkmen, used to say that once or twice they had seen a woman near the scene of the murder at that hour in the morning. Also, that she always ran into the woods, and was dressed in black."

"Who were those old men?"

"Well, they were both reliable fellows. Their tales were laughed at, so they refused to discuss the matter any more. They both claimed to have seen her at a distance, however; and since they were on different wagons, their stories seemed to corroborate each other."

We expressed our great interest in the news, and Dowd advised us to see Reilly the porter, who had heard the story of the woman from the men themselves.

We returned to the hotel, feeling much elated at the courtesy of Dowd and at the prospect of learning something not generally known, and bearing upon the murder.

Soon we managed to find Reilly. He came to our rooms on the excuse that we had some orders to give concerning baggage that had not yet arrived from New York.

The porter was decidedly intelligent, having been reduced to his present position through adversity, as we already knew. It took only a little questioning to elicit his story, which he told about as follows:

"You see, gentlemen, about the time of Smith's murder the milkmen were in the habit of watering their horses at an old fountain just by our curb, but since done away with.

"Well, about two weeks before Smith was murdered, one of the milkmen, Moses Inkelman, a driver for a large farm north of here, told me that he had that morning seen a very large woman on the crest of the hill as he was driving to town. She was seemingly anxious to avoid notice and stepped into the woods as he passed by. Moses asked me if I thought she was anyone from Mona. He seemed so curious about the matter that several who had heard his story laughed at him. He was very sensitive and did not mention the episode again until after the murder—long after, I remember—and then only to me, when he said: 'If these people would only stop making fun of a Jew, and believe me, they might learn something.' He disappeared a little while afterward, and we learned from his successor that he had suddenly died of heart disease, on the farm.

"The other milkman never told his story save to a few—one night around the stove in a grocery store. The others were inclined to scoff at him; but I remembered what Moses had told me, and saw this fellow, Sullivan, alone.

"It was about a year after the affair. He said that he had seen a woman's figure lurking around the crest of the hill on two different occasions before the murder."

"Did he say anything about her appearance?" I asked.

"No. He said he never came very near to her, but he saw that she always wore black, and ran very heavily. He thought she was one of the drunken creatures that sometimes infest the water front on Saturday nights.

"You see, gentlemen, there were more factories here then, and the town was tougher than it is now, especially along the railroad and shore where the canal-boats came in. The new piers farther down the river have changed all that. Sullivan told his story to the police, but they saw nothing in it, or pretended they

didn't; so Sullivan shut up."

"What became of him?" Moore asked.

"Well, sir, that's the curious part of it, to my mind. He was found dead only a short time ago on River Road, 'way down near Lorona, and there were marks on his throat and blood in his mouth. The examiner said he had had a hemorrhage and had choked to death, scratching himself in his dying struggles. But——"

"Well, continue," commanded Moore.

"Gentlemen, I believe he was murdered."

"Why, what makes you think so?" I asked.

"I saw the body at the undertaker's in Lorona, gentlemen, and the marks on the neck were not only scratches, but black and blue patches. The examiner was a drunkard himself and not a good reasoner. I always had the idea that the milkman was choked to death by the woman because he had seen her.

"And the other fellow, Moses—I think he was done away with likewise," continued Reilly. "I tell you, gentlemen, there is more to all this than is perhaps wise to know, unless one keeps pretty quiet."

We tipped Reilly a good fee and then turned in for the night in a most uncomfortable frame of mind. As Moore said: "things are coming up so rapidly here that we will all be twisted before long."

Our visit to the town had so far proved more valuable than we had hoped for, and we both wished that Oakes could have been with us. Several times in the night I awoke, and each time heard footsteps passing to and fro, and subdued voices in the corridor downstairs, and could but reflect how very different this was from the usual quietude of such a place.

When we arose in the morning, Moore remarked that he never knew of such a noisy hotel in a small town.

"Guess the place is going to give me nervous prostration pretty soon, if things keep up like this," said he.

While we were at breakfast, Chief Hallen walked in and sat down beside us in a rather pompous manner, I thought. He seemed desirous of calling attention to himself. "Well, gentlemen," he said in a quiet enough way, "don't be taken aback

at anything you may witness to-day. You may have a surprise. I want you to meet me in the hotel corridor soon and see who comes on the nine o'clock train."

He bade us adieu, and walked out in an unnaturally aggressive manner.

"He's showing off like a schoolboy," said I.

"Or else acting," corrected Moore.

We sat down in the corridor by and by. Hallen was talking with the clerk at the desk. The hangers-on were numerous and wore an air of expectancy; they were waiting for some one.

The rickety old carriage from the station arrived at this moment, and the man on the box opened the door with more than usual courtesy. Out stepped a medium-sized man of good figure and a most remarkable face. It was bronzed like that of a seafaring man; the eyes were black as jet and piercing; the nose hooked and rather long. He wore a thick, short moustache, which matched his hair and eyes in blackness; otherwise, his face was smooth-shaven, and his attire was in the perfection of good taste for a business man. When he spoke, one noticed particularly his strong white, even teeth.

"He looks like a pirate from the Spanish Main, dressed up," said Moore.

"A remarkably attractive fellow, anyway."

"Yes," I said; "he has the air of a celebrated man of some kind."

As he walked to the desk, the by-standers spoke in subdued tones, watching him the while. I heard one lounger say: "Sure, that is the fellow. I've seen him before. Ain't he a wonder in looks?"

Chief Hallen advanced and spoke a few words to the stranger, and then shook hands with him. He registered, and the clerk thumped the bell for Reilly with an air of tremendous importance.

As though by accident, Chief Hallen espied us and, taking the stranger by the arm, walked over to us.

We arose and bowed as the Chief repeated our names, saying, so that those near could hear: "Gentlemen, you are from the city. Let me make you acquainted with one of your fellow citizens—Mr. Quintus Oakes, of New York."

Moore calmly shook hands and mumbled something, and then, in a side whisper to me, said: "It's up to you, Stone; say something."

Although I was nearly as surprised as he, I managed to make a few audible remarks about how glad the town would be to know that Quintus Oakes was here. I saw a merry twinkle in Hallen's eyes, but the stranger made a suitable reply, and left us with that peculiar business-like air of his.

I turned to Moore and half-gasped: "What does this mean, old man?"

"A decoy," said he. "Just keep your nerve. Hallen has been giving us practice in acting."

The by-standers and the groups in the street were discussing the stranger with peculiar, suppressed excitement. Many of the smart ones claimed to have seen him before and to know all about him; already, "Quintus Oakes" rang familiarly from their lips.

We presently returned to the Mansion and related to our leader the facts we had learned from Reilly regarding "the woman's" appearances before the murder, the sudden ending of both the milkmen who had seen her, and Reilly's own suspicions in the matter. Oakes was thoughtful for quite a while.

"You have done more than I thought you could in so brief a time," said he at last. "Have you any theories regarding the identity of the woman?"

We had none to offer, and he began to smile ever so slightly. "Well, it seems to me your woman is a mistake—there was no woman. The assassin was a man in a black robe. He ran heavily, of course. You have drawn the murderer of Smith nearer to that of Mark. As regards the sudden deaths of the milkmen, probably

both were killed; the examinations after death, conducted as these were, amount to nothing. The murderer of Smith, the two milkmen and of Mark is probably one and the same. Stone, you nearly fell a victim at the bridge the other night, too."

I did not reply, but a cold perspiration broke out over me. The chain of events seemed clearer now in the light of Oakes's reasoning. Then he turned to Moore.

"Doctor, loan me your cigar-cutter, will you?"

The physician reached for it, but it was gone.

"I think this must be it," said Oakes, holding out the missing article. "Next time you hide on your stomach behind a tree, do it properly."

Moore was dumfounded.

"What!" I cried, "you know that too? We did not tell you."

"No, you did not. You began your narration at the wrong end—or perhaps you *forgot*," and his eyes twinkled.

"But how did you learn of it?" demanded Moore, recovering. And Quintus smiled outright.

"My man was behind another tree only ten feet away from you the whole time. When you left, he picked up this as a memento of your brilliant detective work."

Moore and I smarted a little under the sarcasm, and I asked what the man was doing there.

"Oh, he was watching Mike and, incidentally, keeping you two from mischief. You need a guardian. You never even suspected his presence, and—suppose he had been the assassin!"

"Well," I said, "I suppose that you know all about your namesake in town, and don't need any of our information."

He heard the chagrin in my voice and smiled as he replied:

"Don't mind those little things; they happen to all of us. I am glad 'Quintus Oakes' has arrived. Chief Hallen and I concluded that the sudden arrival of such a man as our decoy would have a salutary effect on the citizens. An appearance of action on Hallen's part would tend to quiet their restlessness; and, now that

public attention is focused upon *him*, Mr. Clark and his friends can work more freely."

During the discussion that followed, he told us that Mike's errand on horseback was as yet unknown, but that the man whom we followed and lost on the way was from a stable in Lorona.

"You see," continued he, "Mike has been doing this before. The horse is brought from Lorona in a roundabout way. Doubtless, on his return, he leaves it at some spot where it is met and returned to the stable."

"Mike is a mystery. What is he up to?" said Moore. "Can he be the murderer?"

"Wait and see," replied Oakes enigmatically, as he ended the conversation.

CHAPTER XVI

The Negro's Story

Saturday came and went without event. So far, at least, Hallen's arrangements for the preservation of order had been effective. Or was it that the eyes and hopes of the people were centred upon the new arrival in town, the great detective—as they were led to believe—who had grown famous through his skill in ferreting out just such mysteries. In any case, the Chief's forebodings of a lawless outbreak were unfulfilled.

The real Oakes spent most of his time in the Mansion while we remained in town; but our little party came and went as it pleased. Our movements had ceased to attract that attention which Oakes found so undesirable. As he said, in the well-known phrase of the sleight-of-hand operators: "the more you look, the less you see." The eyes of Mona were focused on the *false* Oakes—the wrong hand; we ourselves—the hand doing the trick—were over-looked. And the more absorbed they became in the movements of the decoy, the more oblivious were they of the fact that keen eyes were studying them deeply. The criminal, unless very educated and clever, would be fooled with the multitude and caught off his guard.

A rather curious fact was that, while Dowd's newspaper published an article in its personal column about the great detective's arrival and all that he was expected to accomplish, Skinner's journal remained absolutely silent. Dowd said he could not understand it, unless the ruse had failed to deceive Skinner, in

which case we might hear from him soon. We knew that our friend Quintus Oakes held the same idea. As he said, if the cheat were discovered it would lead to trouble, which must be met as it arose.

Moore and I became daily more imbued with the spirit of the adventure; besides which, we were keenly alive to Oakes's feelings and his desire to succeed. The newspapers far and near were following the case carefully, and we knew that his reputation and financial success depended largely on the outcome of this case.

A few evenings later Moore and I were standing in the square, discussing the very apparent change in the temper of the crowd since their attention had been directed by the arrival of the man they believed to be Quintus Oakes.

"Yes," said Moore, in answer to a remark of mine, "it is a clever scheme and makes the people think that Hallen is doing something; but how will they take it if they discover the trick?"

"Well, perhaps by that time the real Oakes, our friend, will be in position to reveal his identity—that would calm any bad feeling—they would realize that work had been done quietly all the while."

Moore shook his head doubtfully. "I don't like Skinner's attitude," he said, "he knows something."

Reilly approached us at this moment to say that Clark wanted us at the Mansion immediately, and that a conveyance was waiting for us at the hotel. We went at once and found it, a four-seated affair, with Hallen and Dowd on the back seat. We two sat in front with the driver—one of Oakes's men; and after we had left the town I turned to the Chief and asked him if he knew what Oakes wanted of us.

"Yes," said he; "the *negro* is here."

Oakes was awaiting us upstairs, with Martin and Elliott. The first thing we learned was that Oakes had recognized the negro "Joe" as a former boot-black on Broadway. Joe's identification of *him* during the court scene had placed the negro in a state of less fear than would otherwise have been the case.

"He came readily enough," said Martin; "he was threatened with arrest if he did not; but he is acting peculiarly. Seems more worried than an innocent man should be."

"He naturally dreads the ordeal; innocent men frequently appear guilty to the onlooker. The really guilty ones are prepared and go through more coolly," said Oakes.

"Yes, sir, I know that; but this one is different. I should hardly say he is guilty; still, his actions are peculiar—I cannot explain *how*."

"Think a little, Martin," said Oakes. It was the tone of the superior, firm but kindly.

Martin thought a few seconds, then he said: "Well, sir, he seems anxious to describe what he saw, and seems to think that you are his friend and will believe him; but he appears to be actually fearful of punishment."

"Rather ambiguous," said Oakes. "Perhaps he is hiding some vital point, Martin. Is he not?"

"Yes, sir; and that point is against himself."

"Of course it is, or he would not hide it; against himself, or one dear to him."

Oakes's correction was without malice, polite and patient. He was the clear reasoner, the leader, instructing a trusty subordinate—the kindly Chief and his young, but able lieutenant.

We ranged ourselves round the centre-table—we four who had come in the carriage, besides Elliott and Martin, who had brought Joe from New York. Oakes stood near a chair, away from the table and the group. After a moment the negro entered, ushered to the door by one of the men. We must have looked a formidable conclave to the poor fellow, for he halted just inside the door at sight of us all. He was a negro of that type seen in the North—strong, lithe, with a clear-cut face whose features showed the admixture of white blood. He advanced to the chair besides Oakes, and sat down at a sign from the latter.

He was nervous, but a pitiful effort at bravery showed in his carriage and manner. Bravery was necessary. A lone negro boy facing such a gathering, and—worst of all to him—that mysterious, awe-inspiring person, Quintus Oakes!

With consummate tact Quintus won the boy's confidence. Elliott spoke to him, kindly and reassuringly; and Hallen walked over and shook his hand with a protecting air. Joe brightened visibly. It was plain that the men who hunted crime were going to try kindness and sympathy first. It has always seemed to me a pity

that such tactics are not more in vogue, especially toward witnesses. The master detective can throw a sympathy into his every act which will win secrets actually barred from other methods of attack.

Reassured, Joe presently began his story. In a clear, remarkably able way (for he had been to school), and with the peculiar, dramatic power possessed by some negroes, he brought vividly before us the scenes he had witnessed. As he warmed to his subject, Oakes and Hallen watched him carefully, but without emotion, occasionally questioning him adroitly to develop points which seemed to them valuable. Dowd took notes, at Oakes's suggestion, for future use.

When Joe's mother died in Troy, he went up to attend the funeral. On his return he stayed a few days in Lorona—a little place already mentioned. It was without railway connections and lay to the east of Mona, along the Highway. He had passed through the latter place afoot, late at night, and had walked the ten miles to Lorona. His sister lived there in service, also his sweetheart Jennie. Naturally, he did not pass it by.

He had left very early one morning to go back to New York and had cut across country from the Highway on the east of Mona, coming around by the hill and the pond, in front of the Mansion, to River Road. He had arrived at the Corners in time to see a milkman pick up a gentleman on the road and drive with him into the town. Joe wanted to get back to New York early and begin work, for he had been absent a week. He was to catch the seven o'clock train, so he had abundance of time, as he could tell by the sun.

He started down the hill slowly, but took the woods along the north side of the Highway; he was fond of the woods and he knew the way—he had travelled it on previous visits. Just after he entered among the trees he heard a shot, followed by a groan—on the road, he thought—a little way above him. He trembled and stood still, then his courage manifested itself, and he crept cautiously to the roadside, which was hidden below by a few feet of embankment. What he saw paralyzed him! A man was lying in the road, and a little lower down on this side, not a hundred feet from himself, stood another in full view, with a smoking revolver in his hand. Instantly the negro understood. A murder—and *he* was a *witness*! He did nothing—waited. To have shouted would have been to invite death. But he kept his eyes open.

"I'se the only witness. I must look at him good," he thought. The man's back was partly turned, but Joe took in all that he could at that distance, and saw him

retreat after a moment into the woods. Then he grew frightened. The assassin was not far from him, but, fortunately, going deeper into the woods, and down toward the stony glade below.

Did the negro run? No. He gathered a couple of good-sized stones and followed. He thought the man on the road was dead; and he saw the other one going down into the gully to cross the small stream at the bottom. "Good!" he thought; "I'll follow him. If he sees me now, and comes after me, I can run a long way before he can climb that hill."

The assassin was picking his way—carefully—until he came to the rocky bottom. He wanted to cross the stream where a large flat rock gave an invitation for stepping. He had followed the stony formation carefully, avoiding the earth; he did not wish to leave marks to be traced.

Now, at this moment the negro became conscious of a new danger; he was near the scene of the crime alone, and if found, he would be suspected of having done it. So he looked about for a moment, and then decided to run back to Lorona and his people. He was growing scared. Who could blame him? He saw the murderer stoop down right below him, deep in the gully; and the negro, obeying a sudden impulse, swung one arm and hurled a stone straight at him. It struck the fugitive on the shoulder, turning him half around; and he broke into a run, full tilt, for the brook and the stepping-stone. Joe had not seen the murderer's face, but he told us that the man's chest was protected only by an undershirt. It was a chilly morning, and the fact had impressed him afterward as curious. He watched, and saw the assassin take the brook like a frightened stag, landing first on the rock in the centre, then on the other side. As he stepped on the rock in the middle of the stream, the boy saw something fall from his waist—something red. It fell into the water.

"I'd like to know what that is," he thought; "but I'd better *skip*." Then horror took possession of him; he crossed the road quickly and dashed into the Mark property. Then he ran to River Road and the bridge, up the incline on the other side of the pond, and into the fields beyond. On he went until Mona was passed; then he sat down in a little patch of wood and thought.

He was sure nobody had seen him except a farmer in the distance, too far away to know he was a negro. He was innocent, and perhaps he had better wait and see the police. Had he done so then and there, all would have been solved sooner than it was; but, poor boy, he had no one to advise him and he was alone with a

terrible secret. He had done well; he could identify the murderer perhaps; his was a great responsibility.

He stayed around, and from afar witnessed the crowds of the morning. In the afternoon he sneaked into town, hungry and worn and terribly cold. When he saw the people gathering in the court-room, curiosity conquered. He listened with all his soul, and made up his mind to go in and tell what he knew.

He saw Oakes come forward to give his testimony, and his heart beat fast and furious. He felt ill—the cold sweat poured from him as he heard; but he remained, entranced. He was going to tell all, for surely that tall fellow—Clark, they were calling him,—was the great detective Oakes; he had shined his shoes many times at the stand on Broadway before he went up-town. How peculiar that they didn't seem to know him! Then intelligence came, and he said to himself: "These people don't know him because he does not want them to." Joe did not understand all that had been said, but he knew things were uncanny and that this man Oakes was playing a game.

Suddenly had come the statement of Oakes about the arms, and the tension became too great. He cried out and ran, like the fleet-footed boy that he was, for Lorona.

There he told nothing, except that he had missed the train. His friends gave him food—the murder story was yet vague in the little village—and then he dashed on for New York. He shook the dust from his clothes and, catching a train miles down the line, arrived safely in town. He was far away from Mona at last, but he must see Mr. Elliott, his good friend, and tell him all that he could.

As the negro finished his story he looked around, and partially recovered from the state of ecstasy into which the recitation had thrown him. His eyes were rolling and shifting, his dark skin had that peculiar ashen color that comes to the negro under stress of great excitement.

Dr. Moore arose and walked to the boy, and, placing his hands on his wrist, said reassuringly: "Good boy, Joe! you are a brave fellow."

Oakes handed him a drink of brandy—he needed it—and then we all joined in praising him. He soon recovered himself, and then Oakes took up his position beside him again.

"Now, Joe, what did the murderer drop when he jumped over the stream from the

rock?"

"I dunno, Master Oakes—but it was a banana, I think."

"What!" said Hallen; "a banana?"

The negro looked worried.

"Yes, it did look like one of dose red, white, spotted cloths wat de niggers down South wear on their heads."

We all laughed.

"Oh, a bandana handkerchief, Joe."

And Joe laughed also, in relief.

"And now," continued Oakes, "what did it do? Did it float away?"

The boy thought a moment, then his quick brain came to his aid.

"No, no, Master Oakes; it splashed, sure enough it did. It went down—so help me Gawd!"

"Good!" said Oakes. "It contained something heavy, then. Now, Joe," he continued, slowly and clearly, "tell me, when you heard the evidence that the murderer was the man with a mark on his arm, why did you say, 'Oh, Gawd!' and run away?"

We all felt uneasy—the question was so unexpected, to some of us at least.

The negro hesitated, stammered, and lurched forward in his chair. Great beads of perspiration stood out on his brow and on the back of his hands. Oakes was behind him, and in a caressing way slid his left arm across the boy's chest. We divined instantly that that arm was ready to shoot up around the boy's neck for a strangle hold.

Joe tried to speak, but could not. I saw Hallen prepare for a spring, and Martin edge toward the door. Dr. Moore's breathing came deep and fast, and I began to feel like shouting aloud. What did it mean?

"Come! Speak, boy, speak!" said Oakes.

No answer.

Then Oakes stooped forward and said loudly enough for us all to hear, but right in the negro's ear: "Boy, you ran because *you* have a scar on your left arm!"

We were on our feet in an instant.

"The murderer," we cried.

The negro made a frantic effort to rise, but the arm closed on his neck and Oakes's right hand came down on his right wrist.

Joe's left hand went to the arm at his neck, but he was powerless.

In a voice as firm as a rock, clear and emotionless, Oakes cried out: "Don't move, boy! Don't try to run."

And then he said to us: "This boy is *not* the murderer; he is only a scared, unfortunate negro, and I will prove it."

The meaning of the words came to the boy gradually, and he became limp in the chair. Oakes relaxed his hold.

"Now, boy, if you try to run, we will bore you," and Chief Hallen drew his revolver and put it before him on the table.

"Now, Joe, show us your arm!" commanded Oakes.

The negro arose staggering, and took off his outer garment and his shirt. There, on his left arm, was a large irregular birthmark, blue and vicious-looking.

Oakes looked at it. "Gentlemen, this boy is a victim of circumstances. This is no cross, but the coincidence of a mark on the left arm has scared him nearly to death. That, in my opinion, is why he was afraid, and why he acted so peculiarly."

This was said deliberately, and with emphasis.

The negro fell on his knees. "Oh, Gawd! Oh, Mr. Oakes! Dat is it. Dat is it. I never done any murder. No! no! *no!*" and he burst into racking sobs. The strain was terrible. Dowd opened a window.

Hallen spoke. "How are you to prove his innocence, Mr. Oakes, as you said?"

There was a slight element of doubt in the question.

"Get up, boy," said Oakes; "get up." And turning to us, the cool man looked long at us all, then said: "The evidence showed conclusively that the weapon used was a heavy one, of 45-calibre probably—a revolver in all likelihood, and fired from a distance of about one hundred and fifty feet. That means a good shot. Now, this boy is right-handed, as you have noticed, but he could not use his right hand to shoot with, for the first two fingers have been amputated near the ends. Plenty of loss to preclude good pistol shooting!

"To have used such a weapon with the left hand, and with such accuracy, is out of the question save for a fancy shot. If this boy could shoot like that, he would not be boot-blacking for a living.

"Again, he has not noticeably strong arms, nor a wrist powerful enough to handle a heavy weapon properly. The boy is innocent—in my opinion."

"Oakes, you are a demon," said Hallen.

"Oh, no, I hope not; only I hate to see mistakes made too often. Poor devil!"

And Oakes patted the boy on the back.

With a pathetic, dog-like expression, sobbing with joy, the befriended negro seized the man's right hand and, kneeling, showered kisses upon it.

CHAPTER XVII

Checkmated

The negro was led away. He was in better spirits now, and smiling as only a negro can. That extraordinary genius—the mystic Oakes—had, by a process of reasoning that Joe himself was able to follow, not only cleared him of suspicion, but made a *hero* of him. The innate vanity of the race was reacting on the boy, and coming to the rescue of his nervous system, recently so severely strained.

When he had gone, Oakes turned to us and, interrupting our exclamations, remarked:

"Now that we are all here together, it would be wise perhaps briefly to review what clues we have obtained and their probable significance."

We all assented to this suggestion, and by tacit consent Quintus Oakes began:

"First, we have found that the *cartridge picked up* in the cellar, and evidently dropped by the man in the robe, *is of the same pattern as the old ones in the pouch upstairs*.

"They all belong to the old revolver which was taken away from its place—and for which another was substituted since my first visit here. With regard to its calibre (the important point), *that old revolver meets the requirements of our deductions about the weapon used to murder Mr. Mark*. Therefore we have a chain of evidence connecting my assailant in the cellar—the man in the robe—with the assassin.

"We know also that the revolver was fired not far from the hundred-and-fifty-foot distance; *the man was an excellent shot*, for you must consider the old style of weapon.

"He must have been *large*, or at least *strong in the wrist*, for a good shot with such a weapon cannot be made by a weak person."

I interrupted: "The murder of Smith was considered to be due to a pistol ball of large calibre. Could the same weapon have been used?"

"It could," said Oakes. "That one has been in the family for years. The style of the cartridges is somewhat similar to our modern ones, but they are very old, as we know by their appearance.

"Further," he continued, "in my opinion the 'woman story' connected with the Smith murder is based on a *man* in a black *robe*. It may have been the same man who is at the bottom of these later mysteries—though we are to remember that when Mr. Mark was killed Joe saw no *robe*.

"In the annals of crime we find very few women doing murder in that way; it is a man's method.

"We must look then for a *strong-wristed* man—a man who has also strong arms, and a *cross* on the *left* one; finally, a man with a knowledge of revolvers, and who has in his possession—or has had—a large, old-fashioned weapon and cartridges, and also a robe.

"And one thing more strikes me," added Oakes in a slow, deliberate voice, "he is a man *with a mania—an insane man*—always, or at intervals."

"Yes," said the doctor. "I had concluded so too, Oakes. The wearing of a robe—

especially in a confined place like the wall space—the cutting out of a panel and the peculiar method of attack seem nonsensical and without proper reason. And the absence of provocation for those assaults, and for the murder of good men like Smith and Mark, point strongly to an unbalanced mind."

"Probably correct," Oakes replied. "And I should say that the *insanity is present at intervals only*."

"Mr. Oakes," said Chief Hallen then, "don't you think it advisable to investigate that story of the bandana handkerchief as soon as possible? Affairs in town may become pressing at any time, and we may be needed there."

"Yes, Chief, certainly. We should lose no time about it," said Oakes. Then he spoke to Martin; and the latter retired and presently returned with Joe.

The detective asked the boy if he would go and point out the stone from which the murderer was leaping when the handkerchief fell into the water. "You know it is nearly full moon and several of my men will go with you, and so will Mr. Martin."

The negro assented reluctantly, though bravely, for he was not devoid of superstition. Oakes called in four of his men and said:

"Go with Mr. Martin and Joe. Take lanterns, and find the handkerchief which is at the bottom of the stream if the boy is telling the truth, and the murderer has not recovered it. He did not notice it drop, did he, Joe?"

"No, Master Oakes; he just flew along and never looked round. He did not know where it dropped." The negro was using good English, and standing erect with a very important expression. He was innocent, and the central figure now. He realized that dignity was becoming. An educated boy of his race can show great self-control under such circumstances. Vanity—thou Goddess of Transformation!

While the searching party was gone, we spent the time discussing Mike's peculiarities—most of all his horseback ride in the moonlight, a curious departure for a hired man.

"This whole thing is unusual in the extreme, Stone. Since the night that you were escorted to the pond by Chief Hallen's men and there warned of impending danger, and your unknown friend was chased by the man lying in wait for you, I have had a net around Mike and Maloney and Cook, but with negative results,"

said Oakes.

"You see, Maloney and Cook go about their business in a quiet fashion, while Mike cannot be approached very well; the men report him as very shrewd and suspicious."

"Did you find out where Mike went on his horseback trip?"

"No, that is another curious thing. The Lorona man who brought him the horse says he has done it for a few days and received good pay. The horse was always returned promptly, once or twice by a boy; the other times by Mike himself."

"To have done that, Mike must have walked back from Lorona," said Hallen.

"No, he may have ridden part way. We found a man this evening who saw him take a team on the Lorona Highway and ride into Mona after dark."

"Where is Mike now?" I inquired.

"Since the episode of that horseback ride, witnessed by Dr. Moore and yourself, he has disappeared."

"Disappeared!"

"Yes, eluded all our men and never returned the horse."

"Skipped! Got away!" we cried in amazement.

"Yes, but he won't stay away long; he will come back."

We did not quite understand Oakes's speech, but there evidently was something behind it.

At this point, with his characteristic swiftness of movement, he lighted a cigar and began to smoke, offering the box to us all.

That meant that, as far as he was concerned, talking on business had ceased for a time. He was now recreating.

Elliott and I walked to a window and looked out upon the front walk and the road, conversing upon the manner in which Joe had been brought to Mona.

He had resisted the idea at first, but through the efforts of Martin and Elliott, and

the promise of a reward, he had finally consented to the journey. They had explained to him that his refusal would defeat the ends of justice, and that escape was impossible; and when he realized that he had been unconsciously talking to watchers, and polishing their shoes in his innocence, he saw the folly of further remonstrance. Thus was the important evidence of the negro secured.

The strain of events was telling on us all. Quintus Oakes showed his deep concern by a tendency to leave us and remain alone.

As Elliott and I were talking, he looked at the rolling hills beyond the pond and exclaimed:

"Look! Can I be mistaken, Mr. Stone? Look in the direction of Mona—away off on the plateau—is not that a horse?"

I followed his pointing and discovered in the moonlight the figure of a horse advancing rapidly over the blue-green fields, along the path that led to the bridge.

Oakes advanced to the window and gazed intently, shading his eyes with his hands. On the crest of the hill that dipped to the pond the horse soon stood out clearly against the dark blue of the sky. We could see a figure which had lain low on his neck rise and sit straight in the saddle, then flash a light.

From near the road, on our side of the pond, came an answering light; a man stood there and exchanged signals with the horseman.

The rider was moving his arms rapidly, and with them the light. The other was answering in a similar manner.

Oakes remained quiet, and we all gathered at the window about him.

"What is it?" I asked.

He turned and said to me: "Here, write as I read."

I took an envelope and pencil from my pocket and wrote as Oakes deciphered the signals.

"A message from Mona," he cried. "Quick!"

Then he read the letters as they appeared:

"Discovered. Skinner has extra out. Pronounces me false; says Hallen has tricked

the town. Beware of Skinner. Tell Hallen to look out. Am off for New York."

Then came a long wave over the head, and the horseman dashed back toward Lorona.

We detected another horseman at a little distance, who joined him; they rapidly disappeared together.

"Excellent!" exclaimed Oakes. "He has done his duty well."

We saw the man on this side run post haste for the Mansion. As he rushed up the steps, Oakes met him. "All right, boy! I saw the signals myself." Then to us he said: "Quintus Oakes the false is discovered. That was he; he came to warn us."

"Then Skinner has caught on, confound him," said Dowd, and we all silently assented.

Oakes paced the room slowly. "Boys, we have been unexpectedly checked. The enemy has a strong hand: there is trouble ahead."

"Yes, there is that," retorted the vigorous Hallen. "I must get away to headquarters, gentlemen!"

"Correct!" answered Oakes; "and we will go with you, Chief. If trouble is coming, we will be useless here."

With one accord we prepared to depart for Mona immediately. The carriage was brought to the door and saddle-horses also.

Then we waited anxiously for the return of Martin's party. We were not long delayed. A commotion in the hall was heard, and in stepped Joe and Martin, followed by the men. Oakes's assistant advanced and laid a red handkerchief, dotted with white spots, upon the table. It was wet and heavy, and knotted by its four corners so as to form a pouch.

"We found it, sir, in about two feet of water, partly covered with sand. Its weight was gradually sinking it into the bottom."

Joe laughed hysterically and lapsed into negro dialect: "See, Mars Oakes! see, boss! I dun tole you the truth."

Oakes seized the handkerchief, and we all looked inside. It contained a few large cartridges.

"They match the one I found in the cellar, and those of the old revolver," said Oakes. "The man of the Mansion mysteries and assaults *is* the murderer of Mr. Mark."

We were intensely excited as we stood there viewing the evidence that was so conclusive. Not one of us made a remark, but the deep breathing of some and the pale faces of others showed the interest that was felt by one and all.

Oakes discovered on one end of the handkerchief the initial "S," and we all studied its appearance closely. Then Oakes asked Hallen if such handkerchiefs were unusual in Mona.

"No, not at all; there are hundreds of them sold here, especially to the laborers on the water-works—the Italians and Poles," answered the Chief.

"It is a very peculiar 'S,'" said Oakes, as he folded the handkerchief and put it in his pocket, giving the cartridges to Martin. He said nothing more, but seemed serious and thoughtful, as usual. And then we set out all together on a wild drive to police headquarters.

Despite the lateness of the hour, the crowds were increasing. The square, with the hotel on one side and headquarters on the other, was the centre of a vicious body of men, pushing, struggling and forcing its way along, and pausing now and again to surge around headquarters. We could all see that Hallen was to have his hands full.

"I should like to see Skinner very much," remarked Oakes in a sarcastic vein.

"I should like to see his arms," said Moore; "they might be interesting."

Oakes looked at the speaker with one of his undefinable expressions. We could not tell whether the shot had been a true one or not.

CHAPTER XVIII

Misadventures

Toward morning the crowd thinned. The street grew more quiet, although the very air still throbbed with action, even as the heart-strokes within us. Quickly as events had come, we were yet only in the midst of our experiences.

The clock in the Chief's room was striking three, and drowsiness was stealing

over me, as over the outside world, when a knock came at the front door and Hallen admitted a man, weary-eyed and panting. I recognized him as one of the men who had been masquerading about the Mansion as a carpenter. He was dressed in a heavy jersey without a coat, and was evidently suffering from fatigue.

He walked over to Oakes and spoke to him in a low voice. The detective asked a question or two, and turning looked at Dr. Moore, asleep in a chair, fagged out, then at me. I was wide awake, anticipating more trouble. "Stone," said he, "are you good for a ride with me on horseback? We have found something important."

"Yes," I answered, "I am ready."

Speaking a word to Hallen and Martin, Oakes drew me aside. "Leave your overcoat. Come, we are needed."

We passed out into the night and down a side street, led by the man who had summoned us. In a few minutes we reached a stable and found horses, and I knew that it had been so arranged. We were mounted and off without notice from any but an hostler and the proprietor, who had told me that my horse was strong and capable.

We pounded to the east, along the Highway, toward Lorona, for a mile or so, then swerved into a narrow road winding across the plateau to the south and west. I knew we were making for the River Road below the Mansion. I had heard of this lane, which swept in a long curve around the southern end of Mona, connecting the Highway with River Road about two miles south of the Mansion gate.

As we galloped along, Oakes communicated to me the cause of our trip.

"Two of my men have located a hut deep in the forest at the south end of the Mansion grounds. There is something going on there. They think they have the murderer. One of the men came for me; the other is watching."

I felt the blood surge to my brain, and the hardships of the night were forgotten in the intensity of my anticipations. At last, and I was to be at the finish!

Instinctively I felt for my revolver. It was safe, and the assurance that it was with me gave relief.

Fortunately, I was a fair horseman and my mount was one of those animals that respond to the rider's every command. My two companions were also well mounted, and the long ride was soon over. Arriving at River Road, we dismounted and left the horses in charge of the man who had accompanied us. Another man now came from the darkness—another of Oakes's retinue. He was to lead us to the hut.

Then we three entered the fringe of the woods, and cautiously followed our guide deep into the denser section. The moon was hidden occasionally by fleeting clouds, and as we advanced farther and farther, its rays ceased to reach us. All was gloom, deep and almost impenetrable.

Our guide whispered: "He is in the hut, sir, waiting for someone. Follow me."

Then he advanced a few paces, and led us through a more open section of the forest. Soon he stopped.

"Stay here until you see a light flash ahead; that is his signal. He has been here an hour, but his friend is slow in coming."

"Perhaps he knows it is too dangerous," said Oakes.

Our guide went from us to a short distance, to keep separate watch.

The giant trees around were more scattered than elsewhere in the forest through which we had passed. Occasionally the sheen of the moonlight was visible far above us as the branches swayed in the breeze. Here below, the air was quiet and the gloom deep. Our eyes, accustomed to it now, could detect the silent army of tree-trunks around us for a considerable distance.

The air was chilly, but excitement kept us from feeling the need of our great-coats. Beneath our feet the ground was soft but dry, and the leaves were scattered about in profusion; for this was the fall of the year and the woods had begun to strip at the touch of the frost king.

Quintus Oakes stood by my side behind a tree. We were both gazing intently in the direction that had been indicated to us. Nothing was visible for a few moments, when suddenly Oakes pressed my shoulder with his hand and said in a low, quiet voice: "See—off there, that flash!"

I had noticed nothing, but as I drew breath to answer, I beheld the diverging rays of a light—probably a lantern—play up and down a tree-trunk at least a hundred

feet away. It moved quickly, and then jumped to another trunk; in its transit it threw a long, narrow yellow streak on the ground between. Then it would be lost suddenly to our view. I thought the trees intervened in our line of vision at such times, but Oakes explained: "He is waiting and signalling with a dark lantern; see how the light is shut off at will. He is surely within a hut of some kind; I can see the outlines occasionally."

"What can he be up to?" I whispered. "He is at least a mile from the Mansion, and nearly as much from the road."

"That light is a guide," said Oakes. "His confederate cannot find the hut without it; the forest is too dense."

We waited in silence, stealing very carefully nearer to the hut, and our patience was finally rewarded. We saw the door, which was sidewise to us, open with a quick movement and a man enter. Then all was dark within and without, save in one little spot where, through the back wall of the hut, a few rays found exit in long, narrow streaks of yellow light, scarcely visible to us.

"He has turned his bull's eye away from the window and the door, and has not shut it. They are using the light for some purpose," said the detective, touching my arm and motioning me to follow him.

With utmost caution we advanced until we were near enough to hear voices. At first they came to us as a low, indistinct muttering, but as we neared the hut we determined that they were raised in argument. At our distance, however, we were unable to recognize either.

"Keep away from the front," said Oakes, "lest the door be opened and we be discovered."

We stationed ourselves in the shadow near the window, which was low in the side of this curious log-cabin—for such we saw it to be. It was boarded inside evidently, for the light was kept from without too well.

Through the window we beheld two dim forms bending over a board table. One was handling something like paper, in the diverging streak of illumination from the bull's eye opening of the lantern, which was on the table, facing the back wall of the hut, just as Oakes had said.

The figure could not be distinguished either as to face or form, for the light was very indistinct save in the immediate path of the rays. As we moved ever so little

from our chosen positions, our vision of the table and the streak of light upon it was cut off, owing to the small size of the window. I knew by the movement of Oakes's arm that he had secured his weapon, and I closed my hand about mine, holding it—muzzle down—by my side, ready for instant use.

The voices within, became louder, and I distinguished the words: "You *must*, man, you MUST get away."

It was answered by a half-mumbled protest, and then we saw one figure arise and stoop over the light on the table.

"Here, take this, and go!"

Oakes touched me. "The murderer preparing to get away," he said.

We could see a pair of hands counting what appeared to be money; then they extended their contents to the other hands that awaited them. The figure who had given the money arose, and with his back to us made as if to leave. Suddenly, without an instant's warning, we saw the form of the other come partially into view, and an arm steal slowly upward. As the first figure moved away, it closed about his neck and a death struggle began, revealed to us by the blurred swaying of the two and a deep, despairing gasp from the man being strangled.

"Murder!" said Oakes, and we moved toward the door of the hut with one thought in mind—the helping of a fellow being meeting his death at the hands of what we believed to be the assassin of Mona.

I was excited; it was unquestionably the most trying moment of my life, and I met it as we had not foreseen. Advancing two steps hurriedly, my feet caught in one another somehow, and with a wild war-whoop of distress I fell forward on my face, carrying Oakes with me in a crashing, headlong mix-up that must have been heard for a hundred yards in that still morning air.

It was all over!

The two in the hut heard us, the strangler released his hold and the light was extinguished instantly. Out of the door the figures flew like demons. They were both anxious to escape detection—that was evident. They must have thought it was the charge of the Light Brigade.

Oakes and I were up and after them. He shouted a word of command, then I heard more footsteps, and our guide answered. Instantly came the sounds of a

struggle, fierce but short, in the darkness beyond. We could see nothing, but we heard a heavy fall, and then the rush of an escaping man, or men. Oakes and I were quick to reach the spot, and managed to find our forest guide groaning on the ground.

At Oakes's suggestion we carried him back to the hut, which I ascertained was now quite empty. It was a grewsome experience, this. Oakes refused to allow a match to be struck, saying: "Don't draw their fire, Stone; we may be in a nest of them." My chagrin was deep as I thought of the opportunity that my clumsiness had brought to naught. We soon succeeded in reviving our man; he had been felled by a fist blow on the face, evidently.

"Did you see the other fellow?" asked my companion.

"Yes, sir, I saw one; he was Skinner. I caught his face in the lantern light just as they doused it."

"Indeed!" cried Oakes. "Skinner! You mean the man who runs the newspaper—the one I have ordered shadowed."

"Yes, sir; the same. It was he who was counting the money."

"Yes, that agrees. Go on. Who was the other?"

"I did not see him at all, Mr. Oakes, but I ran into him, or rather he into me. I have a piece of his shirt here, sir."

The man handed something to Oakes, and together we peered at it in the dim morning light. We soon determined that it was a good-sized piece of the neck of a shirt.

Then, watching carefully the woods around, I stood on guard, while Oakes examined the inside of the hut. It was an old hunter's cabin evidently, and had not been recently used. The table was made of rough boards, and was supported by two stumps. It might have served as a place to lie upon also.

Oakes uttered an exclamation, as the guide handed him a piece of paper money that was on the floor. Nothing else was found. The lantern had gone with the men.

"One man was giving money to the other to get him away, and nearly lost his life in defense of the rest in his possession. This is a piece of a bill torn off in the

struggle," said Oakes.

"Do you recognize this shirt pattern?" asked he.

"Yes, sir," said our guide; "it is like what O'Brien wears."

"Exactly!" said Oakes. "And you"—he addressed the man—"come with us to the road. Can you walk that far?"

"Yes, indeed. I am all right now, but I was finished for a few minutes."

"You were knocked out well," remarked Oakes; "lucky you were not killed."

We returned to River Road by the way we had come, arriving there as dawn was breaking and the sun beginning to throw his rays across the plateau before us. We found our horses and the man who had escorted us from Mona.

Oakes spoke to him: "Here, Bob, let Paul ride on your horse; he has had a smash. You walk. Both of you go to the Mansion and tell the others to find O'Brien, if possible. Paul will explain. Make no arrests, but don't let your man get away."

We vaulted into our saddles and galloped ahead. As we were returning to headquarters by way of the Corners I felt like a culprit; I was devoured by chagrin, and thoroughly ashamed of my awkwardness.

Oakes's face was grave—much more so than usual—but he rode his horse with alertness and confidence, and I wondered at the endurance he displayed—also at his consideration; for in this hour, when keen disappointment must have been his, he did not mention my mishap, which had so changed events. He acted as though it were beneath him to notice it, and that made me all the more mortified; but at the same time I vowed to redeem myself in his eyes.

Dashing toward the Mansion gate, we both pulled up our horses as Oakes uttered a sudden exclamation. He rested one hand on the pommel of his saddle and pointed with the other at a man inside the Mansion gate. His back was toward us, and he had been raking the walk apparently.

"Look—notice!" and the voice of my companion grew sharp and significant; "look!"

The man was now reaching upward with one hand, the rake held within its grasp, and with a graceful, well-calculated swing he was deftly denuding a branch overhead of its dying leaves.

"Well, I see," I answered; "it's Maloney cleaning up."

"Exactly!" came the staccato answer; "but how about the strength of the wrist that can handle such a heavy rake with such certainty?"

"Oh, yes, he's strong," I cried. "He's got plenty of muscle, apparently."

"He has a strong wrist and a strong arm, and not such an awfully large chest," answered Oakes calmly, as though speaking of the weather or of something of no importance. Fool that I was, it was only then that his meaning suddenly went home to my slow-acting brain. I saw a light in Oakes's eyes that I had never seen before—cool, steely, calculating.

"No," I whispered; "*impossible*!—but you are searching for just such a person."

"Yes, of course," was the laconic answer; "but let's talk with the gentleman of the rake."

Oakes led the way to within a few feet of the gate, then rising in his stirrups shouted to Maloney.

The latter turned, and with a look of recognition came quickly toward us. "Good morning, sir;—good morning, Mr. Clark. I was going to headquarters for you soon, sir; they told me you had gone there with Chief Hallen——"

"Yes! Why did you wish to go there, Maloney?"

"Because, sir, there is something wrong—something about the mystery here. You know, sir, you left word to report if anything unusual happened."

Maloney spoke quietly, and without embarrassment. We had noticed before that he was fairly well educated—another victim of unfortunate circumstances.

"What has occurred?" There was a hard ring in Oakes's voice. It told me to be discreet; I had heard that accent before.

"Mr. Clark, I went down to Lorona last night to see my brother, who is sick. When I returned it was late. I was on horseback, and I noticed a man on the road lighting a lantern. I spoke to him; he would not answer, but started into the timber at the far south end of the grounds."

"Well, what was peculiar?"

"It was Skinner, sir."

"Skinner!"

"Yes, sir; I saw his face by the light. I thought it strange, tied my horse and followed him. He went a long way into the woods to a hut, and waited a couple of hours with the light. Then another man came, and they had a quarrel. There was a terrible noise, and then the light went out and they disappeared. I went back to my horse and have just got here."

"Who was with Skinner?"

"I don't know, sir. I was facing the door of the hut, but it was too dark to see. They worked with a dark lantern."

We had quietly walked our horses up to the gate while listening to Maloney. Oakes's eyes were upon the ground.

Suddenly he looked up. "Thank you very much, Maloney. You have done well in reporting to me. I will see Chief Hallen; this is a matter, perhaps, for the police, certainly not for me, to work on."

Wheeling our horses, we darted to the Corners and on toward Mona.

Quintus Oakes was very quiet; he seemed annoyed—or nonplussed—and the pace that he set was terrific. As we neared the town we slowed up, and I asked excitedly of the taciturn man by my side: "Tell me, what's up?"

He turned slightly in his saddle. "Maloney was there; he acknowledged it. So far he told the truth; but he *lied* about returning on horseback. There were no hoof-marks going toward the stable—none entered the Mansion gate. And he lied also about his brother in Lorona, for there is no such relative of his there; Maloney has no brothers or sisters hereabouts."

I now remembered Oakes's careful scrutiny of the ground while we were talking with Maloney, and I also realized how close was the net he had spread about everyone at the Mansion.

"If Maloney was at the hut, how did he get back ahead of us?" I asked.

"Ran, of course—took the inside way through the woods; he knows the paths well. He may not only have been *near* the hut, Stone, he may have been *in* it. If so, he tried to kill Skinner, for the old man had money."

Then Oakes continued: "Perhaps it was Maloney who was about to get away, if he could. But he can't," the detective added with a sardonic laugh, as he closed his jaws firmly.

"But," I exclaimed, "suppose it was Maloney, what of O'Brien? He was there; we have his shirt—in part at least."

"Oh, bother O'Brien! he makes me tired," cried Oakes enigmatically; "he will get himself into trouble some day."

"Yes, yes," I contended; "but he too has strong arms and a strong wrist and could have used the revolver."

"Surely! So could many men. These clues are merely the primary ones. Many men answer their requirements. They are worth very little by themselves. They simply point to a certain type of man. They are simply *links*, as yet unforged into the chain."

"But one thing more, Oakes," I cried, "why should Maloney volunteer the information that he was at the place if he had no good excuse for being there?"

"That's it exactly. Perhaps he mistrusts he was seen and wants to get in his story first. Perhaps he cannot hold his tongue; perhaps his mind is weak. We are looking for a mind somewhat unusual, Stone, remember that."

We were now at the Square in front of the little hotel and, dismounting, we proceeded to enter the door of the inn. As we did so, I took my companion by the arm and drew him aside.

"Say, Oakes," I said, "don't tell Dr. Moore how I involved matters by that stumble. I would never hear the end of it."

Oakes looked surprised, then his eyes beamed in merriment. He smiled ever so slightly.

"That certainly was a beautiful charge you made over me," said he.

He did not promise not to tell, however; but months afterwards, Dr. Moore learned all about it from me, and I then found that Quintus had remained silent.

CHAPTER XIX

A Faulty Story

After breakfast, while Oakes gave the doctor a brief rèsumè of our night's adventure, the two rival newspapers came out with "extras" on the recent doings. Skinner's comments were sarcastic and bitter, and, while not actually inciting to lawlessness, played upon the roused feelings of the towns-people by scathing allusions to Hallen's inefficiency, and by reiterating the story of the false Quintus Oakes.

Our friend Dowd, on the other hand, came forward with a moderate, well-worded article that swayed the minds of the more thoughtful. The reading of his words won us more friends. Who does not like to hear two sides of an argument, or to read cool words of wisdom from one whose career entitles him to respect?

We had learned at breakfast that Hallen had taken hold with a grip of iron during the night. Many arrests had followed his activity, and the quietude of the forenoon was largely due to his efforts of the night before.

As we stood outside the hotel remarking upon the changed appearance of the streets, our attention was attracted to a small crowd approaching the Square from the direction of the Corners. There were men running ahead and shouting; then a close, compact body swaying around a central attraction. We thought we detected a man being helped along as though he were severely injured, and we clearly distinguished the words "Shot at!" "The murderer!" and many expressions of anger and terror.

Oakes looked into the mass of men and scanned the pale face of the injured one. "It's Maloney," he said, seizing the doctor and myself by the arm. He pushed his way forward as the crowd recognized and opened for Mr. Clark.

"Well, Maloney, what is it?" asked Oakes.

"I was shot at, sir," he exclaimed, "shot at, in the very spot where Mr. Mark was killed; and then, sir, someone hit me a blow on the head, and I fell."

I saw Oakes run his hand over Maloney's scalp.

"I was dazed, sir, when these men found me," finished the gardener.

"Yes," said two laborers, "we found him on the ground just waking up, and acting queer-like. And here's the revolver; it was lying behind the rock, sir."

"How did it happen?" asked Oakes.

"I heard a shot near me," Maloney answered, "a heavy revolver shot. I turned, and was then hit with something like a sand-bag, I guess, for everything got dim."

Hallen walked him into the headquarters building, to avoid the rapidly increasing crowd.

"Shut the doors," he ordered. The command was quickly obeyed, and we who had worked together were all within the building now, away from the crowd.

"Who was it?" asked Hallen of Maloney.

The man hesitated a while, but upon being pressed for an answer finally replied: "I have not dared to mention my suspicions, sir, but the fellow looked like Mike O'Brien. At any rate, he was wounded; he was walking with a limp, sir, and I saw blood on his trousers leg. He must have been in a scrap or an accident."

"When I was coming to," he continued, "I saw him hiding a revolver behind a rock. I pointed out the place to the men when they came a few moments after, and they found it."

"Why did you not cry out for help?" asked Oakes suddenly, even viciously, I thought.

Maloney answered quickly: "Because he thought I was dead, and I let him think so. If I had made any noise, sir, he would have finished me. I did not move until I knew help was near."

"Good!" said Oakes; "you had presence of mind. Let us see the revolver; the men left it here, did they not?"

Hallen stepped forward with the weapon.

Oakes examined it; but his look informed us that it was not the *old* one taken from the wall in the Mansion.

Further questioning failed to reveal anything of importance, but it seemed clear from what Maloney said that the assaulter escaped on horseback after he was seen by his intended victim, for Maloney insisted that he had heard a galloping horse afterwards.

"He was wounded, you said?" queried the detective.

"Yes, sir, quite badly, I thought."

Moore examined Maloney's injury and took careful note of his condition; then the gardener was told to go, and he was soon joined outside by the two laborers —his new found friends. Together they went for the hotel bar across the street. As they disappeared, Oakes exchanged glances with the doctor, and I knew that something was wrong. There came a long silence, which Hallen finally broke.

"This is a queer story, Oakes; I don't understand it. Is it the murderer at work again—and O'Brien accused? You say the Mansion mysteries are the work of the same hand that shot Mr. Mark, and possibly Mr. Smith. But those mysteries are old, and O'Brien is a recent arrival here and knows very little of the Mansion. I cannot see his guilt. How do you explain it, Oakes?"

The keen man addressed faced the Chief, and we all knew the words that were coming were valuable.

"Chief, I have just told you of Mr. Stone's adventures with me this morning—of my proof that Maloney lied to us. Well, he has lied again."

"Yes," chimed in Dr. Moore, "the man's a fake. He was not seriously injured, if at all."

"I saw through Maloney's story instantly," continued Oakes. "He said he was assaulted by O'Brien, who was, according to his own story, a badly wounded man. He said O'Brien hid the revolver afterwards, while he, Maloney, was shamming death, and that O'Brien sought to escape. It is nonsense."

"Why? I fail to see!" I asked excitedly.

Oakes turned to me: "Why, Stone, don't you see the flaws? Would a seriously injured man attempt deliberate murder? What show would he have to escape? Then, again, if able to get away himself, would he hide the revolver near the scene of the crime, behind a rock? No, he would take it with him as a defensive weapon, or else hide it where it never could be found; in the Hudson, for instance, or the brook—both near at hand."

"True enough," cried Hallen, his face showing his admiration; "but what's your idea, then, Oakes?"

"Just this, gentlemen. Maloney *himself* shot O'Brien, and seeing the latter escape knew that his game was up, for he had been identified by O'Brien. So he hid the revolver that he himself used, and then pretended to have been sand-bagged and shot at. He relied on the weight of his word against O'Brien's, not knowing anything of the evidence collected against him or that we were anything but agents and workmen about the Mansion?"

The Chief looked long and half sceptically at Oakes, then asked: "Does Maloney meet your requirements? Does he fill the bill?"

"Well, he has a strong wrist and long arms," answered Oakes—"that places him among the *possibles*; he also has a comparatively narrow chest, such as the man had who wore the robe—you remember we reasoned that out. Those three things cover much ground. Then, again, he is an old resident, knows all about the Mansion, was here when Smith was murdered."

Elliott now spoke up: "Oakes, you said the murderer was a good shot. Is Maloney a good shot with a revolver?"

"Yes, he was; he used to belong to the National Guard years ago. He was a splendid shot then, according to evidence procured by my men."

"But the revolver to-day was not the old one?" queried the Chief.

"No," answered Oakes; "but he can easily have two."

"I had better arrest him now as a suspicious person," exclaimed Hallen excitedly.

"Not yet. Let us be *sure* first—remember Skinner has a motive for crossing us; he has tried to defeat the aims of justice right through. He was dealing money this morning to someone; suppose it was to Maloney—what is his reason?"

Hallen thumped the table furiously as though a new thought had come to him. "Skinner answers the physical requirements also, Mr. Oakes—he was also a guardsman—a good shot."

"Yes," answered Oakes, "but scarcely strong enough to overpower me at the Mansion."

"Unless he was acting while in mania, as we presume this criminal acts," said Moore.

I sat spellbound as these men discussed the intricacies of the affair, realizing the

truth of their reasonings and marvelling at the clues, conceptions and brilliant memories revealed, especially by the masterly Oakes.

"Too bad you cannot find Skinner, and see what he is up to," I remarked.

"We must let Hallen keep watch on him until we are ready for our final move. It would be easy to arrest him on suspicion, but that might defeat our object, and, again, I do not believe in making arrests until my case is clear," said Oakes.

"Do you not think Skinner might be the murderer?" I asked.

"Not as I see things now. It seems more probable that he is interested in someone whom he wants to get out of harm's way. His motive throughout this affair has been to hide the guilty, I think."

"And what do you make of that man O'Brien?" queried Dowd; "he seems to be a mysterious fellow."

Oakes and Hallen exchanged knowing glances. "He's another possibility; he's a little Tartar," said the detective.

"But won't Maloney get away now?" asked Elliott.

"Nit," was the answer from Hallen. "Those two 'laborers' with him are my 'specials.'"

I was getting entirely tied up now, but, desiring to appear erudite and worthy of such company, I blurted forth: "Who is Mike O'Brien, anyway?"

Oakes looked at us all coolly and exasperatingly. "He seems to be a little extra thrown in. I'll tell you all about it when you tell me if the 'S' on the handkerchief has anything to do with Mr. Skinner."

An exclamation of surprise went up. We had all forgotten *that*. But before we could resume, a message arrived for Oakes. It was brought by one of the men whom we knew so well by sight around the Mansion. He told of the finding of a burned tree, hidden in the forest, near the scene of the murder of Mr. Mark. Those who were searching had discovered that the tree was recently struck by lightning and that within its burned interior was ash.

The man had brought some with him, and also a small, crumpled piece of newspaper. Oakes looked carefully at them as we glanced over his shoulder.

"At last!" cried he. "Here is wood ash—wet, as was that on the robe; and here is paper like that of the 'Daily News,' which we found in the robe; is it not?"

"Yes," cried Moore. "It is indeed—can it be?"

"Yes," came the answer from Oakes; "my orders to search for the origin of the ash have been crowned with success. The robe was in that tree."

"But," I cried, "of what value is that?"

"Just this—the robe was not worn at the time of the murder. Remember, Joe did not see it—it had been hidden, probably. The murderer used it to go and to come in, but for some unknown reason discarded it at the shooting."

"Excuse me," said the messenger, "excuse me, Mr. Oakes—but that's about right. The tree was beyond the stone where he crossed and lost the handkerchief. He was running for the robe, sir; the murderer was after his disguise."

Oakes looked at his subordinate calmly and smiled ever so slightly. The man bowed and retreated, abashed at his own impetuosity.

Hallen turned to our friend Oakes and said: "I never in my life saw anything like this—like you."

Oakes, always ready to side-step praise in any form, answered, with one of his chilling glances: "Oh, bother! You're young yet, Hallen; you need age."

Hallen half resentfully yanked his cap on his head and strode to the door.

"Well," he remarked, "here's where I take a look at Maloney's arms—I am dead tired of theorizing."

"Stop!" commanded Oakes; "you'll spoil it all."

"I won't spoil the cross on the arm—the cross of indigo—if it's there; and if it ain't there, it ain't. Hang it all, anyway." And forthwith Hallen strode out the door, down the steps toward the hotel bar-room, with Oakes and the rest of us following in a vain endeavor to head him off.

When we reached the bar-room, Hallen was already in the side room. We rushed toward the little room door, expecting to see Maloney in the grasp of Hallen; but instead, we beheld the Chief gazing in stupefaction at his two men dead drunk, heads between their hands on the little round table.

"————————,——!" cried the Chief in a voice that shook the glasses on the shelves in the bar-room and brought the white-coated attendant with one bound to the door. "Hell—en—Maloney's escaped."

"Escaped!" cried the bar-keeper. "Escaped!—nit. Why, he paid for the drinks and walked out half an hour ago—said he had a job at the Mansion. These fellows—gosh!" cried the man as he shook them—"drunk! What's up—what does it mean, Chief?"

Then Quintus Oakes spoke in tones of dulcet and ineffable sweetness, cooingly, charmingly. "It means that Chief Hallen pays for a round of the best you've got. In order to see a cross on a man's arm it becomes necessary first to catch the man—something like the bird's tail and the salt proposition."

"Mix 'em up quick!" shouted Hallen, advancing to the bar. "Hell—en—be damned! Get the two samples of Mona's police out into the air! Hell—en——!"

CHAPTER XX

A Man's Confession

The assault upon Maloney was now the talk of the town. Hallen, who had enjoyed a respite from censure, was again furiously blamed for inability and incompetence. None but our select few discerned that Maloney was lying, for none knew as much of the intricacies of the case as did we. All were crying out for the instant arrest of the one who had attempted to kill him, but none but the few who had heard Maloney's statement within headquarters knew that it was O'Brien he had accused—and only those few knew that his story was probably false.

Although the order had gone forth quietly, as we knew, to "find Mike O'Brien," still it was not known to any save Hallen's and Oakes's men.

The masses were in ignorance of the strides we had made twards the solution of the horrible happenings at Mona, and, of course, Hallen was getting more than he deserved in the way of criticism.

Oakes told us that he momentarily expected some new developments in the case, as Hallen was endeavoring to find Skinner and bring him to the Mansion. His surmises proved true, for it was found an easy matter to locate the old man; and early in the evening Hallen arrived at the Mansion and joined us in the apartments upstairs, and with him were Martin and Skinner.

Dowd, the rival of the old man, was with us, having begged earnestly of Oakes to be allowed to follow as close to the action as possible, and having stuck by us

like a veritable leech since the morning. Dowd was a nice fellow, and a newspaper man from start to finish, and he seemed to have developed a great liking for Oakes.

We were all upstairs when Martin ushered in the tall, rather slender, but powerful old man, Skinner. None of us, save Hallen, had seen him at close range before; but I saw a curious expression, half of defiance, half of dismay, in his face, that made me watch him most closely. Dr. Moore was scanning his features carefully in a way that showed he had detected something, but Quintus Oakes, rising from his seat and advancing politely to meet the old gentleman, seemed neither to have seen anything nor to know anything. He was just the polished gentleman we all knew so well; but I noticed that, as he shook hands with Mr. Skinner, he cast a quick glance at the man's arm and the wrist, and then at the old man's eyes.

Moore whispered: "He has excluded Skinner as the criminal. Look! see him take it all in."

Oakes was leading Skinner to a seat, and as he walked, he spoke freely. He had discovered that which Dr. Moore had also seen, but which I had failed to detect.

"Mr. Skinner, allow me," said he, gracefully. "It's not well lighted here; I imagine that little white scar on your right eye—on your cornea, just in front of the pupil—interferes somewhat with your vision."

"Yes, Mr. Clark, it does interfere just a trifle."

"Just enough to spoil duck-shooting, eh! I understand you used to be quite fond of that sort of thing, Mr. Skinner."

Moore and Hallen exchanged glances; and the knowledge was general to us—the old man was *not* the murderer, for the assassin could shoot well, and the old scar on the eye prevented that in Skinner's case.

"But to what do I owe the honor of a request to call at the Mansion, escorted by such a nice young man, to see Mr. Clark, the agent?" queried Skinner.

The old fellow was shrewd—he looked at Hallen and smiled half-heartedly. Then he looked at me, and remarked that we had met before somewhere, and extending his hand to Moore, he said he guessed he was glad to know us all better. Then turning quietly to Chief Hallen, he laughed, and gave us a shock from which we were unable to rally for a few moments.

"Well, Chief, they're keeping you busy. They tell me you don't like it because I exposed that fellow who palmed himself off as Mr. Quintus Oakes—that man Rogers, you know."

"No, I did not like it particularly—it interfered with my plans; I am trying to catch the murderer of Mr. Mark, you know."

"Suppose you are! you haven't got him yet. You can search me, Chief. I think Mr. Quintus Oakes here is entitled to all the credit so far—eh—don't you?"

The old fellow turned to Oakes as he spoke the words that showed he was not to be fooled into believing Oakes was Clark.

We moved nearer. Skinner knew all, apparently.

Then Oakes arose to meet the occasion, and stood before the old man: "Mr. Skinner, I thank you for warning me not to come to Mona—it was your letter I received. But why did you warn me? Was it to protect your secret?"

Oakes had acted all along as though he had learned some things he had not spoken of to us—he and Hallen had seemed to comprehend more than we others knew; but I was scarce prepared for such a sudden revelation.

"Stop!" cried the old man, "stop! you have no right—I did warn you to keep away from Mona—I knew of the Mansion mysteries—I knew you by sight in New York—I recognized you here on your first visit—I did not want to see a good man get in trouble."

"Thank you," said Oakes, "thank you. Your kindness was appreciated, but you have another motive—you are shielding someone."

"None—no one," came the answer.

"Nonsense!" and Oakes's eyes blazed as he spoke; "you tried to send him away this morning. You gave him money at the hut. You were nearly killed by the man you are protecting. Can you explain it?"

The old man was shaking violently. He arose, tottered and sat down. Then burying his head in his hands, he remained silent for a space of seconds. Then shaking his head, he moaned: "No, I can't explain. I had given him all. Mr. Oakes, he was not robbing me—he seemed angry—he—I could not understand."

"I can," said Oakes. "The man you have befriended these many years, the man

Maloney who used to work with you in your shop, to whom you gave, among many other things, a red bandana handkerchief with your initial 'S' upon it—one of those handkerchiefs you use about the printing office—that man, we think, is a maniac. We surmise that he has the killing mania. Did you not suspect it?"

The old man's manner changed to one of terrified inquiry. "Why, I never suspected—I—I thought he was peculiar—I mistrusted he was at the bottom of the Mansion mysteries—I wanted to send him away to give him a show."

Oakes hesitated, then answered evasively, but forcefully: "Maloney is probably irresponsible. He is the man of the Mansion—the woman, so called, of the Smith murder—the murderer of Mr. Mark—we believe, but we are without *proof* as yet."

The old man's face filled with the blood dammed back from the throbbing heart, then paled as the heart-strokes weakened, and the cold sweat of collapse appeared in beady drops upon his brow.

Moore was at his side with a drink, and we all placed him on the sofa and watched the color return to the yellow-white face, and the respirations deepen again.

Oakes bent solicitously above him. "There is something back of all this, Skinner. Maloney is more than a friend." Then, as the old man rose, the detective, in tones gentle but strong, called Skinner's attention to the fact that his conduct in using the influence of his journal against Hallen and the discovery of the criminal needed an explanation.

Skinner arose, steadied himself, and turning to Hallen said, in a voice scarcely audible: "Chief, I have always been a good citizen till now. I wanted Maloney to get away. He would not go. I thought he might be at the bottom of the Mansion mysteries, but I had no idea he could be a murderer. I did not wish his identity revealed; I tried to discourage Mr. Oakes. I tried to save my reputation, Chief—to save a name good as the world goes; but this is my punishment. Study my face, Chief—study my eyes, my chin. Then imagine a handsome Spanish face—dark-haired, dark-skinned. Do you see why Maloney has blue eyes and a square chin—with hair black as the Indian's and skin swarthy as night? Gentlemen, do you understand? She is dead. Maloney does not know. I cared for the lad. He is my son. He always has been eccentric, but although perhaps insane, I had no proof. I tried to hide my secret, but if Justice demands his capture, Chief, I am at your disposal."

The old man extended his hands, his lips quivering with the words that spelled ruin, and advanced to the Chief, as though expecting arrest, while we all remained motionless, in pitying silence.

Hallen glanced at him. Then the burly fellow turned suddenly to Martin: "Here, you son of a dandy!" said he, as we all smiled and Oakes bit his lip in suppressed emotion, "here! you go on down to the stable and tell my coachman to drive round to the front door—I am going to have him drive home with Mr. Skinner." Then they walked to the door, the old man half-leaning on the thick-set, muscular shoulders of Hallen. At the threshold the Chief turned quickly: "If any of you ducks say anything, you're a lot of dudes," and the two disappeared downstairs to the coach.

After Hallen had returned to the room, and as the rumble of the wheels died away in the distance, Dowd addressed a question to Oakes. He wanted to know how Oakes had secured advance information as to the history of Skinner and the handkerchief.

"Well, Dowd, as soon as Skinner began antagonizing our moves, I suspected that he was the writer of the letter of warning. Then I ordered his history—you know those things are easily obtained. He came here years ago it seems, comparatively unknown, and worked his way up, employing a young fellow for many years in his office. This young fellow went West, but returned later. He was Maloney. He had not the mental attainments for his employer's business, but the older man kept in touch with the younger, even after he found it necessary to dispense with his services. When I saw Skinner, I detected some resemblance between them—this seems to have escaped general notice, but Dr. Moore was not deceived. A study of the eyes and the ears and the nose confirmed my suspicions of the paternity of Maloney; but all that, while interesting, was not so valuable as the knowledge that Maloney had several handkerchiefs given him by Skinner. You see, Skinner's conduct was so suspicious throughout that we have investigated him thoroughly. We found he wore such handkerchiefs around his neck in the printing office. We found Mrs. Cook was aware that Maloney had some of them—he told her that Mr. Skinner gave them to him. He always was proud of Skinner's friendship."

"Then you knew all about it this morning, Quintus," I cried, exasperated at the man's taciturnity; "you knew when you said you would tell who O'Brien was, if I would tell whether the 'S' had anything to do with Skinner."

"No, but I mistrusted; the proofs were only more recently secured."

"Then, as you now have the answer regarding the 'S,' it seems only fair that you tell us who O'Brien is," I cried.

Oakes became very serious. "I believe O'Brien was the man watching on the balcony when Dr. Moore was assaulted; also that he was the man at the bridge who warned you, Stone, of danger, but who has kept his identity hidden. We had strong proof that he was at the hut watching, as were we; he accidentally left a part of his shirt with my man, remember. I also believe that he was wounded and is in hiding—wounded by Maloney, on the Highway, when he was about to close in upon him."

"What do you mean?" cried Moore. "What curious conduct for a man—to keep in hiding!"

"No, not at all," answered Oakes sharply. "Remember how you saw him on horseback one night, revolver in hand. Well, he was attending to business. *O'Brien is working on the Mansion mysteries.* I believe he only knows half of the affair; he does not realize Maloney may be the murderer of Mark—his conduct is in accord with that of a brave detective working single-handed and desiring to keep his identity secret."

"A *detective*!"

"Yes, I fancy so," answered Oakes, with a smile on his face. "Why not? We are not the only bees around the honeysuckle."

"By George! I never thought of that," exclaimed Moore.

"Indeed!" retorted Oakes in dulcet tones. "Why should you? You have not played this game before—it is new to you."

"And does Hallen know, does he mistrust that O'Brien is a detective?"

Oakes laughed. "Boys, you're slow. Of course he does. He has even found out there is a well-known detective by the name of Larkin who is fond of the alias O'Brien. This Larkin has a scar under his hair in front. We will perhaps be able to identify O'Brien soon."

"What made you first mistrust?" I asked.

"Why, remember how curiously O'Brien acted when we hunted the robe—how

indifferent he was—how he used dialect!"

"Yes, but why—how?"

"Well," interrupted Oakes, "that dialect was poor—unnatural, consequently perhaps assumed. That was the first clue to explain the curious actions of Maloney's loving friend, who has stuck to him like molasses to a fly's leg."

"Let us go into town and have dinner at the hotel," I cried, disgusted at my lack of perspicacity. My invitation was accepted with the usual alacrity of hungry men, and we soon were striding along—Hallen, Oakes and Moore in front and Dowd, Elliott and myself behind. We walked close together, discussing the events and joking at one another in great good-natured animal spirits, for things were coming to a head now and Broadway was not so far off after all.

As the darkness closed in upon us, relieved only by the faint glimmering of the rising moon, we were in a compact body—an excellent target. Strong in the presence of each other, we had for a moment forgotten that we were in the land where a brain disordered was at liberty. We, the criminal hunters, were but human—and this was our error.

CHAPTER XXI

The Attack

We had advanced along River Road to its junction with the Highway, and Martin had just closed in from behind as Dr. Moore started to say something about the dinner that was coming, when, just as we came into the shadows of the great trees to our left, a flame, instantaneous, reddish-blue, streaked forth from the side of the road and a deep, muffled, crashing sound came to our ears. Everyone recognized it instantly—it was not the high crack of a modern weapon such as we carried, but the unmistakable guttural of an old-style heavy revolver.

An instant, and the voice of Oakes rang out, cool, but intensely earnest, "To cover"—and we covered. Never before had six men melted from a close formation so rapidly, so silently, so earnestly.

Dr. Moore, Elliott and I reached the trees on the other side together, and lost our identity trying to find a place for our hunted bodies. We lay down in a heap behind a burned tree-stump, and said "damn" together.

Somewhere around was the fiend of Mona, and somewhere were Oakes, Hallen and Dowd, but not with us—we could swear to this, for we were in a class by ourselves and we knew one another even in the darkness.

We heard a sudden scuffle in the road, and saw a giant figure rush by us, throwing a silhouette on the roadway. It turned, faced about and crouched as another figure darted from the woods across the road. Then the figure crouching made a spring, and the two swayed to and fro before us like great phantoms, and then the figures separated, and one started down the Highway followed by the other at breakneck speed. Then we heard the voice of Oakes from somewhere:

"Halt! or I'll shoot."

The fugitives stopped, ducked, dashed toward us and by us, into the woods, and after them came the report of Oakes's revolver—we knew it by the quick, high-pitched note—and then—Oakes himself. It was evident to us he had fired in the air, for we all saw the small flame point heavenward as his weapon was discharged.

Neither fugitive slackened his speed, but both rushed across the plains east by northeast into the face of the moon as it rose off the plateau of Mona.

"What is who?" gasped Moore.

"The which?" I answered, as a polar chill chased up my spine.

"Oh, the d——l!" soliloquized Elliott.

"See, the second man limps—he must be O'Brien; he is chasing the first one," whispered the doctor as we gazed into the night.

"And Oakes is cavorting after the bunch—I play him straight and place," spoke Elliott; "he is gaining."

We watched Oakes, fleeter than ever, steadier, disappear in the distance as the moon entered a passing cloud-bank and all became lonesome and dark.

"Let's get on the plain," said Elliott, and we crawled as best we could out of the woods toward the place where the three were last seen by us.

"Let's be in at the finish," I cried, and we started in the dim steely haze of the obscured moon to follow the chase. Darkness impenetrable came on, and suddenly a wild moan of anguish reached us—an awful, convulsive cry of terror.

It neared us and was in our very neighborhood—in our midst—and again away; and with it came the rush of feet, heavy and tired, and soon the light tread of the pursuer—the athletic, soft tread of Oakes. I shall never forget that cry of terror. It was as though the soul had left the body in anguish—it was a cry of fear greater than man seemed capable of uttering.

From out of the darkness came the voice of Moore: "A maniac in terror!" Then the heavy tread was upon us again, a body darted past me, and the heavy revolver spoke again. I felt a stinging sensation in my arm, a numbness, a feeling of dread and of fear; then I reeled and recovered, and looking around me saw the figure dashing away like mad. The moon was uncovering again, and the fighting instinct of the brute was aroused within me. I knew I was wounded, but it was a trivial matter. I felt the surging of blood to my brain, the pumping of my heart, the warmth and glow of the body that comes when one rallies from fear or surprise, and the next instant I was off in pursuit.

Always a good runner, I seemed endowed with the speed of the wind; slowly I gained. The man before me ran rapidly but heavily; he was tired. He glanced around and moved his arms, and I realized that he was unarmed. His weapon had fallen. I shut my mouth and saved my breath, and loosened joints which had not been oiled since the days of long ago, when I played on my college foot-ball team. Slowly I closed in—the capture was to be mine—the honor for Stone, yours truly—lawyer. I unreefed some more, and the ground went by under me like mad. I was dizzy with elation and courage and bull-hearted strength, and then, just as I came within talking distance of the fleeing terror, there was a report and my right leg dragged, my stride weakened and tied itself into bowknots, and I dropped my revolver. I realized I was done for. We all know the symptoms—the starboard front pulley of my new Broadway suspenders had "busted."

The next instant the "terror" had turned and was upon me. I felt a crashing fist in my face and another in my neck, a swinging blow on my jaw and a quick upper cut in my solar plexus; and as the moon had just again disappeared behind the cloud, I sank to the plain of Mona nearly unconscious—overpowered. I felt hands with the power of ten men seize my wrists. I felt them being tied together with handkerchiefs; I felt a heavy weight on my stomach, and realized that I was being used as a sofa. Then I started to call for help, to speak and to struggle; but the terror who had murdered and frightened, and held up this part of the State, soaked me again with both fists. I thought of home and New York and mint juleps, and of the two dollars I spent to railroad it up to Mona, and realized that

it was cheap for all I was getting. Then I started in to die; and the fiend struck a match in my face, and I nearly did die. For it was that quiet, aristocratic Elliott. "You're the darndest ass I ever saw," said he as he got off; "why didn't you tell who you were?"

"Couldn't," I muttered. "I was thinking of——"

I never finished that remark, for the next instant Elliott was borne down to the ground by the force of the impact of a great body. He rolled about with the unknown, and tore and twisted. I heard the deafening blows rain on his head, and was powerless to aid, for my hands were tied and I was strangely weak—I was done for.

"You d—— fiend! I've got you. You will murder Stone along with the others, will you? You terror, you."

I recognized the voice as I heard the handcuffs click on Elliott, and realized it all.

It was too much. "Hallen!" I murmured. "Thank God! Soak him again," and I heard the blows descend on Elliott's anatomy. Then I relented.

"Spare him, Chief—it's Mr. Elliott."

Hallen roared in surprise. "Then the murderer has gotten away, with Oakes after him. I beg pardon—I—I—ha, ha!" and then the Chief roared again as he undid us and called for the others.

Lanterns were now brought from the Mansion, and a crowd of Oakes's men collected around us. I noticed that Moore and Hallen were looking at me curiously; and then Oakes stepped to my side from somewhere out in the darkness.

"You're sick, old fellow!" he said softly.

"Sick!" and then I realized that things were strangely distant, that faces seemed far, far away, and that Moore's voice was miles off as he rushed to my side.

"Wounded! Look at his arm," he cried.

"Yes," I murmured; "it was that last shot—I forgot it."

I tried to raise the arm and saw that a red-blue stream was running down and dripping from my hand upon the ground.

I stepped forward to point to Hallen, and to tell about how he slugged Elliott; but as I moved I lurched forward, and a great strong arm closed about me and a tender voice whispered—miles—miles away. It was Oakes's voice.

"Here, Hallen, give us a hand," and I felt myself lifted tenderly and carried across the plateau. I was dimly conscious that Moore was working silently, rapidly, at my side, and that the strong, supple arm of Oakes was about me, and that Hallen was helping. A great wave of affection came over me for these tender, dear fellows—and I talked long and loud as Elliott wiped my face; and I told Moore that Elliott was a past master at slugging—and all the time the crowd grew. I heard the name of Mr. Clark shouted, and then my own; and then, as they bore me in at the Mansion gate, I passed away off into the distance and went into a deep, dark tunnel where all was quiet and still. And then I again heard Moore's voice saying: "He has fainted, Oakes. Get him to bed, or he will faint again."

There was such gentle tenderness in the faces around me, such gentle, strong words, and such gentle, strong lifting of my body, that I sighed at the deliciousness of it all—the splendor, the beauty of my journey—and all for two dollars' railroad fare.

I heard some curious statements about great bravery in dashing after the unknown, and all that sort of thing—and I knew enough to realize that the crowd had things twisted. Oakes was speaking to me like a big brother, and Hallen had somehow quit all his bluster, and was quiet and grave, and Moore and Elliott seemed foolishly attentive. I appreciated their kindness, but did not quite understand, and their attentions amused me. I should have laughed outright, but things were becoming confused.

Then I realized that they were worried. How peculiar it seemed! The angel of friendship was about me. I felt a strange peacefulness as I entered the great Mansion. It seemed like a palace with golden walls, and the familiar voices of welcome warmed me.

Then I heard a deep, thumping, rhythmic tremor as it was borne through the air, and I knew that the boat on the river was passing the Mansion. I laughed long and loud at the peculiar words it was saying. I talked to it, commanded it to breathe more quietly, or it would disturb those asleep on the shore. Then I tried to explain to the judge that I was not a brave man—that it was all a mistake; that I had chased Elliott instead of the murderer; that the jury had failed to understand—and I laughed again.

My merriment grew as I caught sight of Oakes's face; it was so nonsensical of him not to have perceived that the steamer was at the bottom of the whole mystery. I tried to explain, then I shouted at their stupidity, and finally laughed angrily and in despair. I was in the grip of delirium.

During the night they searched for the bullet, and found it—and some time next day I awoke in my right mind.

CHAPTER XXII

"The Insane Root"

During the next few days Elliott called frequently and apologetically. Although he had suffered considerably at the hands of Hallen, he appreciated how much attention he had given me on the plains of Mona where was my Waterloo, and he kept me informed of the doings of our party in the search for the murderer. But it was several days before he brought me the information that both O'Brien and Maloney had been found—O'Brien in a farm-house, nursing his leg; Maloney walking about town, cool and collected, apparently with nothing to conceal. I was told that he was not yet under arrest, but had been coaxed back to the Mansion to give evidence against O'Brien, as he was led to believe.

"But why doesn't he suspect? He must realize that suspicion is against him."

"Well, Dr. Moore told me recently that the criminal, if insane as we surmise, may be oblivious during his lucid intervals of what he has been through during his periods of aberration."

"I see," I answered, remembering that such had been often recorded; "and as his attacks of mania may be unwitnessed, he escapes detection because he carries but little ordinary evidence of these during the interval of quiescence."

Before my companion could frame an answer there was a sudden commotion below—a hurrying of feet, and the quiet, commanding voice of Oakes heard now and then above all. We knew the time had at last arrived for the closing scene; we both felt that the hour had come when the final settlement was to take place.

Next moment Oakes appeared. I had not seen him for many hours. He was changed, haggard, worn. His handsome face showed worry and loss of sleep, but his carriage and voice were as usual—vigorous, independent.

Grasping my hand firmly and turning a pleased glance of recognition at Elliott, he said, "Come, Stone, you're strong enough"; and next moment he had thrown a coat over my shoulders and was helping me down the stairs to the dining-room. He seemed to me to have grown more serious, more quiet than was his wont; but his actions were, as ever, strong, quick, easy of execution, and I knew that it was the steadying of the mind and body for the final strain. Oakes's reputation was at stake, and he was fully cognizant that an error of judgment, a flaw in his reasonings, a mishap in the execution of his well-formulated plans, might readily result disastrously, not only to his reputation but to the cause of justice.

Then I stepped across the threshold of the dining-room, and beheld a scene that will always linger in my mind. At the head of the table sat Hallen, and to his right was Dr. Moore, whose dress contrasted strangely with the Chief's blue uniform and brass buttons. Across the table from Moore was Dowd, and here and there about the room were some of Oakes's men, and some of Hallen's as well, lounging, looking out of the windows carelessly, but comprehensively.

As we entered, a deep guttural of welcome greeted me; and Oakes seated me by Moore's side, and Elliott went over and sat with Dowd. Then the detective took the chair at the foot of the table, near which was an empty one.

It was evident at a glance that Oakes was to be the chief actor, while to Hallen had been given the chief position.

There was a moment's silence, then Hallen turned to Dr. Moore: "Are you positive," he said, "that Maloney is insane? I see no evidence."

"I am not positive as yet," was the reply. "Some signs indicate that he may be in the so-called interval between outbreaks of mental disease; but he is clever, as are almost all the insane, and he covers his condition well. Still, we can, and will put him to the test; we will soon determine if we are dealing with the 'insane root that takes the reason prisoner.'"

"But how can it be? He is not violent. I do not comprehend."

Moore glanced at the Chief. "Let Mr. Oakes explain—I should be too technical, I fear; he has an easier flow of words."

Hallen looked surprised. "Well, how is it, Oakes? How can you suspect such a man? Nobody ever saw him violent. What reason have you?"

Then Oakes turned. He was somewhat nettled, I thought, at Hallen's manner, but

his voice did not betray him. His words came clearly, even curtly; but as he revealed his comprehensive knowledge of the matter in plain, every-day language, Hallen's manner changed wonderfully. Never before had he had such an opportunity to see the education of the man before him. Now it came as an overwhelming surprise.

"A lunatic does not necessarily rave or carry the ordinary signs of rending passion," began Oakes as he turned a quiet face of acknowledgment toward Dr. Moore. "The one who hears voices, real to him, but really arising in the diseased mechanism of his own brain—ordering him to be a martyr, a saviour of his country, or to spend the millions he imagines he possesses, is usually melancholy, reserved, cautious, ever on the watch, deceptive, but doubtful sometimes as to his own brain-workings.

"Likewise, the man who possesses the homicidal mania may be cautious and quiet—to the ordinary observer a normal citizen. But the aura of insanity is around him; he lives and moves and deceives, and hides from the outside world the words that come to him day or night—the words that arise not in the voice of a living man, but in his own diseased mind. The sufferer says nothing of the voices that tell him he is persecuted—that the world's hands are against him. By accident, in a moment of unwariness, he may reveal that he hears such voices; but it is an even chance that he will be laughed at and the warning fall on ears that fail to understand. He is considered a 'crank.'

"Then the unfortunate shrinks more into himself, becomes absolutely dominated by the ideas and commands generated in his own false mind. He may become violent by degrees, may scare and haunt the places where he believes himself abused; and all the while the voices tell him he is foolish, being put upon, and finally he becomes controlled by the delusion that he is being persecuted. Then perhaps suddenly comes the incentive, usually a command of false origin within his own brain, that makes the worm turn that reveals to the world that he is a maniac—a 'killer.' He hears the word 'kill,' and his mind, no longer even suspicions of its own disease as it was at first, becomes frenzied. He sometimes attacks openly, but usually does so secretively, with the cunning of the tiger, and kills and slaughters. Then he returns to his dreams—quiet, satisfied, spent."

Oakes paused. "You understand, Hallen," he said, "I am no expert; but such cases have come to my notice—it is not easy for me to explain more fully."

"Go on," was Hallen's answer; "go on, sir. I am deeply interested—it amazes

me."

The Chief showed his words were those of genuine interest and surprise.

"The insane man leads a dual life," continued Oakes, "perhaps for a long time. Such a man is not yet an inmate of an asylum. His case is unrecognized—he is a soul battling with madness until some awful tragedy occurs, like that of Mona, to reveal his greatest of all misfortunes—the loss of reason."

We were all silent when Oakes finished speaking. Not a man there but now recognized and realized more fully what we had been fighting against. Then Hallen rose and looked at Oakes, then at all of us.

"Boys," he said, "according to custom, being Chief of Police of Mona, I am to make the arrest. That I will do, but let me tell you right here it is Mr. Oakes who will point out the culprit. I have been unable to get a clue, and I am damned if I'll take credit from a man like that." As he spoke he thumped the table with his hamlike fist. Hallen was not a clever man. He was about the average, perhaps a little above; but he was as honest as the day was long—a staunch, vigorous man—and we all admired him.

"Sit down," commanded Oakes harshly. "Don't give us any more such nonsense," and the Chief sat down, while we all half smiled at the discomfiture of both.

"Now, gentlemen," said Oakes, "let us keep our wits about us. First let me identify O'Brien, if possible, and let us study Maloney afterward. Remember, if O'Brien is not Larkin the detective, my case is *not* ready; if he *is* the man we suspect, then we must turn to Maloney regardless of any presence of insanity now, as he maybe in the quiescent period, so called, and may succeed in baffling us. Having once excluded O'Brien from suspicion, we will be justified in action against Maloney. We must prove his knowledge of the heavy revolver, if possible. Then if we succeed in forging that link to our chain, we will move quickly; upon his arm should be the cross seen by the dying Mr. Mark."

CHAPTER XXIII

The Test

As Oakes ceased speaking there came a silence. Although we were many there, there was not a motion for a space of seconds—not a sound save the deep

breathing of Hallen and of some of the others upon whom the duty of the hour was to fall. Men trained for such scenes—always alive to the possibilities, always alert for trickery or treachery—are yet but human, and subject to the tension that is felt even by the most courageous.

Then, in obedience to a signal from Oakes, Martin appeared, escorting O'Brien, who was limping, into the room, and to the chair facing Oakes.

It soon became evident to us that Oakes's real identity was unknown to O'Brien. Even if the latter were the detective Larkin, he had failed to realize that Mr. Clark was anything but the agent for the property.

"You are wounded, my man! They tell me it happened in the Highway the other day, and that afterwards, at night, you chased Maloney on the plains of Mona, after he had fired upon us. Tell us about it, O'Brien."

Oakes's voice was calm and strong, but in it I fancied I detected a note of pity.

O'Brien hesitated, stammered. "How did you know when I was shot?" he exclaimed. "I told no one." Oakes smiled slightly. "Out with your story, O'Brien. Did you chase Maloney for revenge, or for revenge and business?"

O'Brien straightened in the chair. "Who is this man Clark? How peculiar these questions are!" his look plainly said.

"Why, for revenge, of course," he answered.

"Let's see your wound," commanded Oakes.

O'Brien bared his leg: the injury was now nearly healed; but was still enough to make the man limp. Then, as he bent down to readjust his trousers Oakes, accidentally as it were, brushed against his forehead, throwing back the hair from O'Brien's brow.

We all saw a long, white, glistening scar, now exposed to full view at the line of the heavy hair. The man before us *was* Larkin the detective.

Oakes with marvelous tranquillity apologized for the "accident," and said: "Why should Maloney have shot you? what is behind it all? Speak."

"I do not know." It was evident to us all that O'Brien was avoiding the issue.

"I see," exclaimed Oakes. "As O'Brien you know nothing; as Mr. Larkin the

detective you know more than it suits you to tell."

O'Brien was on his feet in an instant. "Who dares insinuate—who dares say I am a detective, sir?"

"Nonsense! Keep cool. The Chief here has satisfied himself. Tell us—why should Maloney hate you?"

O'Brien glanced around and fixed his gaze on Hallen. "I am Larkin. He hates me because I have been watching him. Maloney is the man responsible for the Mansion mysteries, I think," he said.

"Indeed! What else?" queried Hallen suddenly.

"I believe he may be the murderer of Mr. Mark."

"What proofs have you?" asked Oakes, as we all leaned forward intently.

"No proof as yet."

"Exactly! But, Mr. Larkin, you deserve much credit," said Oakes, as he led O'Brien to a chair by Hallen's side. "Sit here," he continued. "I am going to have Maloney brought in now. He has always been a good gardener—a decent sort of fellow. I must hear his story before I give him up to the Chief. It has been suggested that Maloney may be mentally unbalanced; you will excuse me, Mr. Larkin, if I use you as a foil to draw him out while Dr. Moore assists me."

Then, by way of explanation, Oakes, whose identity was still unknown to Larkin, went on:

"You see, Chief Hallen wishes to be sure of some little points, and so do I. Perhaps Maloney will not resent my questioning; he should have no feelings against the agent of this property, whereas he might object to Hallen as an interlocutor."

Oakes was now a trifle pale, I thought. There were furrows on his forehead; his manner was suave and deliberately slow. But little did I dream the true depth of the man, the masterly manner in which he was about to test the mental balance of Maloney.

To one who was ignorant of the terrible events this story tells of, and the dire necessity of discovering once for all who was responsible for them, the efforts of these keen, scientific men to entrap a weakened brain would have seemed unfair

and cruel.

But for those who knew the story and knew of the murderous deeds done in Mona by some unfortunate with a cunning, diabolic, although probably unbalanced mind, there remained only one alternative—to uncover and catch the criminal at all hazards.

Martin left the room, and returned escorting the suspect, who was dressed in his working clothes, his coat covering a gray jersey. His face was stolid, but not unprepossessing; his bearing, quiet and reserved. His blue eyes shifted quickly. Then, as Oakes stood facing him, he respectfully saluted "Mr. Clark."

The detective met him cheerily.

"Good-morning, Maloney; I have asked you as a favor to come here and identify the man who shot at you the other day; O'Brien has reached the end of his rope now."

As Oakes finished his sentence, Maloney's face changed hue, but he faced O'Brien, hesitatingly, as though somewhat at a loss. "There's the man! Yes, he shot me," he cried.

Then again Oakes began to speak, and we all knew that he was purposely deceiving Maloney, playing with him—waiting for the moment when he would make the slip; when, if of diseased mind, he would fail to differentiate facts from fiction, when the false paths suggested to him would hopelessly entangle him.

"The other night, Maloney, someone fired upon us on the road. We have well-nigh proved O'Brien is the guilty one. You chased him across the plain. We owe our thanks to you, one and all of us. Had *you* not been so close behind him, he would have killed Mr. Stone here."

Oakes motioned toward me as he spoke. I saw it all. He was twisting the facts, drawing Maloney into a false idea that he was unsuspected—that he was a hero.

"Yes," I cried, seeing the point instantly. "I owe my life to you, old man. I thank you."

A sudden flash of remembrance seemed to cross the suspect's face. Then his brow darkened. There was some error here—he was no hero. But what was it? Somehow things were wrong, but where?

Dim recollection came to him, then a calmness curious to witness; but his eyes were shifting quickly, and the fingers of one hand were moving silently over one another, as though rolling a crumb of bread. The man was suspicious of something, but clever enough to be apparently calm, although not yet able to understand the flaw in the presentation of facts.

Then with a supreme effort he seemed to rally to the occasion, and cleverly evaded the issue. "I only did a little thing," he said, "you need not thank me."

The voice was uncertain; the tone pathetic, groping. Oakes had befuddled the poor intellect. Maloney was at sea and sinking.

"Maloney," said Oakes again—there was gentleness in the detective's voice; he knew the man before him was going down—"Maloney, when we were fired upon you were watching the would-be murderer—this man O'Brien. You acted with the promptitude of lightning—O'Brien dropped the weapon he had with him. Did you see where it fell? It was a great army revolver, a 45-calibre weapon."

Maloney started and straightened up; there, at least, was a familiar subject. He remembered *that*, even though his mind failed to remember the details of the assault.

But Maloney knew there was some mistake; it was his weapon, not O'Brien's, that they were talking about. Suddenly, like a flash, came full remembrance—momentarily, only—and he unguardedly blurted out: "There is only one in the county like it"; then cunningly ceased speaking as though he feared his tongue, but could not exactly reason why.

There was a scarcely audible sigh of anxiety around the room—Oakes had *proved* Maloney's knowledge of the old revolver. Dr. Moore was gazing intently at the gardener's neck. The carotid arteries were pumping full and strong, down deep beneath the tissues, moving the ridges of his neck in rhythmic but very rapid undulations—the man was showing great excitement.

"Maloney," said Oakes again, quickly returning to the attack, "before we were fired upon we fancied we heard a cry over the plain, a curious one like someone yelling an oath or an imperious command. Did you hear it?"

"Yes," interpolated Moore. "We thought the words were 'Fire!' or 'Kill! kill!'"

We all realized what the clever men were doing—telling imaginary things, trying

to draw from Maloney an acknowledgment of a delusion. They were sounding his mind, playing for its weak spot.

The suspect looked surprised, bewildered, then suddenly fell into the trap. His weakened mind had been reached at its point of least resistance.

As in nearly all insane individuals, it took but a proper mention of the predominant delusion to reveal that which might otherwise have gone undetected for a long period.

"Yes," whispered Maloney. "I heard the command. It was 'Kill!' 'Murder!' I have heard it before. I am glad you heard it then—that proves that I am right. I knew I was right. I can prove it. Surely it is not uncommon. Gentlemen, I have heard it before. I know—I believe—it was meant for—ha! ha!—O'Brien—ha! ha!—no! no!—for *me*!"

Moore stepped toward the man, whose speech now came thick and fast and unintelligible. Hallen closed nearer. Maloney was shaking. His face was turning dark, his jugulars were bulging like whip-cords down his neck, his eyes sparkling with the unmistakable light of insanity. He stooped. "There it is again! 'Kill! kill!'" he cried in thick, mumbling tones, and bending low. Then he straightened up suddenly and flung himself around, felling Hallen and Martin as though they were wooden men.

He seized a chair and hurled it across the table at Elliott, who dodged successfully, allowing it to crash through the opposite window. Quick to see this means of escape, Maloney followed through the smashed panes—a raving, delirious maniac.

The test, carried out with such consummate skill, had not only proved Maloney's knowledge of the revolver and that he was subject to delusions, but it had also precipitated an unexpected attack of insane excitement—an acute mania.

And now Maloney was gone—escaped.

As Hallen and Martin staggered to their feet, the Chief bellowed forth an order in a voice of deepest chagrin and alarm: "Catch him!" he cried. "If he escapes, the people will rise in fury."

We all heard a sickening, wild yell of defiance from Maloney as he reached the ground—a deep, guttural, maniac cry that struck terror to my weakened nerves

and which froze our men for an instant in their tracks, like marble statues.

Someone broke the awful spell—it was Oakes, crying out: "He is going for the pond and the bridge." And next instant he and Hallen were out of the front door, the men following in a rushing, compact body.

CHAPTER XXIV

Across the Bridge

As I staggered behind the pursuers I saw the tall, erect figure of Quintus glide rapidly across the road and disappear down the decline. In the briefest space we were at the crest by the road, looking down upon the pond. I saw Moore and O'Brien by my side—the latter swearing like a trooper.

"Who is that Mr. Clark, anyway? How did he know who I was? Since Hallen's men found me at the farm-house this man Clark—this agent—has had a lot to say."

"He is a man by the name of Oakes," I said.

O'Brien, or rather Larkin, looked at me a moment.

"Quintus Oakes?"

"The same."

"The deuce you say! No disgrace to me then. I understand things now. But I should have suspected."

The murderer reached the bridge and, hesitating, stooped suddenly at its near side. He had evidently picked up something from under one of the logs that formed the span. He straightened up and, turning, suddenly fired at Oakes, who was rapidly approaching. The deep tones of a heavy revolver were unmistakable. Maloney had secured his murderous weapon when he stooped; he had had it in hiding under the log. He was armed now with a weapon of terrible possibilities. In another instant he was across and mounting the green sunlit slope beyond. A hundred feet behind was Quintus, untouched by the bullet that had been sent his way. A few steps, and he reached the other side, but as he struck the ground, the bridge—frail thing that it was—loosened from its centre support and went crashing into the pond, leaving Hallen, who was close behind Oakes, on this side of the bridge with the rest of us. Oakes was alone, pursuing the murderer up the

slope of the hill on the other side of the water, facing us. We saw him turn, as the bridge fell, and look at us; then he made a sweeping gesture toward the north and south, and turned again after the murderer, who was just half-way up the slope now; his body dotting the surface of the ground with a shadow at his side—a shadow of himself—company in the race for freedom.

We all simultaneously interpreted the gestures made by Oakes, and Hallen dashed to the north end of the pond to skirt it, while Martin and Moore dashed for the southern end, leaving Elliott, Larkin and myself standing where we commanded full view of what was coming. We were conscious of several other figures dashing by us, and we knew that his men were straining every nerve and muscle to reach Oakes in his dangerous position.

It was a long run to skirt either end of the pond, and to swing around the opposite shore, and thence up the sloping sides to Quintus's aid. We three remaining behind were anxious beyond expression. I leaned heavily on Elliott, and really prevented him from joining in the chase, where he would have been useless; the others were so much fleeter of foot.

"God—that man Oakes is alone with the murderer!" cried Larkin. "He is too good a man to lose his life in the fight that is coming. Look!"

We saw Maloney halt and face about. Then came a slight flash, followed by the heavy report of the revolver in his hand.

Quintus was running slowly up toward him and was perhaps one hundred feet away. At the report he staggered, and dropped upon the green, slippery sward.

"He is wounded," cried Elliott.

I felt sick at heart and weak, and sat down, Larkin by my side; we two were powerless, being only convalescent.

"An elegant shot! That Maloney is a crack one," cried the detective.

"Yes," said Elliott; "it was determined before that Mark's murderer was a good shot."

Then came another report, and we saw that again the murderer had fired. Oakes remained quiet. His body showed sprawled on the hill-side.

"Damnation!" cried Elliott. "Is Oakes dead? He does not answer with his

revolver."

"No," cried Larkin. "I saw him move, and see—he is braced to prevent himself slipping down the hill. He knows he is a poor target, and is not anxious to move lest he slide into the pond. That grass is frosty and very slippery."

Then came the delayed crack of Quintus's weapon, and Maloney sprang into the air as he ran. He now went slowly and painfully, lurching forward along the crest of the hill.

"Slightly wounded, thank Fate—but Oakes could have killed him had he wished," cried Larkin.

We saw Quintus rise and follow Maloney, then drop to his chest again, as the latter wheeled and fired three shots rapidly at him in delirious excitement.

Oakes remained quiet and huddled, and despite the fact that Maloney was now an excellent target, he did not fire.

"Oakes is hit badly," exclaimed Elliott. Then the speaker did an unexpected thing. Seizing his revolver, he discharged the weapon again and again in the direction of Maloney. "A long shot," he muttered, "but I'll keep him guessing."

We could see the bullets hit somewhere near the fugitive, for he seemed disconcerted and turned toward the northern end of the pond, to run in that direction; he was now outlined on the crest of the hill. We heard another shot ring out—a shot sharp, staccato it was; and we then emitted a yell, for we knew by it that Oakes was alive. Maloney fired again, and again Elliott, by our side, tried two more long shots with his revolver.

We heard Oakes's voice, clear and firm it came, wafted across the pond.

"Don't shoot again. He has no more ammunition. I will get him."

And Elliott, in suppressed excitement, exclaimed: "He was drawing Maloney's fire all the time. He was not wounded."

"Yes, he knew Maloney had the old six-shooter, and he knows it is empty now."

"That Oakes keeps everything in mind," said Larkin. "He is a good one."

Then we saw the figures of the runners skirting the northern end of the pond. Hallen was leading. He fired at Maloney, evidently not having understood

Oakes's word, and again came that clear voice across the pond.

"Don't fire, Hallen; remember, he is a lunatic and he can't get away now."

We saw Oakes rush to close in on Maloney, but the latter met his attack, and the detective was borne to the ground heavily.

"Shoot, Oakes, shoot!" I yelled, as did Hallen; but Quintus responded not.

We saw that the fight was furious, but were unable at first to distinguish the figures as they remained on the ground. They were locked in one another's embrace in a deadly, awe-inspiring struggle. Then across one man's neck we saw a forearm—the cuff was shining in the sunlight—and Elliott cried out: "That is Oakes."

The two rose to their feet, powerful black objects, and by the outline we recognized the tall figure of our friend as they swayed and surged, gradually slipping and sliding down the incline, toward the deep waters of the pond below.

"Oakes has got him," cried Larkin, "choking him. Look at them!"

We saw the murderer's body arch sideways and backward, with Oakes's hands around his neck.

As Maloney's body came down, down to the ground again, Larkin and Elliott by my side shouted in admiration at the power and skill displayed.

Suddenly like a flash the maniac turned, twisted, and next moment encircled Oakes's body with both his arms, and rolled toward the water with him.

"He is going to drown Oakes—see!"

The words came in a hurried gasp from Elliott, who was throwing off his coat and his shoes in a movement quick as the thought that had come to him.

"He's too good a man," he cried, and with a sudden rush Elliott was at the water's edge and into the pond—swimming with strong overhanded strokes, head low and sideways, toward the opposite shore.

Larkin and I could scarcely believe our eyes. The man was apparently gifted with great powers, for he cut through the water steadily, surely, with a rapidity that was amazing. Over opposite, the fight was furious, always nearing the edge of the pond.

Help for Oakes was no nearer than Hallen, who, we could see, was dashing around the northern end of the pond in a desperate race to save him. On the other end, moving like the wind, but farther away from the fighting men, I distinguished young Martin leading several others in the race for life. And down beneath us, quarter way across the pond was the solitary swimmer, lifting his shoulders well out of the water each time his stroke reached its limit—each moment advancing steadily, surely. I saw at a glance that Oakes was doomed—Elliott could not reach him, neither could Hallen. Larkin by my side supported me, for my head was reeling with weakness. Suddenly he shouted across the pond—"Fight him!—fight him! Oakes, strangle him."

I could see now that, somehow, Oakes's arm was around the maniac's neck, and that they were on their feet again. Neither had a weapon—they had long since been lost in the hand-to-hand fight.

"Oakes can't do it. Why, in the devil's name, did he try to capture him alive? Why did he not shoot to kill instead of to wound simply?" cried my companion.

Now Maloney was surging, dragging Oakes close to the water's edge—closer, ever closer.

Suddenly Oakes weakened and half stepped, half retreated, to the water's edge; then as suddenly the two figures swayed up the hill a few feet again, and with a quick, cat-like movement Oakes was free. It was his one supreme effort, a masterly, wonderfully executed, vigorous shove and side-step. It was evident Maloney was dazed. Oakes's strangle-hold had told at last.

We heard a mighty shout from Hallen, and another from the swimmer now rapidly approaching the bank.

Maloney faced Oakes a moment; his chest heaved once or twice as his breath returned; he crouched, then sidled into position for a spring and launched himself toward Oakes, who, pale as death, stood swaying, his arms by his side, apparently all but done for.

Then we all witnessed that which thrilled us to the heart—the sudden, wonderful mastery of science, aided by strength, over sheer brute force. Maloney came toward Oakes in a fearful rush that was to take both together out into the pond to death.

Instantly Oakes's swaying body tightened and steadied. I knew then, as did

Larkin, that Oakes had been deceiving Maloney—that the detective was still master of himself. As the heavy body closed upon him, Oakes stepped suddenly forward. His left arm shot upward with a vicious, swinging motion, and as his fist reached the jaw, his body lurched forward and sideways, in a terrible muscular effort, carrying fearful impetus to the blow.

Then instantly, as Maloney staggered, Oakes swung himself half around, and the right arm shot upward and across to the mark, with fearful speed and certainty.

The on-rushing maniac was half stopped and twisted in his course. His head swung sideways and outward with the last impact upon the jaw; his legs failed to lift, and with a wabbling, shuddering tremor the body sank to the water's edge. The next instant Hallen came tumbling on to the murderer. I heard the click of handcuffs; I saw the white shirt and black trousers of Elliott squirm up the bank, and next moment the vigorous swimmer, the aristocratic, great-hearted clubman, caught Oakes in his arms as the detective lurched forward and fell, momentarily overcome by his last supreme effort.

A great, rousing cheer reverberated from bank to bank. We took it up, and sent it back in lessened volume, but undiminished spirit.

They now came back from the other side of the pond by the way of the north end, the men assisting Oakes carefully up the incline to us, and bringing also Maloney.

His eyes were bloodshot—his features squirming in horrible movements; and through it all he talked and talked; his brain was working with great rapidity; he was shouting, declaiming, laughing, and all the while his sentences were without significance, without lucidity.

Oakes pointed to the maniac. "I regret extremely," he said, "that I was forced to wound him slightly. I could not let him escape with that weapon in his hand."

An approving murmur rose from the men, but Oakes checked them, frowning his displeasure. Then he turned to Martin:

"Look at his left arm, boys."

Hallen and Martin ripped off the sleeve, and Dowd, after peering at the arm, excitedly exclaimed: "The blue cross! Quintus Oakes, you are right."

Yes, surely, there on the left arm, just below the shoulder, was a cross done by

some skilled tattooer's hand in days long past—a cross of indigo.

Then in the road a team appeared from the Mansion, and Dowd jumped in and waved his hand as he started.

"Where are you going?" cried Hallen.

"To Mona to get out an extra—to tell how Clark, Mr. Clark of the Mansion, has captured the murderer, aided by Hallen of Mona."

As the team started, Dowd yelled back again: "And I am going to tell Mona that Clark is QUINTUS OAKES."

Hallen waved his arms, while we all again cheered the name of our friend, as we bore him in triumph back to the Mansion.

CHAPTER XXV

The Man of the Hour

Soon we heard the tones of a bell from far away—one, two, three—then a pause, then a few quick strokes, followed by a low, single deep note. Hallen answered our looks of astonishment.

"That's the old bell of headquarters. The Mayor promised to ring it, day or night, when the mystery was solved, and Dowd has carried the news."

Then again came the deep tones in quicker rhythm, and we knew it was all the old bell could do in the way of joy.

We scarce had time to congratulate Oakes on the splendid termination of his work before Hallen was away with his men, taking Maloney to town by a roundabout way.

Then came the crowd to besiege the Mansion and to call for Oakes, and for Hallen; in fact, for us all. The growling and discontent had vanished; the past uneasiness was gone. Oakes and Hallen were now the heroes of Mona. Oakes spoke a few words of thanks to the crowd and tried to dispose of it by saying that Hallen had returned to town with the prisoner; but it lingered long before the Mansion, discussing the successful termination of Mona's woes.

Now that a master had unravelled the mystery, details were not difficult to

supply. Many recalled, suddenly, that they had always thought Maloney "queer," though they had never considered as significant the points that might have been vital. Such is always the case with untrained observers.

We made our farewells that night, for we were to return to New York next day; but Quintus kept the hour of our going private, for, as he said to us, he had had too much of the kindness of Mona already, and there were whispers of an ovation or something of that sort reserved for our departure.

"You know, Stone," Oakes said to me, "we really don't deserve all this good feeling; these people will never stop. I am going to slip out quietly tomorrow, and you and Dr. Moore can come later."

"Nonsense," said I, "stay and let them show their appreciation of what you have done. Why, old man, you have changed the course of events in Mona—you cannot help being in their minds."

"You don't understand," said he. "I dislike heroics. Mona overestimates matters. I am going away unexpectedly."

Here he set his jaws hard and looked determined, self-reliant, half-disgusted. I knew that he was in earnest and that his nature was calling once more for action and not for praise.

At eleven o'clock next morning Oakes walked over to the police headquarters, while Dr. Moore and I remained in the hotel, casually watching him. He was going to make a short call on Chief Hallen, as he had frequently done before, and it was to be his farewell. He had planned to have a horse at the proper moment, and to mount quickly and leave for the station alone, thus avoiding notice and any demonstration.

Since we remained at the hotel, he hoped that the people would be misled into thinking that he would return to us, and that we would all go together.

But for once Quintus Oakes was wrong. Mona was on the lookout for him, and he had no sooner gone into headquarters than some one started the rumor that the man was going away quietly. In a minute the place was the centre of a seething, happy, expectant crowd. When Oakes finally appeared at the steps, instead of seeing his horse rounding the corner as he had planned, he beheld the crowd in waiting.

He made a step back to enter the headquarters door, but Chief Hallen laughingly held him, and Quintus Oakes was cornered.

Moore and I were now with the crowd, and joined in the laugh at his expense. A

deep flush appeared on his face, but we all noticed a merry twinkle in his deep blue eyes, nevertheless.

Somebody cried for a speech. Oakes hesitated and again tried to retreat, but at that moment all eyes were turned suddenly to a wagon coming down the side street and accompanied by a small crowd.

It turned into the Square and a hush fell over all, for there in the vehicle was Maloney—the murderer, and an old gray-haired man—Skinner. The murderer of Mr. Mark was handcuffed, and sat heavily guarded; but the old man was not a prisoner—his head was bowed in silent grief, as he sat by Maloney's side. It was evident to all that the prisoner was being removed from headquarters to the court-house for trial, and that the father was bearing his burden before the world.

Quintus Oakes gave a glance of pity at the prisoner, and an extremely sorrowful expression crossed his strong, handsome face as he recognized the old man by Maloney's side.

The populace, recovering from its surprise at sight of the wagon, changed its mood, and surrounded it with angry demonstrations, hissing and threatening. The face of the prisoner was calm, proud, defiant—the face of a man in triumphal entry. He was unconscious of his awful position, his awful crimes. He saw only the notoriety.

Dr. Moore turned to me. "See Maloney—see his face; he thinks himself a hero—he is too insane to appreciate the truth." But Skinner looked out upon the crowd and paled; then glancing up, he caught the eyes of Quintus Oakes, and with a harrowing, beseeching expression, bent his gray head into his hands.

The populace in fury tried to stop the wagon; but now, at this instant, Oakes rose to the occasion, and the *man* showed the mettle and the humanity that was in him.

Rising to his full height, he spoke:

"Stop! This is no time to hiss. Remember, the murderer is irresponsible; the other is his father—an *old, old man*!"

As Quintus's voice rang out in its clear, strong notes, with a marvelously tender accent, and as the full meaning of his words became apparent, a sudden silence seized the crowd—a silence intense, uneasy, sympathetic. Quintus Oakes was single-handed, alone, but the master mind, the controlling man among us all.

The silence deepened as men glanced about with ill-concealed emotion—deep, suppressed.

The wagon moved on, and the stillness was broken only by the crunching of the wheels and the occasional sighing, heavy breathing of the populace. Over all was the suspense, the quick, awe-inspiring change from vicious hatred to pity and grief, blended instantly in the hearts of all by that strong, vigorous, quick-minded man of action and of justice—OAKES.

Taking advantage of the lull, Quintus stepped into the crowd, and before any could foresee his purpose, he threw his coat over the pommel of a saddled horse just being led around the corner—his horse—and springing lightly, gracefully to the saddle took the reins.

The crowd, divining his intent, closed about him, but with horsemanship beautiful to behold he forced the animal to canter to one side, and then to rear, making an opening in the crowd. The next moment he darted forward—away—as the people, realizing the tenderness of his speech and that he was leaving them, perhaps for always, bellowed a reverberating, tumultuous *farewell*.

Chief Hallen shouted a hurried command, and the next moment we were all electrified to hear the deep tones of the bell of headquarters ringing out its ponderous "God-speed."

Oakes turned in his saddle at the first stroke and, with blazing eyes and suppressed pride, waved a last vigorous acknowledgment.

FINIS.

Transcriber's note: A few printer's errors in the punctuation have been corrected as has the spelling of 'possibilties' which is now 'possibilities'.

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