Big Game

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I.

Dick Ffoulkes was in good practice at the Criminal Bar, and his envied dinner parties, given to few and well-known friends, were nearly always held in his chambers in Lincoln's Inn. They looked out on one of the pleasantest green spots in London.

There was a brooding of fog on the first December night of 1911, when Ffoulkes gave a supper to celebrate his victory over the Crown in the matter of the Marsden murder.

Marsden was a wealthy man, and had no enemies. The police suspected a mere protégé of his unmarried sister, who was his only heir; he might thus benefit indirectly; no other motive could be found. The boy — for he was barely twenty — had dined with Marsden on the night of the murder, and of course the police had finger-prints by the dozen. Ffoulkes had torn their flimsy web to rags, and tossed them in the air with a laugh.

All his guests had gone but one, his oldest friend, Jack Flynn. They dated from Rugby, and had continued their inseparability at Balliol. They had read together for the bar, but Flynn, after being called, had branched off into the higher journalism.

The Marsden case had stirred England profoundly. Slight as was the motive attributed to Ezra Robinson, the suspected boy, there was no other person with any motive at all; faint as were the clues which pointed to him, there were none at all to point elsewhere.

Besides these considerations, there was apparently no physical possibility of any other murderer. Marsden had unquestionably died of a thrust in the heart from a common carving-knife, which was identified as the one which had been sent up with the dinner. Unobserved access to the suite was impossible, a floor clerk being continuously seated in full view of the only door to the whole apartment. The only person known to have been in the room, after the table had been cleared by the hotel servants, was the accused. And even Ffoulkes had not dared to suggest that the wound—a straight drive from above and behind — might have been self-inflicted. Nor was there any motive of robbery, or any trace of search for papers. But there was an undoubted thumb-print of Robinson's in blood on the handle of the carving knife, and there was a cut on his left hand. He had explained this, and the presence of the knife itself, by saying that it had slipped as he was carving, and that he had run into the bathroom to wash and bind the cut, leaving the knife on the washstand.

The only point clean for the defense was the medical evidence, which put the time of death some two hours later than the departure of Robinson. This coincided with a temporary failure of the electric current all through the hotel. Ffoulkes suggested that the old man, who had drunk a good deal of wine, had gone to take a bath before retiring, seen the knife, remembered his old skill as an amateur juggler, ample testimony of which was forthcoming, and started to play at catching the knife. The light had gone out while he was throwing; he had dodged maladroitly, and the blade had chanced to catch him between the shoulders.

The opposite theory was that Robinson had returned to fetch his cigarette-case, which was in fact found in the room by the police, passed the floor clerk and slipped into the suite in the short spell of darkness, seen his opportunity and seized it, making off before the light was restored. He had not been able to give a satisfactory

account of his movements. His story was that he had left Marsden early on account of a severe headache, and had wandered about the streets trying to obtain relief; on the other hand, no one in the hotel would swear to having seen him after his ostensible departure. The floor clerk had testified to a considerable commotion just at the time of the failure of the electric supply: she had heard noises apparently in several rooms; but this might well have been the normal confusion caused by the sudden darkness.

Flynn had been of the utmost service to Ffoulkes in the case. He had performed a weekly miracle in avoiding a spell of prison for contempt of court; for every week he had returned to the charge. There were long articles on miscarriages of justice; others on the weakness of circumstantial evidence where no strong motive was evident; others again on strange accidental deaths. He quoted the case of Professor Milnes Marshall, who slipped and fell while setting up his camera in Deep Ghyll on Scawfell. He was on a gentle slope of snow, yet he made no effort to recover himself, and rolled over and over to the edge of a precipice, at whose foot he was found dead, smashed to a pulp. This happened in full view of several other climbers. This accident was contrasted with that of Arthur Wellman on the Trifthorn. He fell eight hundred feet, and yet only hurt himself by cutting his leg slightly with his ice axe.

A hundred such parallels were at the service of Flynn, and he hammered them into the head of the public week by week, while scrupulously avoiding any reference to Marsden. As the courts had no idea, officially, of the line of the defense, they could say nothing. But Flynn moulded the opinion of the public soundly and shrewdly, and in the end the jury had acquitted Robinson after a bare quarter of an hour's deliberation.

Ffoulkes guests had complimented him on the ingenuity of his theory of an accident, but the lawyer had not been pleased. "That was a frill," he had replied;

“the real defense was Absence of Motive. Grant the police their theory of Robinson’s movements; put the knife in his hand, and a certain get-away—which he had not got, mind you; the light might have come on any second—but allow everything, and then ask yourselves: “Why should he stab the man? There was no quarrel; his marriage with Miss Marsden was not opposed; on the contrary he risked that marriage by a mix-up of this sort; yet we are to suppose that he did it on the mere chance that there would be no fuss, and that his fiancée would have twelve thousand a year instead of four. Why, a sane man would hardly kill a rabbit on such motive!”

But now the guests were gone; Ffoulkes and Flynn lit fresh cigars, and settled down for an honest talk. At the elbow of each stood a bottle of the Green Seal ‘63, one of the soundest wines that ever came out of Oporto. For some time they smoked in silence.

“This is capital wine, Dick,” said Flynn presently.

“Ah, cher ami, it is only ten years older that we are. We are getting to the port and portly stage of life.”

“Well, there are thrills left. This has been a great case.”

“Yes. I’m glad you stayed. I thought you might care to hear about it.”

“Hear about it!”

“Yes, there were interesting features.”

“But we need hardly recapitulate.”

“Oh, I don’t mean what came out at the trial.”

“No? . . . I suppose nothing ever does come out at a trial!”

“Just as nothing ever gets into the newspapers.”

“All right. Spit it out. I suppose Robinson did it, for a start.”

“Of course. There was an accident in it, but one of a different kind. When the elevator put him out on Marsden’s floor, he was amazed to recognize an old flame in that very prepossessing floor clerk Maud Duval.

They had been members of some kind of devil-worship club, and one of their games was cocaine. Robinson's a perfect fiend, by the way; we had to smuggle the stuff in to him all the time he was in prison, or he'd have gone crazy. Well, the old passion lit like tinder. They had lost each other somehow — you know how such things happen-both had made desperate efforts to renew the link, but in vain. So he told her his plans in ten words. Her answer was equally sweet and to the point. 'Kill the old man — I'll cover your tracks; marry the old girl; and meet me at our old trysting-place at midnight a year from today. We'll find a way to be rid of her. Don't risk another word till then.' Great and successful criminals have always this faculty of firmness of character and promptitude of decision. The rest of the story is short. The knife incident was intentional; for Robinson had brought no weapon. He left the hotel openly at nine-thirty; came in again by the bar entrance, went unnoticed to the mezzanine floor, and thence to Marsden's floor, thus avoiding the notice of the main office. The failure of the electricity had nothing to do with it — happened twenty minutes later. He walked in, killed the old man, and left as he had come. Pretty bold? Only cocaine. So now he's off to marry old Miss Marsden's money."

"I begin to see some sort of motive! Maud is what they call 'some peach' across the Straits of America."

"Yes; a perfect devil, with the face of a baby, and the manners of the jeune fille bien élevée. Just such a woman as you are a man, Jack, you old scoundrel."

"Many thanks. I think your own morals — in this case — have been a trifle open to criticism. I suppose it's your fifteen years of law."

"No; it's being under the influence of dear old Jack, with his fifteen years of journalism!"

"Stop rotting! I'm a bit staggered, you know, straight. Let's have another bottle of port."

Ffoulkes went to the buttery, and returned with a couple. For ten minutes neither spoke.

"I've a damned funny feeling," said Flynn at last. "Do you remember the night we put the iodide of nitrogen in the Doctor's nighties?"

"By the soft leather of this chair, I do!"

"Yes; we caught it! But it's the spirit, not the flesh, which goads me now. I've loved skating around the judges, these last weeks. The best thing in life is the feeling of escape. It's the one real thrill. Perhaps that's why I've always been so keen on solitary climbing and big game shooting."

"I always preferred fishing. My thrill comes from proving my intellectual stamina or subtlety." There was a pause.

"What do you think of murder, anyhow?" suddenly blurted out the journalist.

"The most serious crime, except high treason, known to the English law."

"True, O wise judge! But what is it morally?"

"An art, according to that ass Wilde."

"When I rite an essay on it, I shall treat it as a sport. And between you and me, that is why I have never written one."

"Why?"

"Why, old intellectual stamina and subtlety, because if I ever do take it up, I don't want some fool to fix me up with a motive. But after your story of tonight, I don't mind telling you; if I'm caught, I'll brief you! Observe, O man of motives, the analysis. Man is no longer killed for food, except in distant countries, or in rare emergencies such as shipwreck."

"He is only killed nowadays for one of two motives, gain or revenge."

"Add love."

"That's psychopathic."

"Well, we're all psychopaths; it's only a term of endearment in common use among doctors."

"Get on!"

"But there's the greatest motive of all — adventure. We've standardized life too much; and those of us who love life are more and more driven to seek adventure in crime."

"Or journalism."

"Which is only one of the meaner crimes. But you needn't talk; the practice of law is the nearest thing we have to man-hunting."

"I suppose that's true."

"Of course it's true. But it's a mere pheasant-shoot, with all your police for beaters. The game hasn't a chance. No. The motiveless murderer has the true spirit of sport; to kill a man is more dangerous than to follow a wounded gaur into the jungle. The anarchist goes after the biggest game of all: but he's not a sportsman; he has a genuine grievance."

"Your essay on murder will make some very pleasant reading."

"But doesn't it attract you too, with your passion to prove your mental superiority to others? Think of the joy of baffling the stupid police, fooling the detectives with false clues, triumphantly proving yourself innocent when you know you are guilty!"

"Are you tempting me? You always did, you know."

"Anyhow, you always fell!"

"Cher ami, for that alone I could forgive you everything!"

"Sarcastic to the last!"

"You have me to thank that we usually escaped the consequences!"

"Pride, my poor friend!"

"Truth, comrade in misfortune!"

"No. Seriously. I'm crazy tonight, and I really am going to tempt you. Don't prove it's my fault, blame your own good port, and also certain qualities in your own story of the Marsden case. One or two little remarks of yours on the subject of Miss Maud Duval —"

"I knew something would come of that."

"Yes, that's my weak point. I'm absurdly feminine in vanity and love of power over — a friend."

"Now I'm warned; so fire ahead. What's the proposal?"

"Oh, I haven't thought of that yet!"

"You big baby!"

"Yes, it's my bedtime; I'll roll home, I think."

"No, don't go. Let's sober up on coffee, and the '48 brandy."

"It's a damned extraordinary thing that a little brandy makes you drunk, and a lot of it straightens you out again."

"It's Providence!"

"Then call upon it in the time of trouble!"

Ffoulkes went in search of the apparatus. Jack rose lazily and went to the window; he threw it open, and the cold damp air came in with a rush. It was infinitely pleasurable, the touch on his heated, wine-flushed face.

He stood there for perhaps ten minutes. A voice recalled him to himself.

"Café noir, Gamiani!"

He started as if he had been shot. Ffoulkes, in an embroidered dressing gown of black silk, was seated on cushions on the floor, gravely pouring Turkish coffee from a shining pot of hammered brass.

At one side of him was a great silver hookah, its bowl already covered by a coal from the fire.

Jack took a second dressing-gown that had been thrown across his chair, and rapidly made himself at ease. Then he seated himself opposite to his friend; bowed deeply, with joined hands upon his forehead, and said with mock solemnity: "Be pleased to say thy pleasure, O most puissant king!"

"Let Scherezade recount the mirific tale of the Two Thousand and Second Night, wherein it is narrated how the wicked journalist tempted the good lawyer in the matter of murder regarded as a pastime and as a debating society!"

"Hearing and obedience! but I must have oh! such a lot of this coffee before I get wound up!"

As it happened, it was two hours before Jack deigned to speak. "To use the phrase of Abdullah El Haji i-Shiraz," he began, "I remove the silken tube of the rose-perfumed huqqa from my mouth. When King Brahmadatta reigned in Benares, there were two brothers named Chuckerrbutty Lal and Hari Ramkrishna. For short we shall call them Pork and Beans. Now Pork, who was a poet and a devil of a fine fellow, was tempted by the reprobate Beans, a lawyer, whose only quality was low cunning, to join him in a wager. And these were the terms thereof. During the season of the monsoon each was to go away from Benares to a far country, and there he was, feloniously and of his malice aforethought, to kill and murder a liege of the Sultan of that land. And when they returned, they were to compare their stories. It was agreed that such murder should be a real murder in the legal sense — act for which they would be assuredly hanged if they were caught; and also that it would be contrary to the spirit of sport to lay false trails deliberately, and so put in peril the life of some innocent person, not being the game desired to fill the bag. But it must be an undoubted murder, with no possibility of suicide or accident. The murder, moreover, must be of a purely adventurous nature, not a crime inspired by greed or animosity. The idea was to prove that it would be perfectly safe, since there would be no motive to draw suspicion upon them. Yet if either were suspected of the mamelukes, the Sbirri, the janissaries, or the proggins, he should take refuge with the other; but — mark this, O king! — for being so clumsy he should pay to him a camel-load of gold, which in our money is one thousand pounds. Is it a bet?"

Ffoulkes extended his hand. "It's a bet."

"You're really game?"

"Dying oath."

"Dying oath. And now, O king, for I perceive that thou art weary, hie thee to thy chaste couch, and thy faitful slave shall doss it on the sofa."

In the morning Ffoulkes said, over the breakfast-table, "About that bet." "It's on?" cried Flynn in alarm. "Oh, yes! Only — er— I suppose I need about another seven or eight of law; I stipulate that — what is thrown away — shall be as worthless as possible." "Certainly," said Flynn, "I'm going to Ostend." "Good for you. Newspaper accounts shall be evidence; but send me the whole paper, and mark another passage, not the one referring to the bet."

"O intellectual subtlety and stamina!"

"Have some more coffee?"

"Thanks."

An hour later each, in his appointed lighthouse, was indicating the sure path of virtue and justice to the admiring English.

II.

The Trinity sittings were over. Sir Richard Ffoulkes — for the king's birthday had not left him without honor — was contemplating his wig and gown with disgust. On the table before him was a large leather book, containing many colored flies; and he had just assured himself that his seventeen-foot split cane was in good order. In fact, he had been boyish enough to test the check on his Hardy reel by practicing casts out of the window, to the alarm of the sparrows. It was the common routine for him on the brink of a holiday, but it never lost its freshness.

Then there came back to him the realization that this was to be no ordinary holiday. He was pledged to do murder.

He went over to the mirror, and studied his face steadily. He was perfectly calm; no trace of excitement

showed in his keen features. "I have always thought," he mused, "That the cries of life are usually determined by accident. It is not possible to foresee events with mathematical accuracy, and in big things it is the small things that count. Hence the cleverest criminal may always make some slip, and the clumsiest by a piece of luck. Let me never forget the story of the officer at Gibraltar who, focussing a new field-glass, chanced to pick up a Sheppard in the very act of crime. On the other hand, how many men have got clear away through stupid people disturbing the clues: from Jack the Ripper downwards! But it is the motive that counts. Where that does not exist, the strongest clues lead nowhere. For our surest faith is that men's actions are founded upon reason or upon desire. Hence the utter impossibility of guarding against lunatics or anarchists. I should hardly believe the evidence of my senses in such a case as this: Suppose the Master of the Rolls dropped in to see me, and in the course of a perfectly sound conversation, broke up my fishing-rod without explanation or apology, and, when questioned, calmly denied that he had done so. Who would believe my story? Hence I think that I could walk into the Strand, shoot a perfect stranger in the crowd, and throw away the gun, with no danger of being caught, provided only that the gun could not be traced to me. The evidence of those who saw me fire would be torn to pieces in cross-examination; they could even be made to disbelieve their own eyes.

"From this I draw these conclusions as to the proper conditions for my murder: First, there must be no conceivable reason for the act; second, there must be no way of tracing the weapon to my possession. I need not trouble to hide my traces, except in obvious matters like blood; for it is exceedingly stupid to attempt to prove a false alibi. In fact, there is no bigger booby-trap for a criminal, *pace* the indignant ghost of Mr. Weller, Senior.

“My plan is therefore a simple one; I have only to get hold of a weapon without detection, and use it upon an inoffensive stranger at any time when there happens to be nobody looking—though this is not so important.”

He returned to his fishing tackle. “It’s rather a big bet, though,” he added; “there’s more than a thousand pounds to it. I think I will be pretty careful over details. Practice may not be quite so simple as theory!”

However, the first part of his programme turned out to be delightfully easy. It was his custom to train during the holiday by taking long walks, on his way to the lake or river where he fished. He detested motor-cars. As luck would have it, during the first week, as he tramped a lonely road, his eye was caught by an object lying on the ground. It was a heavy motor spanner, evidently left behind by some chauffeur who had had a breakdown. His mind instantly grasped the situation. There was no one in sight. The spanner was already rusted, had lain there some days. Any of a hundred people might have picked it up. It could never be traced to him. He had never possessed such a tool in his life; besides, the pattern was common. He thrust it quickly into his pocket. When he got home, he packed it away carefully in his traveling cashbox, a solid steel affair of which there was but one key, which never left his chain. “Now,” said he, “the problem is to find the onoffensive stranger. I had better leave Scotland. Every one in Scotland is offensive. Also, in the matter of motive, our common humanity urges us all to kill Scotchmen. So goodbye, land o’ cakes!”

Further meditations were in this key following: since he was to kill with the spanner, certain precautions must be taken. It must be a very clean kill, with no outcry or struggle. At the end of his cogitations, he decided that the victim had better be asleep. His legally trained mind had snapped its last link with the idea of adventure or sport; his motto was “safety first.” His attitude to his projected crime was simply that of

preparing a brief; he wished to meet every contingency; the atrocity of his proceedings was invisible to his intellectuality. Reason is perfectly amoral.

It was on his way from Edinburgh to London that the brilliant idea occurred to him. He would kill old Miss Marsden! She was now Mrs. Robinson, by the way, for she had testified to the faith that was in her by marrying her protégé directly after his acquittal. Ffoulkes knew the house well; he had stayed there several days while working up the case. It was a lonely place, and the old lady was a fresh-air fiend, and slept on the veranda, winter and summer. She was perfectly friendly, had paid most liberally for the defense. Everything was in his favor. Even if Ezra happened to see the murder committed, his tongue was tied; indeed, he stood the strongest chance of being arrested for it himself. The servants slept far away from the veranda, at the other end of the old rambling house; there were no neighbors, and no dogs. His presence in the vicinity would excite no remark, for there was good dry-fly fishing in the streams. He would rent a cottage in the district for the second half of his holiday, walk over the downs, five miles or so, nothing to him, one moonless night, do the job, and walk back. A thousand to one that no one would know that he had ever left his cottage.

On this plan he acted. The only additional precautions suggested themselves to him on the spot; he cultivated the vicar assiduously, playing chess with him every evening; and he feigned a considerable devotion to that worthy gentleman's only daughter. It will be well, he thought, to seem to have my mind well occupied with the pleasures of a simpler chase. Further, the villagers would see nothing in a lover taking long walks by nights, in case he were seen leaving the cottage or returning to it.

A last refinement shot across his mental horizon when he began to calculate the time of the new moon. She would be just a week old on the anniversary of the

Marsden murder. That would be the night for the job; the clever-clever novelist-detectives would fabricate a mystery of revenge in connection with the date. Ezra, too, would be away to meet Maud. There was, of course, a possibility that poignancy of memory would keep the old lady awake on that particular night; but he must chance that.

Things turned out for him even better that he had hoped. Three nights before the proposed crime the vicar mentioned casually that he had met young Robinson — "the charming lad whom you defended so brilliantly" — motoring to London — called away suddenly on business. He expected to be back in a week or ten days. No, Mrs. Robinson was not with him; "she is slightly ailing, poor lady, it appears."

When the great night came Ffoulkes made his master-stroke by proposing to the vicar's daughter. He was obviously accepted, and the young people, after dinner, went gaily arm-in-arm through the village, and received the congratulations of the few belated travelers in that early-to-bed-and-early-to-rise corner of the planet. But Ffoulkes had the spanner in his pocket, and after bestowing his fiancée at the vicarage, went, deviously at first, then swiftly and directly, over the downs. Luck followed him to the last; he found his victim fast asleep. A single blow of the spanner, which he had wrapped in a paper bag to deaden the sound, smashed in the skull; he made his way home without being seen or heard by anybody.

Two days later he wrote to Flynn, with a cutting from the local paper.

"My dear Jack, here's a terrible sequel to the Marsden murder. It is now clear that there is some family feud connected with the fatal date. Probably an affair going back a generation. Shocking, indeed, even to a hardened lawyer like myself; but you see how right I was to insist that there must have been a strong motive for Marsden's murder. Shall we ever know the truth? It sounds like an Arabian Nights' tale."

A month later he returned to London; he had had no answer from Flynn, and supposed him to be still away on his holiday.

There were no arrests, and no clues, in the matter of Mrs. Robinson. The spanner, which Ffoulkes had dropped by the veranda, served merely to suggest a tramp, who might conceivably have been a chauffeur gone to the bad. But the mystery was deepened by an amazing development; her husband had disappeared completely. There was no question of his complicity in the crime; for on the previous evening he had dined with the British Vice-Consul in Marseilles; and it was physically impossible for him to have returned in time to commit the murder.

The obvious deduction was that whoever hated the Marsdens had included him in the schedule.

"Well," soliloquized Ffoulkes in his chambere, "at least I shall not lose that thousand pounds. But now I've got to edge away from Miss Bread-and-Butter-and-Kisses. Ugh!"

III.

When you have dined at Basso's, which is the summit of human felicity, you should avoid too sharp a declension to this vale of tears by taking a stroll along the quays to the old quarter on the west of the Bassin. There you will find streets almost worthy to rank with the Fish market at Cairo, and decidedly superior to even the best that Hong Kong or Honolulu or New Orleans can produce. In particular, there is an archway called by initiates the Gate of Hell, for it forms an entrance to this highly fascinating and exceedingly disreputable district.

Under this archway, on the night of the exploit of Sir Richard Ffoulkes, stood a young man, quietly dressed in the English style, though with a trifling tendency to over-indulgence in jewelry.

He glanced at a watch upon his wrist; ten minutes before midnight. He then took a little bottle from his pocket, after a quick inspection of the vicinity. From the bottle he shook a few grains of powder on the back of his hand, and drew them into his nostrils. Next came a moment's indecision; then, swinging his cane, he walked briskly out of the archway, and paced up and down a strange little square of green, set there as if somehow hallowed by great memories. After a little while he returned to the archway. This time it was tenanted. A girl stood there. She was dressed in plain black with the extreme of modesty and refinement; but the piquancy and vitality of her face, and the lustre and passion of her eyes, redeemed the picture from banality.

There was a long look of recognition; the girl reached out both arms. The man took them in his own. For a minute they stood, feeding on each other, prolonging the delicious torture of restraint. Then slowly they drew together, and their mouths met in an abandoned kiss.

It would have puzzled them to say how long the embrace lasted; but at its truce they saw that they were not alone. Close to them stood another man, tall, elegant, slim, almost feminine in figure, as he certainly was in the extremity of the fashion which tailored him. Nor was there wanting a touch of rouge and powder on his cheeks. His thin, white hand was lifted to his nostrils, and the lovers perceived that he was taking advantage of the darkness to indulge in cocaine.

The newcomer spoke in silken tones. "Forgive me," he said in softest French, "but it gave me pleasure to be near you. I saw monsieur here a few moments ago, and knew that he was one of the elect. And mademoiselle, too? May I have the honor?"

The girl smiled. "Among friends," she murmured charmingly, and raised the back of her hand towards him. He saluted it with his lips, and then shook out a generous supply of crystal poison from a snuff-box in

amber and emeralds that dated from the great days of Louis XIV.

The girl turned her eyes full upon him, almost ardently. "I haven't touched it," she said, "for ever so long. By the way, excuse me, won't you, but aren't we all English?"

"I am," said the exquisite. "I'm an actor on a holiday. Won't you come to my rooms? It's only a garret, or little better, but I have plenty of the Snow of Heaven, and we could have a wonderful night." "Let's go!" said the girl, pressing her lover's arm. He hesitated a moment. "Three's company," urged the other, "when they all understand."

"It would be perfect," chimed the girl, "and it would suit us — in other ways," she added, darkly. "Yes, the scheme has points," admitted the younger man: "thanks very much. We'll come. What's your name? Mine's Herbert Aynes. This lady — we'll call her Mab, if you don't mind. There's an injured husband in the offing, you know: that's one reason why we have to be careful." "Certainly, prudence before all things; but I've no troubles; call me Francis Ridley." They linked arms, and strolled gaily along the main street of the quarter, enchanted by the color and the chiaroscuro, by the hoarse cries in all strange tongues that greeted them on every side, even by the weird odors — for when people are lit by love and adventure and cocaine, there is no place of this whole universe which is not sheer delight. Presently, however, they branched off, under Ridley's direction, and began to climb the steep streets on their right. A minute later they entered an ancient doorway, and after three flights of stairs found Ridley's dovecote.

It was a charming room, furnished, as if for a woman, with all bright colors and daintiness. On one side of the room was a divan, smothered in cushions; on the other a hammock of scarlet cords hung from the rafters. Ridley went to the window and closed the shutters. "Madame est chez elle!" he announced

gallantly. “What a wonderful place!” laughed the girl. “However did you find it?”

“Oh, it used to be a house of assignation.”

“Used to be!”

And this time all three laughed in unison.

IV.

The reopening of the courts found Ffoulkes enormously preoccupied. For the past two years several influential newspapers had been accusing Ministers of the Crown of the grossest kind of robbery. They had bought and sold stock, it was alleged, manipulating the prices by using their positions to announce that the government had or had not decided to make contracts with the companies involved, and subsequently denying the rumours when they had taken their profits. The attack had been so persistent that the accused ministers had been forced to desperate measures. They had started a prearranged libel action against a newspaper in Paris for reprinting one of these articles; but people still asked why they did not prosecute one of the sheets that were attacking them in London. Unhappily, not one of these was to be bought: each, carefully sounded, announced its intention to fight; and redoubled its venom.

It was at last decided to attempt a criminal prosecution of the weakest of its enemies, a paper edited by a man personally unpopular, and to bring every kind of indirect pressure upon the court to secure a conviction.

Of course the law officers of the Crown were unavailable for the prosecution; and the choice of a leader had fallen, at the last moment, when their own counsel suddenly declined to go on with the case and returned the briefs, upon Ffoulkes.

He had thus only a month to assimilate what really required six; but if he won, he could be sure of office next time a Liberal Government was in power.

So he worked day and night, seeing nobody but the solicitors and witnesses employed on the case.

He had no news of Flynn but a telegram from Berlin, saying that he would be back in a month, and that there was "nothing to report as yet." This amused Ffoulkes hugely; it would be great if Flynn failed to bring off his murder. However, he had no time for trifles like murder these days: he had to get a conviction for criminal libel; nothing else mattered.

But when the case came actually into court he saw it to be hopeless. His opening was masterly: it occupied two days; but on the second day he sent word to his clients during the lunch hour that it was no good to go on, and that he felt forced to take measures previously agreed upon. These were simple; near the conclusion of the speech he managed to blunder into disclosing a flaw in the procedure so obvious that the judge could not possibly overlook it. His lordship interrupted: "I am afraid, Sir Richard, that you have no case. If you will refer to Jones vs. The Looking Glass, you will see that it has been expressly laid down that —." An elaborate legal argument followed, but the judge was inexorable. "You must redraw your plea, Sir Richard. The case is dismissed."

The docile organs of the government condoled with the great counsel for losing an "already won case" on a technicality; but Ffoulkes was sorry he had ever touched it. He would go to the club and play a game of chess. Flynn would be there later; he had returned to London that morning, and telegraphed his friend to make it a dinner and the Empire.

In the lounge of the club was only one little old man, who was known as a mathematician of great eminence, with a touch of the crank. He had recently finished a pamphlet to prove that the ancients had some knowledge of fourth-dimensional mathematics, that their statement of such problems as the duplication of the cube implied an apprehension of some medium in which

incommensurables became tractable. He saw especially strong on Euclid's parallel postulate, which has not only been unproved, but proved unprovable. He saw also a deep student of Freemasonry, whose arcana furnished him with further arguments on the same thesis.

This old man, whose name was Simon Iff, challenged Ffoulkes to a game of chess. To the surprise of the lawyer, who was a very strong amateur, he was beaten thrice in very short games. Iff then took off a knight, and won a fourth game as easily as before. "It's no good, sir," said Ffoulkes; "I see you are in the master class." "Not a bit of it," replied the old man, "Lasker can beat me as easily as I beat you. He really knows chess; I only know you. I can gauge your intellect; it is limited in certain directions. I had a lost game against you most of the time; but you did not make the winning continuations, and I knew that you wouldn't and couldn't.

"Let me tell you something, if you'll forgive a senior for prosing. There are two ways to play chess. One is a man against a man; the other is a man against a chess-board. It's the difference between match and medal play at golf. Observe; if I know that you are going to play the Philidor defense to the King's Knight's Opening, I do not risk being forced into the Petroff, which I dislike. But in playing an unknown quantity, I must analyze every position like a problem, and guard against all possibilities. It takes a great genius and a lifetime's devotion to play the latter game. But so long as I can read your motive in a move, so long as I can content myself with guarding that one line. Should you make a move whose object I cannot see, I am compelled to take a fresh view of the board, and analyze the position as if I were called upon to adjudicate an unfinished game."

"That's exceedingly interesting. It bears rather on my game, law."

"I was about to venture a remark upon that point. I was fortunate enough to be present at the trial of Ezra Robinson, and I cannot compliment you too highly on

the excellence of your defense. But, as you will be the first to admit, his acquittal was no solution of the question. 'Who killed Marsden?' Still less does it tell us who killed Mrs. Robinson exactly one year later."

"Do you know the solution?"

"No; but I can show you on what lines to attack the mystery."

"I wish you would."

"I may be tedious."

"Impossible. You have beaten me so abominably at chess that I am all on fire to learn more from watching the working of your intellect."

"Intellect is our weakest weapon. This world is run upon 'inflexible intellectual guiders,' as Zoroaster put it, but it was 'the will of the Father,' as he also explained, which laid down those laws which we call laws of nature, but, as Kant has shown, are really no more than the laws of our own minds. The universe is a phenomenon of love under will, a mystic and poetic creation, and the intellect only stands to it as mere scansion does to poetry."

"It is at least a charming theory."

"It works, Sir Richard. Let us apply our frail powers to this Marsden mystery. Let us take the second murder first, because it is apparently the more abstruse. We have no clues and no motives to mislead us. True, Robinson had a strong interest in his wife's death — yet not only does he prove an alibi, but he vanishes forever! If, as we might imagine, he had hired a knave to do the job, he would have kept in sight, pretended decent grief, and so on. Of course, as has been suggested, he may himself have come to some sudden end; but if that be so, it is a marvelous coincidence indeed. No! We are forced to believe him guiltless, of this second murder at least. Consequently, having eliminated the only person with a motive, we are thrown back upon the master's way of playing chess, pure analysis. (Notice how Tchigorin handicapped himself by his fancy for that second move,

queen to king's second, and Steinitz by his pawn to queen's third in the Ruy Lopez. Their opponents got a line on them at once, and saved themselves infinite trouble.) Pardon the digression. Now then, let us look at this second murder again. What is the most striking fact about it? This, that it was committed by a person with a complete contradiction in his mind. He is so astute that he leaves no clue of any sort; there has not even been any arrest. If he did the first murder also, it shows that he is capable of turning the same trick twice. In short, we see a man of the first-class mind, or rather intellect, for we must assume a lack of moral sense. A man, in fact, with a mind like your own; for since this afternoon's exploit, I imagine you will not claim to be scrupulous."

"You saw through the trick?"

"Naturally; you knew you had no case, so you preferred to lose on a foul, and claim a moral victory."

"Good for you!"

"Well, this same first-rate intellect is in another respect so feeble that the man takes pleasure, or finds satisfaction, in arranging his crime on a significant date. He must be the sort of man that takes precautions against witches on Walpurgis Night!"

"Jove, that's a good point. Never struck me!"

"Well, frankly, it doesn't strike me now. There are men with such blind spots, no doubt; but it is easier for me to think that the murderer, with plenty of nights to choose from, chose that one in particular with the idea of leading people astray — of playing on their sense of romance and mystery — of exploiting their love of imaginative detectives stories!"

"If so, the point is once more in favor of his intellect."

"Exactly. But now we are going to narrow the circle. Who is there in whose mind the date of the first murder was so vivid that such a stratagem would occur to him?"

"Well, there are many. Myself, for example!"

Iff began to set up the pieces for another game.

"We must eliminate you," he said, after a few moments of silence, "you lawyers forget your cases as soon as they are over."

"Besides, I had no possible motive."

"Oh, that is nothing in the case. You are a rich man, and would never do a murder for greed; you are a cold-blooded man, and would never kill for revenge or jealousy; and these things place you apart from the common run of men. Still, I believe such as you perfectly capable of murder; there are seven deadly sins, not two; why should you not kill, for example, from some motive like pride?"

"I take pride in aiding the administration of justice. My ambition is a Parliamentary career."

"Come," said Iff, "all this is a digression; we had better play chess. Let me try at Blackburne's odds!" Iff won the game. "You know," he said, as Ffoulkes overturned his king in sign of surrender, "whomever killed Mrs. Robinson, if I read his type of mind aright, has left his queen en prise, after all. There is a very nasty gap in the defenses. He killed the woman from no common motive; he has therefore always to be on his guard against equally uncommon men. Suppose Casablanca dropped into the club, and challenged me to a game, how should I feel if I had any pride in beating you? There may be some one hunting him who is as superior intellectually to him as he is to the police. And there's a worse threat: he probably took the precaution of killing the old woman in her sleep. He could have no conscience, no remorse. But he would have experience in his own person that such monsters as himself were at large; therefore, I ask you, how does he know, every night, that some one will not kill him in his sleep?"

Ffoulkes called the waiter, and asked Iff to join him in a drink. "No thank you," returned the old man, "playing chess is the only type of pleasure I dare permit myself."

At this moment Flynn came into the club, and greeted both men warmly. Iff had written many a glowing essay for the Irishman's review. He wanted both to dine with him, but once again Iff declined, pleading another engagement. After a few moments' chat he walked off, leaving the two old friends together.

They dined at the club, and pointedly confined the conversation to the libel case, and politics in general. With their second cigars, Flynn rose. "Come round to Mount Street," he said. "I've a lot to tell you." So they strolled off in the bright autumn weather to the maisonette where Flynn lived.

V.

They made themselves at ease on the big Chesterfield. It was a strange room, a symphony of green. The walls were covered with panels of green silk; the floor was covered with great green carpet from Algeria; the upholstery was of green morocco; the ceiling was washed in delicate eau-de-Nil with designs by Gauguin, and the lamps were shaded by soft tissues of emerald. Even the drinks were of the same color: Chartreuse, the original shipping, and créme de menthe and absinthe. Flynn's man brought cigarettes and cigars in a box of malachite, and set them down with the spirits. Flynn dismissed him for the night.

"Well," said Jack, when the man had gone, "I see you got away with it all right."

"I had a scare this afternoon. Old Iff made rings round me at chess, and then proceeded to develop a theory of the — exploit — that was so near the truth that I thought for half a moment that he had guessed something. Luckily, he's just an old crank in everybody's eyes; but, by Jove, he can play chess!"

"Iff's one of the biggest minds in England; but the second-raters always win in London."

"Well, what about your end of the bet?"

"Oh, there's no news yet. But they'll find the bodies next week when my tenancy of the place expires."

"Bodies!"

"Two. You see, I went after your friend Ezra Robinson and the fair Duval. I knew from you of the appointment on the anniversary of the murder, but not the place; so I had him shadowed from the day of the bet. I took a room in the old quarter of Marseilles, when I found that he had stopped there. I got myself up as Francis Ridley, whom you may remember in certain amateur theatricals.

"I got them along to make a night of it, and filled them up with cocaine, while I took — mostly borax. Then when we got to the stage of exhaustion and collapse, I unslung a convenient hammock that hung in the room and told them what I meant to do. And then I hanged them by the neck until they were dead, and may the Lord have mercy on their souls! Next day I crossed to Algiers, went down to El Kantara and shot moufflon — I'm having a fine head mounted especially for you — then I came back through Italy and Germany. That's all!"

"I say," cried Ffoulkes, shocked, "that's hardly in the spirit of the bet, old man. I don't see any moral turpitude involved!"

"You wretched hypocrite," retorted Flynn, "it was deliberate murder by both French and English law. I don't see what you can want more than that. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, with your legal mind!"

But the lawyer was not satisfied. He began to argue, and ultimately turned the discussion into what was as near a quarrel as such old friends could ever contemplate. In fact, Ffoulkes saw the danger, and went home at an unusually early hour.

Flynn dismissed the matter from his mind, and passed the night in composing sonnets, in French, to the honor of the green goddess — absinthe.

VI.

A month later. Flynn had been unusually busy, and saw little of his friends. Twice he dined with Ffoulkes, but the latter was more moody and irritable than ever. He had lost three important cases, and seemed altogether out of luck. His looks reflected his worry as much as his manners. Flynn asked him to come to Paris for a week's rest; he refused; Flynn went alone.

Returning to London, he called at the chambers in Lincoln's Inn. They were shut up. He went on to the club, hoping for news. Almost the first man he saw was an old college friend, a judge, the very man to have the latest tidings. Probably Ffoulkes had been in court that day.

"Hush! it's terrible," said the judge, and drew Flynn into a corner of the lounge. "They had to take him away yesterday. He had persecution mania, a hopeless form, I'm afraid. Hadn't slept for a month. Said he was afraid of being murdered in his sleep! These things are too bad to talk about; I'm going home. Brace up!" The judge rose and went; but when Flynn came out of the stupor into which the intelligence had thrown him, he found Iff seated at his side.

"You've heard? Isn't it awful?"

"No," replied Iff, "not more so than the fact that two and two make four. Which in a sense is awful indeed, and according as you are for or against the tendency of the universe, is encouraging or terrifying. But it is fatal and inexorable. Perhaps to say that is to say enough!"

"Explain what you mean."

"A little while ago," replied the old mystic, "he came here to play chess with me — you remember; you were there, the day of your return. Well, I mastered his mind; I saw its limitations; I mapped its roads; I measured its heights and depths; I calculated its reactions. I beat him easily, at odds. We then began to talk of the Marsden mystery, and I analyzed the mind of the man

who killed Mrs. Robinson — a mind like his own. I showed that the coincidence of dates was probably a deliberate false trail. I then asked who would be likely to think of such a point, who would have vivid reason to think of that date. I was speaking in perfectly general terms; no suspicion of him had crossed my mind. He instantly suggested himself. I knew how he played chess: so I knew that he must have had himself in view subconsciously; that he must be trying to put me off the scent by boldness. It was just the same type of tactics as choosing the anniversary of the first murder. From that instant I knew that he was guilty.

"A moment later he confirmed me. I suggested that a man like himself might kill for such a motive as pride; and he replied that he took pride in the administration of justice. Now after that libel action, and coming from such a man, the English hypocrisy, which might have been natural in a lesser man, was a complete confession. Therefore I determined to punish him. I knew there was only one way; to work upon his mind along its own lines. So I said to him: "Suppose the murderer realizes that there are intellects superior to his own? And — how will he sleep, knowing that there are people who will murder others in their sleep without reasonable cause? You know the answer. I suppose that I am in a sense the murderer of his reason."

Flynn said nothing; but his eyes were streaming; he had loved Dick Ffoulkes dearly, and a thousand memories were urgent in his heart and mind. Iff seemed not to notice it.

"But the murderer of Marsden is still a mystery. Ffoulkes can hardly have done that."

Flynn sat up and laughed wildly. "I'll tell you all about that," he cried. "Ezra Robinson did it, with the help of the floor clerk. They were to meet on the anniversary of the murder. I tracked them down, and I hanged them with these hands." He stretched them out in a gesture of agony. The old man took them in his.

“Boy!” he said, “— for you will never grow up — you have perhaps erred in some ways — ways which I find excusable — but you need never lose a night’s sleep over this business.”

“Ah!” cried Jack, “but it was I who tempted my friend — it was a moment of absolute madness, and now I have lost him!”

“We are all punished,” said the old man solemnly, “exactly where we have offended, and in the measure thereof.”