

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 Triflithorn. 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 than 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 to-day. 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 write 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 to-night, I don't mind telling you; if I'm caught, I'll