

Theodore Dreiser

An American Tragedy III

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Теодор Драйзер

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«РИПОЛ Классик»

1925

УДК 82
ББК 84

Драйзер Т.

An American Tragedy III / Т. Драйзер — «РИПОЛ Классик»,
1925 — (An American Tragedy)

ISBN 978-5-521-06865-4

An American Tragedy is the story of the corruption and destruction of one man, Clyde Griffiths, who forfeits his life in desperate pursuit of success. The novel represents a massive portrayal of the society whose values both shape Clyde's tawdry ambitions and seal his fate: It is an unsurpassed depiction of the harsh realities of American life and of the dark side of the American Dream.

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Chapter 1

Cataraqui County extending from the northernmost line of the village known as Three Mile Bay on the south to the Canadian border, on the north a distance of fifty miles. And from Senaschet and Indian Lakes on the east to the Rock and Scarf Rivers on the west – a width of thirty miles. Its greater portion covered by uninhabited forests and lakes, yet dotted here and there with such villages and hamlets as Koontz, Grass Lake, North Wallace, Brown Lake, with Bridgeburg, the county seat, numbering no less than two thousand souls of the fifteen thousand in the entire county. And the central square of the town occupied by the old and yet not ungraceful county courthouse, a cupola with a clock and some pigeons surmounting it, the four principal business streets of the small town facing it.

In the office of the County Coroner in the northeast corner of the building on Friday, July ninth, one Fred Heit, coroner, a large and broad-shouldered individual with a set of gray-brown whiskers such as might have graced a Mormon elder. His face was large and his hands and his feet also. And his girth was proportionate.

At the time that this presentation begins, about two-thirty in the afternoon, he was lethargically turning the leaves of a mail-order catalogue for which his wife had asked him to write. And while deciphering from its pages the price of shoes, jackets, hats, and caps for his five omnivorous children, a greatcoat for himself of soothing proportions, high collar, broad belt, large, impressive buttons chancing to take his eye, he had paused to consider regretfully that the family budget of three thousand dollars a year would never permit of so great luxury this coming winter, particularly since his wife, Ella, had had her mind upon a fur coat for at least three winters past.

However his thoughts might have eventuated on this occasion, they were interrupted by the whirr of a telephone bell.

“Yes, this is Mr. Heit speaking – Wallace Upham of Big Bittern. Why, yes, go on, Wallace – young couple drowned – all right, just wait a minute – ”

He turned to the politically active youth who drew a salary from the county under the listing of “secretary to the coroner” – “Get these points, Earl.” Then into the telephone: “All right, Wallace, now give me all the facts – everything – yes. The body of the wife found but not that of the husband – yes – a boat upset on the south shore – yes – straw hat without any lining – yes – some marks about her mouth and eye – her coat and hat at the inn – yes – a letter in one of the pockets of the coat – addressed to who? – Mrs. Titus Alden, Biltz, Mimico County – yes – still dragging for the man’s body, are they? – yes – no trace of him yet – I see. All right, Wallace – Well – I’ll tell you, Wallace, have them leave the coat and hat just where they are. Let me see – it’s two-thirty now. I’ll be up on the four o’clock. The bus from the inn there meets that, doesn’t it? Well, I’ll be over on that, sure – And, Wallace, I wish you’d write down the names of all present who saw the body brought up. What was that? – eighteen feet of water at least? – yes – a veil caught in one of the rowlocks – yes – a brown veil – yes – sure, that’s all – Well, then have them leave everything just as found, Wallace, and I’ll be right up. Yes, Wallace, thank you – Goodbye.”

Slowly Mr. Heit restored the receiver to the hook and as slowly arose from the capacious walnut-hued chair in which he sat, stroking his heavy whiskers, while he eyed Earl Newcomb, combination typist, record clerk, and what not.

“You got all that down, did you, Earl?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, you better get your hat and coat and come along with me. We’ll have to catch that 3:10. You can fill in a few subpoenas on the train. I should say you better take fifteen or twenty – to be on the safe side, and take the names of such witnesses as we can find on the spot. And you better call up Mrs. Heit and say ‘taint likely I’ll be home for dinner tonight or much before the down train.

We may have to stay up there until tomorrow. You never can tell in these cases how they're going to turn out and it's best to be on the safe side."

Heit turned to a coat-room in one corner of the musty old room and extracted a large, soft-brimmed, straw hat, the downward curving edges of which seemed to heighten the really bland and yet ogreish effect of his protruding eyes and voluminous whiskers, and having thus equipped himself, said: "I'm just going in the sheriff's office a minute, Earl. You'd better call up the Republican and the Democrat and tell 'em about this, so they won't think we're slightin' 'em. Then I'll meet you down at the station." And he lumbered out.

And Earl Newcomb, a tall, slender, shock-headed young man of perhaps nineteen, and of a very serious, if at times befuddled, manner, at once seized a sheaf of subpoenas, and while stuffing these in his pocket, sought to get Mrs. Heit on the telephone. And then, after explaining to the newspapers about a reported double drowning at Big Bittern, he seized his own blue-banded straw hat, some two sizes too large for him, and hurried down the hall, only to encounter, opposite the wide-open office door of the district attorney, Zillah Saunders, spinster and solitary stenographer to the locally somewhat famous and mercurial Orville W. Mason, district attorney. She was on her way to the auditor's office, but being struck by the preoccupation and haste of Mr. Newcomb, usually so much more deliberate, she now called: "Hello, Earl. What's the rush? Where you going so fast?"

"Double drowning up at Big Bittern, we hear. Maybe something worse. Mr. Heit's going up and I'm going along. We have to make that 3:10."

"Who said so? Is it anyone from here?"

"Don't know yet, but don't think so. There was a letter in the girl's pocket addressed to some one in Biltz, Mimico County, a Mrs. Alden. I'll tell you when we get back or I'll telephone you."

"My goodness, if it's a crime, Mr. Mason'll be interested, won't he?"

"Sure, I'll telephone him, or Mr. Heit will. If you see Bud Parker or Karel Badnell, tell 'em I had to go out of town, and call up my mother for me, will you, Zillah, and tell her, too. I'm afraid I won't have time."

"Sure I will, Earl."

"Thanks."

And, highly interested by this latest development in the ordinary humdrum life of his chief, he skipped gayly and even eagerly down the south steps of the Cataraqui County Courthouse, while Miss Saunders, knowing that her own chief was off on some business connected with the approaching County Republican Convention, and there being no one else in his office with whom she could communicate at this time, went on to the auditor's office, where it was possible to retail to any who might be assembled there, all that she had gathered concerning this seemingly important lake tragedy.

Chapter 2

The information obtained by Coroner Heit and his assistant was of a singular and disturbing character. In the first instance, because of the disappearance of a boat and an apparently happy and attractive couple bent on sight-seeing, an early morning search, instigated by the inn-keeper of this region, had revealed, in Moon Cove, the presence of the overturned canoe, also the hat and veil. And immediately such available employees, as well as guides and guests of the Inn, as could be impressed, had begun diving into the waters or by means of long poles equipped with hooks attempting to bring one or both bodies to the surface. The fact, as reported by Sim Shoop, the guide, as well as the innkeeper and the boathouse lessee, that the lost girl was both young and attractive and her companion seemingly a youth of some means, was sufficient to whet the interest of this lake group of woodsmen and inn employees to a point which verged on sorrow. And in addition, there was intense curiosity as to how, on so fair and windless a day, so strange an accident could have occurred.

But what created far more excitement after a very little time was the fact that at high noon one of the men who trolled – John Pole – a woodsman, was at last successful in bringing to the surface Roberta herself, drawn upward by the skirt of her dress, obviously bruised about the face – the lips and nose and above and below the right eye – a fact which to those who were assisting at once seemed to be suspicious. Indeed, John Pole, who with Joe Rainer at the oars was the one who had succeeded in bringing her to the surface, had exclaimed at once on seeing her: “Why, the pore little thing! She don’t seem to weigh more’n nothin’ at all. It’s a wonder tuh me she coulda sunk.” And then reaching over and gathering her in his strong arms, he drew her in, dripping and lifeless, while his companions signaled to the other searchers, who came swiftly. And putting back from her face the long, brown, thick hair which the action of the water had swirled concealingly across it, he had added: “I do declare, Joe! Looka here. It does look like the child mighta been hit by somethin’! Looka here, Joe!” And soon the group of woodsmen and inn guests in their boats alongside were looking at the brownish-blue marks on Roberta’s face.

And forthwith, even while the body of Roberta was being taken north to the boat-house, and the dragging for the body of the lost man was resumed, suspicions were being voiced in such phrases as: “Well, it looks kinda queer – them marks – an’ all – don’t it? It’s curious a boat like that coulda upset on a day like yesterday.” “We’ll soon know if he’s down there or not!”; the feeling, following failure after hours of fruitless search for him, definitely coalescing at last into the conclusion that more than likely he was not down there at all – a hard and stirring thought to all.

Subsequent to this, the guide who had brought Clyde and Roberta from Gun Lodge conferring with the inn-keepers at Big Bittern and Grass Lake, it was factually determined: (1) that the drowned girl had left her bag at Gun Lodge whereas Clifford Golden had taken his with him; (2) that there was a disturbing discrepancy between the registration at Grass Lake and that at Big Bittern, the names Carl Graham and Clifford Golden being carefully discussed by the two inn-keepers and the identity of the bearer as to looks established; and (3) that the said Clifford Golden or Carl Graham had asked of the guide who had driven him over to Big Bittern whether there were many people on the lake that day. And thereafter the suspicions thus far engendered further coalescing into the certainty that there had been foul play. There was scarcely any doubt of it.

Immediately upon his arrival Coroner Heit was made to understand that these men of the north woods were deeply moved and in addition determined in their suspicions. They did not believe that the body of Clifford Golden or Carl Graham had ever sunk to the bottom of the lake. With the result that Heit on viewing the body of the unknown girl laid carefully on a cot in the boat-house, and finding her young and attractive, was strangely affected, not only by her looks but this circumambient atmosphere of suspicion. Worse yet, on retiring to the office of the manager of the inn, and being

handed the letter found in the pocket of Roberta's coat, he was definitely swayed in the direction of a somber and unshakable suspicion. For he read:

Grass Lake, N. Y., July 8th.

DEAREST MAMMA:

We're up here and we're going to be married, but this is for your eyes alone. Please don't show it to papa or any one, for it mustn't become known yet. I told you why at Christmas. And you're not to worry or ask any questions or tell any one except just that you've heard from me and know where I am – not anybody. And you mustn't think I won't be getting along all right because I will be. Here's a big hug and kiss for each cheek, mamma. Be sure and make father understand that it's all right without telling him anything, or Emily or Tom or Gifford, either, do you hear? I'm sending you nice, big kisses.

Lovingly,

BERT.

P.S. This must be your secret and mine until I write you different a little later on.

And in the upper right-hand corner of the paper, as well as on the envelope, were printed the words: "Grass Lake Inn, Grass Lake, N. Y., Jack Evans, Prop." And the letter had evidently been written the morning after the night they had spent at Grass Lake as Mr. and Mrs. Carl Graham.

The waywardness of young girls!

For plainly, as this letter indicated, these two had stayed together as man and wife at that inn when they were not as yet married. He winced as he read, for he had daughters of his own of whom he was exceedingly fond. But at this point he had a thought. A quadrennial county election was impending, the voting to take place the following November, at which were to be chosen for three years more the entire roster of county offices, his own included, and in addition this year a county judge whose term was for six years. In August, some six weeks further on, were to be held the county Republican and Democratic conventions at which were to be chosen the regular party nominees for these respective offices. Yet for no one of these places, thus far, other than that of the county judgeship, could the present incumbent of the office of district attorney possibly look forward with any hope, since already he had held the position of district attorney for two consecutive terms, a length of office due to the fact that not only was he a good orator of the inland political stripe but also, as the chief legal official of the county, he was in a position to do one and another of his friends a favor. But now, unless he were so fortunate as to be nominated and subsequently elected to this county judgeship, defeat and political doldrums loomed ahead. For during all his term of office thus far, there had been no really important case in connection with which he had been able to distinguish himself and so rightfully and hopefully demand further recognition from the people. But this...

But now, as the Coroner shrewdly foresaw, might not this case prove the very thing to fix the attention and favor of the people upon one man – the incumbent district attorney – a close and helpful friend of his, thus far – and so sufficiently redound to his credit and strength, and through him to the party ticket itself, so that at the coming election all might be elected – the reigning district attorney thus winning for himself not only the nomination for but his election to the six-year term judgeship. Stranger things than this had happened in the political world.

Immediately he decided not to answer any questions in regard to this letter, since it promised a quick solution of the mystery of the perpetrator of the crime, if there had been one, plus exceptional credit in the present political situation to whosoever should appear to be instrumental in the same. At the same time he at once ordered Earl Newcomb, as well as the guide who had brought Roberta and Clyde to Big Bittern, to return to Gun Lodge station from where the couple had come and say that under no circumstances was the bag held there to be surrendered to any one save himself or a representative of the district attorney. Then, when he was about to telephone to Biltz to ascertain whether there was such a family as Alden possessing a daughter by the name of Bert, or possibly Alberta, he was most providentially, as it seemed to him, interrupted by two men and a boy, trappers

and hunters of this region, who, accompanied by a crowd of those now familiar with the tragedy, were almost tumultuously ushered into his presence. For they had news – news of the utmost importance! As they now related, with many interruptions and corrections, at about five o'clock of the afternoon of the day on which Roberta was drowned, they were setting out from Three Mile Bay, some twelve miles south of Big Bittern, to hunt and fish in and near this lake. And, as they now unanimously testified, on the night in question, at about nine o'clock, as they were nearing the south shore of Big Bittern – perhaps three miles to the south of it – they had encountered a young man, whom they took to be some stranger making his way from the inn at Big Bittern south to the village at Three Mile Bay. He was a smartishly and decidedly well dressed youth for these parts, as they now said – wearing a straw hat and carrying a bag, and at the time they wondered why such a trip on foot and at such an hour since there was a train south early next morning which reached Three Mile Bay in an hour's time. And why, too, should he have been so startled at meeting them? For as they described it, on his encountering them in the woods thus, he had jumped back as though startled and worse – terrified – as though about to run. To be sure, the lantern one of them was carrying was turned exceedingly low, the moon being still bright, and they had walked quietly, as became men who were listening for wild life of any kind. At the same time, surely this was a perfectly safe part of the country, traversed for the most part by honest citizens such as themselves, and there was no need for a young man to jump as though he were seeking to hide in the brush. However, when the youth, Bud Brunig, who carried the light, turned it up the stranger seemed to recover his poise and after a moment in response to their "Howdy" had replied: "How do you do? How far is it to Three Mile Bay?" and they had replied, "About seven mile." And then he had gone on and they also, discussing the encounter.

And now, since the description of this youth tallied almost exactly with that given by the guide who had driven Clyde over from Gun Lodge, as well as that furnished by the innkeepers at Big Bittern and Grass Lake, it seemed all too plain that he must be the same youth who had been in that boat with the mysterious dead girl.

At once Earl Newcomb suggested to his chief that he be permitted to telephone to the one inn-keeper at Three Mile Bay to see if by any chance this mysterious stranger had been seen or had registered there. He had not. Nor apparently at that time had he been seen by any other than the three men. In fact, he had vanished as though into air, although by nightfall of this same day it was established that on the morning following the chance meeting of the men with the stranger, a youth of somewhat the same description and carrying a bag, but wearing a cap – not a straw hat – had taken passage for Sharon on the small lake steamer "Cygnus" plying between that place and Three Mile Bay. But again, beyond that point, the trail appeared to be lost. No one at Sharon, at least up to this time, seemed to recall either the arrival or departure of any such person. Even the captain himself, as he later testified, had not particularly noted his debarkation – there were some fourteen others going down the lake that day and he could not be sure of any one person.

But in so far as the group at Big Bittern was concerned, the conclusion slowly but definitely impressed itself upon all those present that whoever this individual was, he was an unmitigated villain – a reptilian villain! And forthwith there was doubled and trebled in the minds of all a most urgent desire that he be overtaken and captured. The scoundrel! The murderer! And at once there was broadcast throughout this region by word of mouth, telephone, telegraph, to such papers as The Argus and Times-Union of Albany, and The Star of Lycurgus, the news of this pathetic tragedy with the added hint that it might conceal a crime of the gravest character.

Chapter 3

Coroner Heit, his official duties completed for the time being, found himself pondering, as he traveled south on the lake train, how he was to proceed farther. What was the next step he should take in this pathetic affair? For the coroner, as he had looked at Roberta before he left was really deeply moved. She seemed so young and innocent-looking and pretty. The little blue serge dress lying heavily and clinging tightly to her, her very small hands folded across her breast, her warm, brown hair still damp from its twenty-four hours in the water, yet somehow suggesting some of the vivacity and passion that had invested her in life – all seemed to indicate a sweetness which had nothing to do with crime.

But deplorable as it might be, and undoubtedly was, there was another aspect of the case that more vitally concerned himself. Should he go to Biltz and convey to the Mrs. Alden of the letter the dreadful intelligence of her daughter's death, at the same time inquiring about the character and whereabouts of the man who had been with her, or should he proceed first to District Attorney Mason's office in Bridgeburg and having imparted to him all of the details of the case, allow that gentleman to assume the painful responsibility of devastating a probably utterly respectable home? For there was the political situation to be considered. And while he himself might act and so take personal credit, still there was this general party situation to be thought of. A strong man should undoubtedly head and so strengthen the party ticket this fall and here was the golden opportunity. The latter course seemed wiser. It would provide his friend, the district attorney, with his great chance. Arriving in Bridgeburg in this mood, he ponderously invaded the office of Orville W. Mason, the district attorney, who immediately sat up, all attention, sensing something of import in the coroner's manner.

Mason was a short, broad-chested, broad-backed and vigorous individual physically, but in his late youth had been so unfortunate as to have an otherwise pleasant and even arresting face marred by a broken nose, which gave to him a most unprepossessing, almost sinister, look. Yet he was far from sinister. Rather, romantic and emotional. His boyhood had been one of poverty and neglect, causing him in his later and somewhat more successful years to look on those with whom life had dealt more kindly as too favorably treated. The son of a poor farmer's widow, he had seen his mother put to such straits to make ends meet that by the time he reached the age of twelve he had surrendered nearly all of the pleasures of youth in order to assist her. And then, at fourteen, while skating, he had fallen and broken his nose in such a way as to forever disfigure his face. Thereafter, feeling himself handicapped in the youthful sorting contests which gave to other boys the female companions he most craved, he had grown exceedingly sensitive to the fact of his facial handicap. And this had eventually resulted in what the Freudians are accustomed to describe as a psychic sex scar.

At the age of seventeen, however, he had succeeded in interesting the publisher and editor of the Bridgeburg Republican to the extent that he was eventually installed as official local news-gatherer of the town. Later he came to be the Cataraqui County correspondent of such papers as the Albany Times–Union and the Utica Star, ending eventually at the age of nineteen with the privilege of studying law in the office of one ex-Judge Davis Richofer, of Bridgeburg. And a few years later, after having been admitted to the bar, he had been taken up by several county politicians and merchants who saw to it that he was sent to the lower house of the state legislature for some six consecutive years, where, by reason of a modest and at the same time shrewd and ambitious willingness to do as he was instructed, he attained favor with those at the capital while at the same time retaining the good will of his hometown sponsors. Later, returning to Bridgeburg and possessing some gifts of oratory, he was given, first, the position of assistant district attorney for four years, and following that elected auditor, and subsequently district attorney for two terms of four years each. Having acquired

so high a position locally, he was able to marry the daughter of a local druggist of some means, and two children had been born to them.

In regard to this particular case he had already heard from Miss Saunders all she knew of the drowning, and, like the coroner, had been immediately impressed with the fact that the probable publicity attendant on such a case as this appeared to be might be just what he needed to revive a wavering political prestige and might perhaps solve the problem of his future. At any rate he was most intensely interested. So that now, upon sight of Heit, he showed plainly the keen interest he felt in the case.

“Well, Colonel Heit?”

“Well, Orville, I’m just back from Big Bittern. It looks to me as though I’ve got a case for you now that’s going to take quite a little of your time.”

Heit’s large eyes bulged and conveyed hints of much more than was implied by his non-committal opening remark.

“You mean that drowning up there?” returned the district attorney.

“Yes, sir. Just that,” replied the coroner.

“You’ve some reason for thinking there’s something wrong up there?”

“Well, the truth is, Orville, I think there’s hardly a doubt that this is a case of murder.” Heit’s heavy eyes glowed somberly. “Of course, it’s best to be on the safe side, and I’m only telling you this in confidence, because even yet I’m not absolutely positive that that young man’s body may not be in the lake. But it looks mighty suspicious to me, Orville. There’s been at least fifteen men up there in row-boats all day yesterday and to-day, dragging the south part of that lake. I had a number of the boys take soundings here and there, and the water ain’t more than twenty-five feet deep at any point. But so far they haven’t found any trace of him. They brought her up about one o’clock yesterday, after they’d been only dragging a few hours, and a mighty pretty girl she is too, Orville – quite young – not more than eighteen or twenty, I should say. But there are some very suspicious circumstances about it all that make me think that he ain’t in there. In fact, I never saw a case that I thought looked more like a devilish crime than this.”

As he said this, he began to search in the right-hand pocket of his well-worn and baggy linen suit and finally extracted Roberta’s letter, which he handed his friend, drawing up a chair and seating himself while the district attorney proceeded to read.

“Well, this does look rather suspicious, don’t it?” he announced, as he finished. “You say they haven’t found him yet. Well, have you communicated with this woman to see what she knows about it?”

“No, Orville, I haven’t,” replied Heit, slowly and meditatively. “And I’ll tell you why. The fact is, I decided up there last night that this was something I had better talk over with you before I did anything at all. You know what the political situation here is just now. And how the proper handling of a case like this is likely to affect public opinion this fall. And while I certainly don’t think we ought to mix politics in with crime there certainly is no reason why we shouldn’t handle this in such a way as to make it count in our favor. And so I thought I had better come and see you first. Of course, if you want me to, Orville, I’ll go over there. Only I was thinking that perhaps it would be better for you to go, and find out just who this fellow is and all about him. You know what a case like this might mean from a political point of view, if only we clean it up, and I know you’re the one to do it, Orville.”

“Thanks, Fred, thanks,” replied Mason, solemnly, tapping his desk with the letter and squinting at his friend. “I’m grateful to you for your opinion and you’ve outlined the very best way to go about it, I think. You’re sure no one outside yourself has seen this letter?”

“Only the envelope. And no one but Mr. Hubbard, the proprietor of the inn up there, has seen that, and he told me that he found it in her pocket and took charge of it for fear it might disappear or be opened before I got there. He said he had a feeling there might be something wrong the moment he heard of the drowning. The young man had acted so nervous – strange-like, he said.”

“Very good, Fred. Then don’t say anything more about it to any one for the present, will you? I’ll go right over there, of course. But what else did you find, anything?” Mr. Mason was quite alive now, interrogative, dynamic, and a bit dictatorial in his manner, even to his old friend.

“Plenty, plenty,” replied the coroner, most sagely and solemnly. “There were some suspicious cuts or marks under the girl’s right eye and above the left temple, Orville, and across the lip and nose, as though the poor little thing mighta been hit by something – a stone or a stick or one of those oars that they found floating up there. She’s just a child yet, Orville, in looks and size, anyhow – a very pretty girl – but not as good as she might have been, as I’ll show you presently.” At this point the coroner paused to extract a large handkerchief and blow into it a very loud blast, brushing his beard afterward in a most orderly way. “I didn’t have time to get a doctor up there and besides I’m going to hold the inquest down here, Monday, if I can. I’ve ordered the Lutz boys to go up there to-day and bring her body down. But the most suspicious of all the evidence that has come to light so far, Orville, is the testimony of two men and a boy who live up at Three Mile Bay and who were walking up to Big Bittern on Thursday night to hunt and fish. I had Earl take down their names and subpoena ’em for the inquest next Monday.”

And the coroner proceeded to detail their testimony about their accidental meeting of Clyde.

“Well, well!” interjected the district attorney, thoroughly interested.

“Then, another thing, Orville,” continued the coroner, “I had Earl telephone the Three Mile Bay people, the owner of the hotel there as well as the postmaster and the town marshal, but the only person who appears to have seen the young man is the captain of that little steamboat that runs from Three Mile Bay to Sharon. You know the man, I guess, Captain Mooney. I left word with Earl to subpoena him too. According to him, about eight-thirty, Friday morning, or just before his boat started for Sharon on its first trip, this same young man, or some one very much like the description furnished, carrying a suitcase and wearing a cap – he had on a straw hat when those three men met him – came on board and paid his way to Sharon and got off there. Good-looking young chap, the captain says. Very spry and well-dressed, more like a young society man than anything else, and very stand-offish.”

“Yes, yes,” commented Mason.

“I also had Earl telephone the people at Sharon – whoever he could reach – to see if he had been seen there getting off, but up to the time I left last night no one seemed to remember him. But I left word for Earl to telegraph a description of him to all the resort hotels and stations hereabouts so that if he’s anywhere around, they’ll be on the lookout for him. I thought you’d want me to do that. But I think you’d better give me a writ for that bag at Gun Lodge station. That may contain something we ought to know. I’ll go up and get it myself. Then I want to go to Grass Lake and Three Mile Bay and Sharon yet to-day, if I can, and see what else I can find. But I’m afraid, Orville, it’s a plain case of murder. The way he took that young girl to that hotel up there at Grass Lake and then registered under another name at Big Bittern, and the way he had her leave her bag and took his own with him!” He shook his head most solemnly. “Those are not the actions of an honest young man, Orville, and you know it. What I can’t understand is how her parents could let her go off like that anywhere with a man without knowing about him in the first place.”

“That’s true,” replied Mason, tactfully, but made intensely curious by the fact that it had at least been partially established that the girl in the case was not as good as she should have been. Adultery! And with some youth of means, no doubt, from some one of the big cities to the south. The prominence and publicity with which his own activities in connection with this were very likely to be laden! At once he got up, energetically stirred. If he could only catch such a reptilian criminal, and that in the face of all the sentiment that such a brutal murder was likely to inspire! The August convention and nominations. The fall election.

“Well, I’ll be switched,” he exclaimed, the presence of Heit, a religious and conservative man, suppressing anything more emphatic. “I do believe we’re on the trail of something important, Fred.

I really think so. It looks very black to me – a most damnable outrage. I suppose the first thing to do, really, is to telephone over there and see if there is such a family as Alden and exactly where they live. It's not more than fifty miles direct by car, if that much. Poor roads, though," he added. Then: "That poor woman. I dread that scene. It will be a painful one, I know."

Then he called Zillah and asked her to ascertain if there was such a person as Titus Alden living near Biltz. Also, exactly how to get there. Next he added: "The first thing to do will be to get Burton back here" (Burton being Burton Burleigh, his legal assistant, who had gone away for a week-end vacation) "and put him in charge so as to furnish you whatever you need in the way of writs and so on, Fred, while I go right over to see this poor woman. And then, if you'll have Earl go back up there and get that suitcase, I'll be most obliged to you. I'll bring the father back with me, too, to identify the body. But don't say anything at all about this letter now or my going over there until I see you later, see." He grasped the hand of his friend. "In the meantime," he went on, a little grandiosely, now feeling the tang of great affairs upon him, "I want to thank you, Fred. I certainly do, and I won't forget it, either. You know that, don't you?" He looked his old friend squarely in the eye. "This may turn out better than we think. It looks to be the biggest and most important case in all my term of office, and if we can only clean it up satisfactorily and quickly, before things break here this fall, it may do us all some good, eh?"

"Quite so, Orville, quite so," commented Fred Heit. "Not, as I said before, that I think we ought to mix politics in with a thing like this, but since it has come about so – " he paused, meditatively.

"And in the meantime," continued the district attorney "if you'll have Earl have some pictures made of the exact position where the boat, oars, and hat were found, as well as mark the spot where the body was found, and subpoena as many witnesses as you can, I'll have vouchers for it all put through with the auditor. And to-morrow or Monday I'll pitch in and help myself."

And here he gripped Heit's right hand – then patted him on the shoulder. And Heit, much gratified by his various moves so far – and in consequence hopeful for the future – now took up his weird straw hat and buttoning his thin, loose coat, returned to his office to get his faithful Earl on the long distance telephone to instruct him and to say that he was returning to the scene of the crime himself.

Chapter 4

Orville Mason could readily sympathize with a family which on sight struck him as having, perhaps, like himself endured the whips, the scorns and contumelies of life. As he drove up in his official car from Bridgeburg at about four o'clock that Saturday afternoon, there was the old tatterdemalion farmhouse and Titus Alden himself in his shirt-sleeves and overalls coming up from a pig-pen at the foot of the hill, his face and body suggesting a man who is constantly conscious of the fact that he has made out so poorly. And now Mason regretted that he had not telephoned before leaving Bridgeburg, for he could see that the news of his daughter's death would shock such a man as this most terribly. At the same time, Titus, noting his approach and assuming that it might be some one who was seeking a direction, civilly approached him.

"Is this Mr. Titus Alden?"

"Yes, sir, that's my name."

"Mr. Alden, my name is Mason. I am from Bridgeburg, district attorney of Catawaqui County."

"Yes, sir," replied Titus, wondering by what strange chance the district attorney of so distant a county should be approaching and inquiring of him. And Mason now looked at Titus, not knowing just how to begin. The bitterness of the news he had to impart – the crumpling power of it upon such an obviously feeble and inadequate soul. They had paused under one of the large, dark fir trees that stood in front of the house. The wind in its needles was whispering its world-old murmur.

"Mr. Alden," began Mason, with more solemnity and delicacy than ordinarily characterized him, "you are the father of a girl by the name of Bert, or possibly Alberta, are you not? I'm not sure that I have the name right."

"Roberta," corrected Titus Alden, a titillating sense of something untoward affecting his nerves as he said it.

And Mason, before making it impossible, probably, for this man to connectedly inform him concerning all that he wished to know, now proceeded to inquire: "By the way, do you happen to know a young man around here by the name of Clifford Golden?"

"I don't recall that I ever heard of any such person," replied Titus, slowly.

"Or Carl Graham?"

"No, sir. No one by that name either that I recall now."

"I thought so," exclaimed Mason, more to himself than to Titus. "By the way," this shrewdly and commandingly, "where is your daughter now?"

"Why, she's in Lycurgus at present. She works there. But why do you ask? Has she done anything she shouldn't – been to see you about anything?" He achieved a wry smile while his gray-blue eyes were by now perturbed by puzzled inquiry.

"One moment, Mr. Alden," proceeded Mason, tenderly and yet most firmly and effectively. "I will explain everything to you in a moment. Just now I want to ask a few necessary questions." And he gazed at Titus earnestly and sympathetically. "How long has it been since you last saw your daughter?"

"Why, she left here last Tuesday morning to go back to Lycurgus. She works down there for the Griffiths Collar & Shirt Company. But – ?"

"Now, one moment," insisted the district attorney determinedly, "I'll explain all in a moment. She was up here over the week-end, possibly. Is that it?"

"She was up here on a vacation for about a month," explained Titus, slowly and meticulously. "She wasn't feeling so very good and she came home to rest up a bit. But she was all right when she left. You don't mean to tell me, Mr. Mason, that anything has gone wrong with her, do you?" He lifted one long, brown hand to his chin and cheek in a gesture, of nervous inquiry. "If I thought there was anything like that – ?" He ran his hand through his thinning gray hair.

“Have you had any word from her since she left here?” Mason went on quietly, determined to extract as much practical information as possible before the great blow fell. “Any information that she was going anywhere but back there?”

“No, sir, we haven’t. She’s not hurt in any way, is she? She’s not done anything that’s got her into trouble? But, no, that couldn’t be. But your questions! The way you talk.” He was now trembling slightly, the hand that sought his thin, pale lips, visibly and aimlessly playing about his mouth. But instead of answering, the district attorney drew from his pocket the letter of Roberta to her mother, and displaying only the handwriting on the envelope, asked: “Is that the handwriting of your daughter?”

“Yes, sir, that’s her handwriting,” replied Titus, his voice rising slightly. “But what is this, Mr. District Attorney? How do you come to have that? What’s in there?” He clinched his hands in a nervous way, for in Mason’s eyes he now clearly foresaw tragedy in some form. “What is this – this – what has she written in that letter? You must tell me – if anything has happened to my girl!” He began to look excitedly about as though it were his intention to return to the house for aid – to communicate to his wife the dread that was coming upon him – while Mason, seeing the agony into which he had plunged him, at once seized him firmly and yet kindly by the arms and began:

“Mr. Alden, this is one of those dark times in the lives of some of us when all the courage we have is most needed. I hesitate to tell you because I am a man who has seen something of life and I know how you will suffer.”

“She is hurt. She is dead, maybe,” exclaimed Titus, almost shrilly, the pupils of his eyes dilating. Orville Mason nodded.

“Roberta! My first born! My God! Our Heavenly Father!” His body crumpled as though from a blow and he leaned to steady himself against an adjacent tree. “But how? Where? In the factory by a machine? Oh, dear God!” He turned as though to go to his wife, while the strong, scar-nosed district attorney sought to detain him.

“One moment, Mr. Alden, one moment. You must not go to your wife yet. I know this is very hard, terrible, but let me explain. Not in Lycurgus. Not by any machine. No! No – drowned! In Big Bittern. She was up there on an outing on Thursday, do you understand? Do you hear? Thursday. She was drowned in Big Bittern on Thursday in a boat. It overturned.”

The excited gestures and words of Titus at this point so disturbed the district attorney that he found himself unable to explain as calmly as he would have liked the process by which even an assumed accidental drowning had come about. From the moment the word death in connection with Roberta had been used by Mason, the mental state of Alden was that of one not a little demented. After his first demands he now began to vent a series of animal-like groans as though the breath had been knocked from his body. At the same time, he bent over, crumpled up as from pain – then struck his hands together and threw them to his temples.

“My Roberta dead! My daughter! Oh, no, no, Roberta! Oh, my God! Not drowned! It can’t be. And her mother speaking of her only an hour ago. This will be the death of her when she hears it. It will kill me, too. Yes, it will. Oh, my poor, dear, dear girl. My darling! I’m not strong enough to stand anything like this, Mr. District Attorney.”

He leaned heavily and wearily upon Mason’s arms while the latter sustained him as best he could. Then, after a moment, he turned questioningly and erratically toward the front door of the house at which he gazed as one might who was wholly demented. “Who’s to tell her?” he demanded. “How is any one to tell her?”

“But, Mr. Alden,” consoled Mason, “for your own sake, for your wife’s sake, I must ask you now to calm yourself and help me consider this matter as seriously as you would if it were not your daughter. There is much more to this than I have been able to tell you. But you must be calm. You must allow me to explain. This is all very terrible and I sympathize with you wholly. I know what it means. But there are some dreadful and painful facts that you will have to know about. Listen. Listen.”

And then, still holding Titus by the arm he proceeded to explain as swiftly and forcefully as possible, the various additional facts and suspicions in connection with the death of Roberta, finally giving him her letter to read, and winding up with: "A crime! A crime, Mr. Alden! That's what we think over in Bridgeburg, or at least that's what we're afraid of – plain murder, Mr. Alden, to use a hard, cold word in connection with it." He paused while Alden, struck by this – the element of crime – gazed as one not quite able to comprehend. And, as he gazed, Mason went on: "And as much as I respect your feelings, still as the chief representative of the law in my county, I felt it to be my personal duty to come here to-day in order to find out whether there is anything that you or your wife or any of your family know about this Clifford Golden, or Carl Graham, or whoever he is who lured your daughter to that lonely lake up there. And while I know that the blackest of suffering is yours right now, Mr. Alden, I maintain that it should be your wish, as well as your duty, to do whatever you can to help us clear up this matter. This letter here seems to indicate that your wife at least knows something concerning this individual – his name, anyhow." And he tapped the letter significantly and urgently.

The moment the suggested element of violence and wrong against his daughter had been injected into this bitter loss, there was sufficient animal instinct, as well as curiosity, resentment and love of the chase inherent in Titus to cause him to recover his balance sufficiently to give silent and solemn ear to what the district attorney was saying. His daughter not only drowned, but murdered, and that by some youth who according to this letter she was intending to marry! And he, her father, not even aware of his existence! Strange that his wife should know and he not. And that Roberta should not want him to know.

And at once, born for the most part of religion, convention and a general rural suspicion of all urban life and the mystery and involuteness of its ungodly ways, there sprang into his mind the thought of a city seducer and betrayer – some youth of means, probably, whom Roberta had met since going to Lycurgus and who had been able to seduce her by a promise of marriage which he was not willing to fulfil. And forthwith there flared up in his mind a terrible and quite uncontrollable desire for revenge upon any one who could plot so horrible a crime as this against his daughter. The scoundrel! The raper! The murderer!

Here he and his wife had been thinking that Roberta was quietly and earnestly and happily pursuing her hard, honest way in Lycurgus in order to help them and herself. And from Thursday afternoon until Friday her body had lain beneath the waters of that lake. And they asleep in their comfortable beds, or walking about, totally unaware of her dread state. And now her body in a strange room or morgue somewhere, unseen and unattended by any of all those who loved her so – and tomorrow to be removed by cold, indifferent public officials to Bridgeburg.

"If there is a God," he exclaimed excitedly, "He will not let such a scoundrel as this go unpunished! Oh, no, He will not! 'I have yet to see,'" he suddenly quoted, "'the children of the righteous forsaken or their seed begging for bread.'" At the same time, a quivering compulsion for action dominating him, he added: "I must talk to my wife about this right away. Oh, yes, I must. No, no, you wait here. I must tell her first, and alone. I'll be back. I'll be back. You just wait here. I know it will kill her. But she must know about this. Maybe she can tell us who this is and then we can catch him before he manages to get too far away. But, oh, my poor girl! My poor, dear Roberta! My good, kind, faithful daughter!"

And so, talking in a maudering manner, his eyes and face betraying an only half-sane misery, he turned, the shambling, automaton-like motions of his angular figure now directing him to lean-to, where, as he knew, Mrs. Alden was preparing some extra dishes for the next day, which was Sunday. But once there he paused in the doorway without the courage to approach further, a man expressing in himself all the pathos of helpless humanity in the face of the relentless and inexplicable and indifferent forces of Life!

Mrs. Alden turned, and at the sight of his strained expression, dropped her own hands lifelessly, the message of his eyes as instantly putting to flight the simple, weary and yet peaceful contemplation in her own.

“Titus! For goodness’ sake! Whatever IS the matter?”

Lifted hands, half-open mouth, an eerie, eccentric and uncalculated tensing and then widening of the eyelids, and then the word: “Roberta!”

“What about her? What about her? Titus – what about her?”

Silence. More of those nervous twitchings of the mouth eyes, hands. Then... “Dead! She’s been – been drowned!” followed by his complete collapse on a bench that stood just inside the door. And Mrs. Alden, staring for a moment, at first not quite comprehending, then fully realizing, sinking heavily and without a word to the floor. And Titus, looking at her and nodding his head as if to say: “Quite right. So should it be. Momentary escape for her from the contemplation of this horrible fact.” And then slowly rising, going to her and kneeling beside her, straightening her out. Then as slowly going out to the door and around to the front of the house where Orville Mason was seated on the broken front steps, contemplating speculatively along with the afternoon sun in the west the misery that this lorn and incompetent farmer was conveying to his wife. And wishing for the moment that it might be otherwise – that no such case, however profitable to himself, had arisen.

But now, at sight of Titus Alden, he jumped up and preceded the skeleton-like figure into the lean-to. And finding Mrs. Alden, as small as her daughter nearly, and limp and still, he gathered her into his strong arms and carried her through the dining-room into the living-room, where stood an antiquated lounge, on which he laid her. And there, feeling for her pulse, and then hurrying for some water, while he looked for some one – a son, daughter, neighbor, any one. But not seeing any one, hurrying back with the water to dash a little of it on her face and hands.

“Is there a doctor anywhere near here?” He was addressing Titus, who was now kneeling by his wife.

“In Biltz – yes – Dr. Crane.”

“Have you – has any one around here a telephone?”

“Mr. Wilcox.” He pointed in the direction of the Wilcox’s, whose telephone Roberta had so recently used.

“Just watch her. I’ll be back.”

Forthwith he was out of the house and away to call Crane or any other doctor, and then as swiftly returning with Mrs. Wilcox and her daughter. And then waiting, waiting, until first neighbors arrived and then eventually Dr. Crane, with whom he consulted as to the advisability of discussing with Mrs. Alden yet this day the unescapable mystery which had brought him here. And Dr. Crane, very much impressed by Mr. Mason’s solemn, legal manner, admitting that it might even be best.

And at last Mrs. Alden treated with heroin and crooned and mourned over by all present, being brought to the stage where it was possible, slowly and with much encouragement, to hear in the first place what the extenuating circumstances were; next being questioned concerning the identity of the cryptic individual referred to in Roberta’s letter. The only person whom Mrs. Alden could recall as ever having been mentioned by Roberta as paying particular attention to her, and that but once the Christmas before, was Clyde Griffiths, the nephew of the wealthy Samuel Griffiths, of Lycurgus, and the manager of the department in which Roberta worked.

But this in itself, as Mason and the Aldens themselves at once felt, was something which assuredly could not be taken to mean that the nephew of so great a man could be accused of the murder of Roberta. Wealth! Position! Indeed, in the face of such an accusation Mason was inclined to pause and consider. For the social difference between this man and this girl from his point of view seemed great. At that, it might be so. Why not? Was it not likely that a youth of such a secure position would possibly more than another, since she was so attractive as Heit had said, be the one to be paying casual and secret attention to a girl like Roberta? Did she not work in his uncle’s factory? And was

she not poor? Besides, as Fred Heit had already explained, whoever it was that this girl was with at the time of her death, she had not hesitated to cohabit with him before marriage. And was that not part and parcel of a rich and sophisticated youth's attitude toward a poor girl? By reason of his own early buffetings at the mood of chance and established prosperity the idea appealed to him intensely. The wretched rich! The indifferent rich! And here were her mother and father obviously believing most firmly in her innocence and virtue.

Further questioning of Mrs. Alden only brought out the fact that she had never seen this particular youth, and had never even heard of any other. The only additional data that either she or her husband could furnish was that during her last home-coming of a month Roberta had not been feeling at all well – drooped about the house and rested a good deal. Also that she had written a number of letters which she had given to the postman or placed in the delivery box at the road-crossing below. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Alden knew to whom they were addressed, although the postman would be likely to know, as Mason quickly thought. Also, during this period, she had been busy making some dresses, at least four. And during the latter part of her stay, she had been the recipient of a number of telephone calls – from a certain Mr. Baker, as Titus had heard Mr. Wilcox say. Also, on departing, she had taken only such baggage as she had brought with her – her small trunk and her bag. The trunk she had checked herself at the station, but just where, other than Lycurgus, Titus could not say.

But now, suddenly, since he was attaching considerable importance to the name Baker, there popped into Mason's mind:

“Clifford Golden! Carl Graham! Clyde Griffiths!” and at once the identity of the initials as well as the related euphony of the names gave him pause. An astounding coincidence truly, if this same Clyde Griffiths had nothing to do with this crime! Immediately he was anxious to go direct to the mailman and question him.

But since Titus Alden was important not only as a witness in identifying Roberta's body and the contents of the suitcase left by her at Gun Lodge but also to persuade the postman to talk freely, he now asked him to dress and accompany him, assuring him that he would allow him to return tomorrow.

After cautioning Mrs. Alden to talk to no one in regard to this, he now proceeded to the post office to question the mailman. That individual when found, recalled, upon inquiry, and in the presence of Titus who stood like a galvanized corpse by the side of the district attorney, that not only had there been a few letters – no less than twelve or fifteen even – handed him by Roberta, during her recent stay here, but that all of them had been addressed to some one in Lycurgus by the name of – let him see – Clyde Griffiths – no less – care of General Delivery there. Forthwith, the district attorney proceeded with him to a local notary's office where a deposition was made, after which he called his office, and learning that Roberta's body had been brought to Bridgeburg, he drove there with as much speed as he could attain. And once there and in the presence of the body along with Titus, Burton Burleigh, Heit and Earl Newcomb, he was able to decide for himself, even while Titus, half demented, gazed upon the features of his child, first that she truly was Roberta Alden and next as to whether he considered her of the type who would wantonly yield herself to such a liaison as the registration at Grass Lake seemed to indicate. He decided he did not. This was a case of sly, evil seduction as well as murder. Oh, the scoundrel! And still at large. Almost the political value of all this was obscured by an angry social resentfulness against men of means in general.

But this particular contact with the dead, made at ten o'clock at night in the receiving parlors of the Lutz Brothers, Undertakers, and with Titus Alden falling on his knees by the side of his daughter and emotionally carrying her small, cold hands to his lips while he gazed feverishly and protestingly upon her waxy face, framed by her long brown hair, was scarcely such as to promise an unbiased or even legal opinion. The eyes of all those present were wet with tears.

And now Titus Alden injected a new and most dramatic note into the situation. For while the Lutz Brothers, with three of their friends who kept an automobile shop next door, Everett Beeker,

the present representative of the Bridgeburg Republican, and Sam Tacksun, the editor and publisher of the Democrat, awesomely gazed over or between the heads of each other from without a side door which gave into the Lutzs' garage, he suddenly rose and moving wildly toward Mason, exclaimed: "I want you to find the scoundrel who did this, Mr. District Attorney. I want him to be made to suffer as this pure, good girl has been made to suffer. She's been murdered – that's all. No one but a murderer would take a girl out on a lake like that and strike her as any one can see she has been struck." He gestured toward his dead child. "I have no money to help prosecute a scoundrel like that. But I will work. I will sell my farm."

His voice broke and seemingly he was in danger of falling as he turned toward Roberta again. And now, Orville Mason, swept into this father's stricken and yet retaliatory mood, pressed forward to exclaim: "Come away, Mr. Alden. We know this is your daughter. I swear all you gentlemen as witnesses to this identification. And if it shall be proved that this little girl of yours was murdered, as it now seems, I promise you, Mr. Alden, faithfully and dutifully as the district attorney of this county, that no time or money or energy on my part will be spared to track down this scoundrel and hale him before the proper authorities! And if the justice of Cataraqui County is what I think it is, you can leave him to any jury which our local court will summon. And you won't need to sell your farm, either."

Mr. Mason, because of his deep, if easily aroused, emotion, as well as the presence of the thrilled audience, was in his most forceful as well as his very best oratorical mood.

And one of the Lutz Brothers – Ed – the recipient of all of the county coroner's business – was moved to exclaim:

"That's the ticket, Orville. You're the kind of a district attorney we like." And Everett Beeker now called out: "Go to it, Mr. Mason. We're with you to a man when it comes to that." And Fred Heit, as well as his assistant, touched by Mason's dramatic stand, his very picturesque and even heroic appearance at the moment, now crowded closer, Heit to take his friend by the hand, Earl to exclaim: "More power to you, Mr. Mason. We'll do all we can, you bet. And don't forget that bag that she left at Gun Lodge is over at your office. I gave it to Burton two hours ago."

"That's right, too. I was almost forgetting that," exclaimed Mason, most calmly and practically at the moment, the previous burst of oratory and emotion having by now been somehow merged in his own mind with the exceptional burst of approval which up to this hour he had never experienced in any case with which previously he had been identified.

Chapter 5

As he proceeded to his office, accompanied by Alden and the officials in this case, his thought was running on the motive of this heinous crime – the motive. And because of his youthful sexual deprivations, his mind now tended continually to dwell on that. And meditating on the beauty and charm of Roberta, contrasted with her poverty and her strictly moral and religious upbringing, he was convinced that in all likelihood this man or boy, whoever he was, had seduced her and then later, finding himself growing tired of her, had finally chosen this way to get rid of her – this deceitful, alleged marriage trip to the lake. And at once he conceived an enormous personal hate for the man. The wretched rich! The idle rich! The wastrel and evil rich – a scion or representative of whom this young Clyde Griffiths was. If he could but catch him.

At the same time it now suddenly occurred to him that because of the peculiar circumstances attending this case – this girl cohabiting with this man in this way – she might be pregnant. And at once this suspicion was sufficient, not only to make him sexually curious in regard to all the details of the life and courtship that had led to this – but also very anxious to substantiate for himself whether his suspicions were true. Immediately he began to think of a suitable doctor to perform an autopsy – if not here, then in Utica or Albany – also of communicating to Heit his suspicions in the connection, and of having this, as well as the import of the blows upon her face, determined.

But in regard to the bag and its contents, which was the immediate matter before him, he was fortunate in finding one additional bit of evidence of the greatest importance. For, apart from the dresses and hats made by Roberta, her lingerie, a pair of red silk garters purchased at Braunstein's in Lycurgus and still in their original box, there was the toilet set presented by Clyde to her the Christmas before. And with it the small, plain white card, on which Clyde had written: "For Bert from Clyde – Merry Xmas." But no family name. And the writing a hurried scrawl, since it had been written at a time when Clyde was most anxious to be elsewhere than with her.

At once it occurred to Mason – how odd that the presence of this toilet set in this bag, together with the card, should not have been known to the slayer. But if it were, and he had not removed the card, could it be possible that this same Clyde was the slayer? Would a man contemplating murder fail to see a card such as this, with his own handwriting on it? What sort of a plotter and killer would that be? Immediately afterward he thought: Supposing the presence of this card could be concealed until the day of the trial and then suddenly produced, assuming the criminal denied any intimacy with the girl, or having given her any toilet set? And for the present he took the card and put it in his pocket, but not before Earl Newcomb, looking at it carefully, had observed: "I'm not positive, Mr. Mason, but that looks to me like the writing on the register up at Big Bittern." And at once Mason replied: "Well, it won't take long to establish the fact."

He then signaled Heit to follow him into an adjoining chamber, where once alone with him, free from the observation and hearing of the others, he began: "Well, Fred, you see it was just as you thought. She did know who she was going with." (He was referring to his own advice over the telephone from Biltz that Mrs. Alden had provided him with definite information as to the criminal.) "But you couldn't guess in a thousand years unless I told you." He leaned over and looked at Heit shrewdly.

"I don't doubt it, Orville. I haven't the slightest idea."

"Well, you know of Griffiths & Company, of Lycurgus?"

"Not the collar people?"

"Yes, the collar people."

"Not the son." Fred Heit's eyes opened wider than they had in years. His wide, brown hand grasped the end of his beard.

"No, not the son. A nephew!"

“Nephew! Of Samuel Griffiths? Not truly!” The old, moral-religious, politic-commercial coroner stroked his beard again and stared.

“The fact seems to point that way, Fred, now at least. I’m going down there yet to-night, though, and I hope to know a lot more to-morrow. But this Alden girl – they’re the poorest kind of farm people, you know – worked for Griffiths & Company in Lycurgus and this nephew, Clyde Griffiths, as I understand it, is in charge of the department in which she worked.”

“Tst! Tst! Tst!” interjected the coroner.

“She was home for a month – SICK” (he emphasized the word) “just before she went on this trip last Tuesday. And during that time she wrote him at least ten letters, and maybe more. I got that from the rural delivery man. I have his affidavit here.” He tapped his coat. “All addressed to Clyde Griffiths in Lycurgus. I even have his house number. And the name of the family with whom she lived. I telephoned down there from Biltz. I’m going to take the old man with me tonight in case anything comes up that he might know about.”

“Yes, yes, Orville. I understand. I see. But a Griffiths!” And once more he clucked with his tongue.

“But what I want to talk to you about is the inquest,” now went on Mason quickly and sharply. “You know I’ve been thinking that it couldn’t have been just because he didn’t want to marry her that he wanted to kill her. That doesn’t seem reasonable to me,” and he added the majority of the thoughts that had caused him to conclude that Roberta was pregnant. And at once Heit agreed with him.

“Well, then that means an autopsy,” Mason resumed. “As well as medical opinion as to the nature of those wounds. We’ll have to know beyond a shadow of a doubt, Fred, and before that body is taken away from here, whether that girl was killed before she was thrown out of that boat, or just stunned and then thrown out, or the boat upset. That’s very vital to the case, as you know. We’ll never be able to do anything unless we’re positive about those things. But what about the medical men around here? Do you think any of them will be able to do all these things in a shipshape way so that what they say will hold water in court.”

Mason was dubious. Already he was building his case.

“Well, as to that, Orville,” Heit replied slowly, “I can’t say exactly. You’d be a better judge, maybe, than I would. I’ve already asked Dr. Mitchell to step over to-morrow and take a look at her. Also Betts. But if there’s any other doctor you’d rather have – Bavo or Lincoln of Coldwater – how about Bavo?”

“I’d rather have Webster, of Utica,” went on Mason, “or Beemis, or both. Four or five opinions in a case like this won’t be any too many.”

And Heit, sensing the importance of the great responsibility now resting on him, added: “Well, I guess you’re right, Orville. Maybe four or five would be better than one or two. That means, though, that the inquest will have to be postponed for a day or two more, till we get these men here.”

“Quite right! Quite right,” went on Mason, “but that will be a good thing, too, as long as I’m going down to Lycurgus to-night to see what I can find out. You never can tell. I may catch up with him. I hope so, anyhow, or if not that, then I may come upon something that’ll throw some extra light on this. For this is going to be a big thing, Fred. I can see that – the most difficult case that ever came my way, or yours, either – and we can’t be too careful as to how we move from now on. He’s likely to be rich, you see, and if he is he’ll fight. Besides there’s that family down there to back him up.”

He ran a nervous hand through his shock of hair, then added: “Well, that’s all right too. The next thing to do is to get Beemis and Webster of Utica – better wire them to-night, eh, or call them up. And Sprull of Albany, and then, to keep peace in the family around here, perhaps we’d better have Lincoln and Betts over here. And maybe Bavo.” He permitted himself the faintest shadow of a smile. “In the meantime, I’ll be going along, Fred. Arrange to have them come up Monday or Tuesday, instead of to-morrow. I expect to be back by then and if so I can be with you. If you can, better get ’em up here, Monday – see – the quicker the better – and we’ll see what we know by then.”

He went to a drawer to secure some extra writs. And then into the outer room to explain to Alden the trip that was before him. And to have Burleigh call up his wife, to whom he explained the nature of his work and haste and that he might not be back before Monday.

And all the way down to Utica, which took three hours, as well as a wait of one hour before a train for Lycurgus could be secured, and an additional hour and twenty minutes on that train, which set them down at about seven, Orville Mason was busy extracting from the broken and gloomy Titus, as best he could, excerpts from his own as well as Roberta's humble past – her generosity, loyalty, virtue, sweetness of heart, and the places and conditions under which previously she had worked, and what she had received, and what she had done with the money – a humble story which he was quite able to appreciate.

Arriving at Lycurgus with Titus by his side, he made his way as quickly as possible to the Lycurgus House, where he took a room for the father in order that he might rest. And after that to the office of the local district attorney, from whom he must obtain authority to proceed, as well as an officer who would execute his will for him here. And then being supplied with a stalwart detective in plain clothes, he proceeded to Clyde's room in Taylor Street, hoping against hope that he might find him there. But Mrs. Peyton appearing and announcing that Clyde lived there but that at present he was absent (having gone the Tuesday before to visit friends at Twelfth Lake, she believed), he was rather painfully compelled to announce, first, that he was the district attorney of Cataraqui County, and, next, that because of certain suspicious circumstances in connection with the drowning of a girl in Big Bittern, with whom they had reason to believe that Clyde was at the time, they would now be compelled to have access to his room, a statement which so astonished Mrs. Peyton that she fell back, an expression of mixed amazement, horror, and unbelief overspreading her features.

“Not Mr. Clyde Griffiths! Oh, how ridiculous! Why, he's the nephew of Mr. Samuel Griffiths and very well known here. I'm sure they can tell you all about him at their residence, if you must know. But anything like – oh, impossible!” And she looked at both Mason and the local detective who was already displaying his official badge, as though she doubted both their honesty and authority.

At the same time, the detective, being all too familiar with such circumstances, had already placed himself beyond Mrs. Peyton at the foot of the stairs leading to the floor above. And Mason now drew from his pocket a writ of search, which he had been careful to secure.

“I am sorry, Madam, but I am compelled to ask you to show us his room. This is a search warrant and this officer is here at my direction.” And at once struck by the futility of contending with the law, she now nervously indicated Clyde's room, feeling still that some insane and most unfair and insulting mistake was being made.

But the two having proceeded to Clyde's room, they began to look here and there. At once both noted one small and not very strong trunk, locked and standing in one corner, which Mr. Faunce, the detective, immediately began to lift to decide upon its weight and strength, while Mason began to examine each particular thing in the room – the contents of all drawers and boxes, as well as the pockets of all clothes. And in the chiffonier drawers, along with some discarded underwear and shirts and a few old invitations from the Trumbulls, Starks, Griffiths, and Harriets, he now found a memorandum sheet which Clyde had carried home from his desk and on which he had written: “Wednesday, Feb. 20th, dinner at Starks” – and below that, “Friday, 22nd, Trumbulls” – and this handwriting Mason at once compared with that on the card in his pocket, and being convinced by the similarity that he was in the room of the right man, he took the invitations and then looked toward the trunk which the detective was now contemplating.

“What about this, chief? Will you take it away or open it here?”

“I think,” said Mason solemnly, “we'd better open that right here, Faunce. I'll send for it afterwards, but I want to see what's in it now.” And at once the detective extracted from his pocket a heavy chisel, while he began looking around for a hammer.

“It isn't very strong,” he said, “I think I can kick it open if you say so.”

At this point, Mrs. Peyton, most astounded by these developments, and anxious to avoid any such rough procedure, exclaimed: "You can have a hammer if you wish, but why not wait and send for a key man? Why, I never heard of such a thing in all my life."

However, the detective having secured the hammer and jarred the lock loose, there lay revealed in a small top crate various unimportant odds and ends of Clyde's wardrobe – socks, collars, ties, a muffler, suspenders, a discarded sweater, a pair of not too good high-top winter shoes, a cigarette holder, a red lacquer ash tray, and a pair of skates. But in addition among these, in the corner in one compact bundle, the final fifteen letters of Roberta, written him from Biltz, together with a small picture of herself given him the year before, as well as another small bundle consisting of all the notes and invitations written him by Sondra up to the time she had departed for Pine Point, The letters written from there Clyde had taken with him – laid next his heart. And, even more incriminating, a third bundle, consisting of eleven letters from his mother, the first two addressed to Harry Tenet, care of general delivery, Chicago – a most suspicious circumstance on the surface – whereas the others of the bundle were addressed to Clyde Griffiths, not only care of the Union League, Chicago, but to Lycurgus.

Without waiting further to see what else the trunk might contain, the district attorney began opening these and reading – first three from Roberta, after which the reason she had gone to Biltz was made perfectly plain – then the three first letters from his mother, on most pathetically commonplace stationery, as he could see, hinting at the folly of the life as well as the nature of the accident that had driven him from Kansas City, and at the same time advising him most solicitously and tenderly as to the proper path for his feet in the future, the general effect of which was to convey to a man of Mason's repressed temperament and limited social experience the impression that from the very beginning this individual had been of a loose, wayward and errant character.

At the same time, and to his surprise, he now learned that except for what his rich uncle might have done for him here, Clyde was obviously of a poor, as well as highly religious, branch of the Griffiths family, and while ordinarily this might have influenced him in Clyde's favor a little, still now, in view of the notes of Sondra, as well as the pathetic letters of Roberta and his mother's reference to some earlier crime in Kansas City, he was convinced that not only was Clyde of such a disposition as could plot such a crime but also one who could execute it in cold blood. That crime in Kansas City. He must wire the district attorney there for particulars.

And with this thought in mind, he now scanned more briefly but none the less sharply and critically the various notes or invitations or love messages from Sondra, all on heavily perfumed and monogrammed stationery, which grew more and more friendly and intimate as the correspondence progressed, until toward the last they invariably began:

"Clydie–Mydie," or "Sweetest Black Eyes," or "My sweetest boy," and were signed "Sonda," or "Your own Sondra." And some of them dated so recently as May 10th, May 15th, May 26th, or up to the very time at which, as he instantly noted, Roberta's most doleful letters began to arrive.

It was all so plain, now. One secretly betrayed girl in the background while he had the effrontery to ingratiate himself into the affections of another, this time obviously one of much higher social position here.

Although fascinated and staggered by this interesting development, he at the same time realized that this was no hour in which to sit meditating. Far from it. This trunk must be transferred at once to his hotel. Later he must go forth to find out, if he could, exactly where this individual was, and arrange for his capture. And while he ordered the detective to call up the police department and arrange for the transfer of the trunk to his room at the Lycurgus House, he hurried next to the residence of Samuel Griffiths, only to learn that no member of the family was then in the city. They were all at Greenwood Lake. But a telephone message to that place brought the information that in so far as they knew, this same Clyde Griffiths, their nephew, was at the Cranston lodge on Twelfth Lake, near Sharon, adjoining the Finchley lodge. The name Finchley, together with the town of Sharon, being

already identified in Mason's mind with Clyde, he at once decided that if he were still anywhere in this region, he would be there – at the summer home perhaps of this girl who had written him the various notes and invitations he had seen – this Sondra Finchley. Also had not the captain of the “Cygnus” declared that he had seen the youth who had come down from Three Mile Bay debark there? Eureka! He had him!

And at once, after meditating sharply on the wisdom of his course, he decided to proceed to Sharon and Pine Point himself. But in the meantime being furnished with an accurate description of Clyde, he now furnished this as well as the fact that he was wanted for murder, not only to the district attorney and the chief of police of Lycurgus, but to Newton Slack, the sheriff at Bridgeburg, as well as to Heit and his own assistant, urging all three to proceed at once to Sharon, where he would meet them.

At the same time, speaking as though for Mrs. Peyton, he now called upon the long distance telephone the Cranston lodge at Pine Point, and getting the butler on the wire, inquired whether Mr. Clyde Griffiths chanced to be there. “Yes sir, he is, sir, but he's not here now, sir. I think he's on a camping party farther up the lake, sir. Any message, sir?” And in response to further inquiries, he replied that he could not say exactly – a party had gone, presumably, to Bear Lake some thirty miles farther up, but when it would return he could not say – not likely before a day or two. But distinctly this same Clyde was with that party.

And at once Mason recalled the sheriff at Bridgeburg, instructing him to take four or five deputies with him so that the searching party might divide at Sharon and seize this same Clyde wherever he chanced to be. And throw him in jail at Bridgeburg, where he could explain, with all due process of law, the startling circumstances that thus far seemed to unescapably point to him as the murderer of Roberta Alden.

Chapter 6

In the interim the mental state of Clyde since that hour when, the water closing over Roberta, he had made his way to the shore, and then, after changing his clothes, had subsequently arrived at Sharon and the lakeside lodge of the Cranstons, was almost one of complete mental derangement, mainly caused by fear and confusion in his own mind as to whether he did or did not bring about her untimely end. At the same time at the lakeside the realization that if by any chance he were then and there found, skulking south rather than returning north to the inn at Big Bittern to report this seeming accident, there would be sufficient hardness and cruelty to the look of it all to convince any one that a charge of murder should be made against him, had fiercely tortured him. For, as he now saw it, he really was not guilty – was he, since at the last moment he had experienced that change of heart?

But who was going to believe that now, since he did not go back to explain? And it would never do to go back now! For if Sondra should hear that he had been on this lake with this factory girl – that he had registered with her as husband and wife... God!

And then trying to explain to his uncle afterwards, or his cold, hard cousin – or all those smart, cynical Lycurgus people! No! No! Having gone so far he must go on. Disaster – if not death – lay in the opposite direction. He would have to make the best of this terrible situation – make the best of this plan that had ended so strangely and somewhat exculpatorily for him.

And yet these woods! This approaching night. The eerie loneliness and danger of it all now. How now to do, what to say, if met by any one. He was so confused – mentally and nervously sick. The crackle of a twig and he leaped forward as a hare.

And in this state it was that, after having recovered his bag and changed his clothes, wringing out his wet suit and attempting to dry it, then packing it in his bag under some dry twigs and pine-needles and burying the tripod beneath a rotting log, that he plunged into the woods after night had fallen. Yet meditating more and more on his very strange and perilous position. For supposing, just as he had unintentionally struck at her, and they had fallen into the water and she uttered those piercing and appealing cries, there had been some one on the shore – some one watching – one of those strong, hardy men whom he had seen loitering about during the day and who might even at this moment be sounding a local alarm that would bring a score of such men to the work of hunting for him this very night! A man hunt! And they would take him back and no one would ever believe that he had not intentionally struck her! They might even lynch him before he could so much as secure a fair trial. It was possible. It had been done. A rope around his neck. Or shot down in these woods, maybe. And without an opportunity to explain how it had all come about – how harried and tortured he had been by her for so long. They would never understand that.

And so thinking he hurried faster and faster – as fast as strong and serried and brambly young firs and dead branches that cracked most ominously at times would permit, thinking always as he went that the road to Three Mile Bay must be to his right hand, the moon to his left when it should rise.

But, God, what was that?

Oh, that terrible sound!

Like a whimpering, screeching spirit in this dark!

There!

What was it?

He dropped his bag and in a cold sweat sunk down, crouching behind a tall, thick tree, rigid and motionless with fear.

That sound!

But only a screech-owl! He had heard it several weeks before at the Cranston lodge. But here! In this wood! This dark! He must be getting on and out of here. There was no doubt of that. He

must not be thinking such horrible, fearful thoughts, or he would not be able to keep up his strength or courage at all.

But that look in the eyes of Roberta! That last appealing look! God! He could not keep from seeing it! Her mournful, terrible screams! Could he not cease from hearing them – until he got out of here anyhow?

Had she understood, when he struck her, that it was not intentional – a mere gesture of anger and protest? Did she know that NOW, wherever she was – in the bottom of the lake – or here in the dark of these woods beside him, mayhap? Ghosts! Hers. But he must get out of this – out of this! He must – and yet the safety of these woods, too. He must not be too brash in stepping out into any road, either. Pedestrians! People in search of him, maybe! But did people really live after death? Were there ghosts? And did they know the truth? Then she must know – but how he plotted before that, too. And what would she think of that! And was she here now reproachfully and gloomily pursuing him with mistaken accusations, as true as it might be that he had intended to kill her at first? He had! He had! And that was the great sin, of course. Even though he had not killed her, yet something had done it for him! That was true.

But ghosts – God – spirits that might pursue you after they were dead, seeking to expose and punish you – seeking to set people on your track, maybe! Who could tell? His mother had confessed to him and Frank and Esta and Julia that she believed in ghosts.

And then at last the moon, after three such hours of stumbling, listening, waiting, perspiring, trembling. No one in sight now, thank God! And the stars overhead – bright and yet soft, as at Pine Point where Sondra was. If she could see him now, slipping away from Roberta dead in that lake, his own hat upon the waters there! If she could have heard Roberta's cries! How strange, that never, never, never would he be able to tell her that because of her, her beauty, his passion for her and all that she had come to mean to him, he had been able to... to... to... well, ATTEMPT this terrible thing – kill a girl whom once he had loved. And all his life he would have this with him, now – this thought! He would never be able to shake it off – never, never, never. And he had not thought of that, before. It was a terrible thing in its way, just that, wasn't it?

But then suddenly there in the dark, at about eleven o'clock, as he afterwards guessed, the water having stopped his watch, and after he had reached the highroad to the west – and walked a mile or two – those three men, quick, like ghosts coming out of the shadow of the woods. He thought at first that having seen him at the moment he had struck Roberta or the moment afterward, they had now come to take him. The sweating horror of that moment! And that boy who had held up the light the better to see his face. And no doubt he had evinced most suspicious fear and perturbation, since at the moment he was most deeply brooding on all that had happened, terrorized really by the thought that somehow, in some way, he had left some clue that might lead directly to him. And he did jump back, feeling that these were men sent to seize him. But at that moment, the foremost, a tall, bony man, without appearing to be more than amused at his obvious cowardice, had called, "Howdy, stranger!" while the youngest, without appearing to be suspicious at all, had stepped forward and then turned up the light. And it was then that he had begun to understand that they were just countrymen or guides – not a posse in pursuit of him – and that if he were calm and civil they would have no least suspicion that he was the murderer that he was.

But afterward he had said to himself – "But they will remember me, walking along this lonely road at this hour with this bag, won't they?" And so at once he had decided that he must hurry – hurry – and not be seen by any others anywhere there.

Then, hours later and just as the moon was lowering toward the west, a sickly yellow pallor overspreading the woods and making the night even more wretched and wearisome, he had come to Three Mile Bay itself – a small collection of native and summer cottages nestling at the northernmost end of what was known as the Indian Chain. And in it, as he could see from a bend in the road, a few pale lights still twinkling. Stores. Houses. Street lamps. But all dim in the pale light – so dim and

erie to him. One thing was plain – at this hour and dressed as he was and with his bag in hand, he could not enter there. That would be to fix curiosity as well as suspicion on him, assuredly, if any one was still about. And as the launch that ran between this place and Sharon, from whence he would proceed to Pine Point, did not leave until eight-thirty, he must hide away in the meantime and make himself as presentable as possible.

And accordingly re-entering a thicket of pines that descended to the very borders of the town, there to wait until morning, being able to tell by a small clock-face which showed upon the sides of a small church tower, when the hour for emerging had arrived. But, in the interim debating – “Was it wise so to do?” For who might not be here to wait for him? Those three men – or some one else who might have seen? – Or an officer, notified from somewhere else. Yet deciding after a time that it was best to go just the same. For to stalk along in the woods west of this lake – and by night rather than day – seeing that by day he might be seen, and when by taking this boat he could reach in an hour and a half – or two hours at the most – the Cranston lodge at Sharon, whereas by walking he would not arrive until to-morrow – was not that unwise, more dangerous? Besides, he had promised Sondra and Bertine that he would be there Tuesday. And here it was Friday! Again, by tomorrow, might not a hue and cry be on – his description sent here and there – whereas this morning – well, how could Roberta have been found as yet? No, no. Better this way. For who knew him here – or could identify him as yet with either Carl Graham or Clifford Golden. Best go this way – speedily, before anything else in connection with her developed. Yes, yes. And finally, the clock-hands pointing to eight-ten, making his way out, his heart beating heavily as he did so.

At the foot of this street was the launch which steamed from here to Sharon. And as he loitered he observed the bus from Raquette Lake approaching. It now occurred to him, if he encountered any one he knew on the steamer dock or boat, could he not say that he was fresh from Raquette Lake, where Sondra, as well as Bertine, had many friends, or in case they themselves came down on the boat, that he had been there the day before. What matter whose name or lodge he mentioned – an invented one, if need be.

And so, at last, making his way to the boat and boarding it. And later at Sharon, leaving it again and without, as he thought, appearing to attract any particular attention at either end. For, although there were some eleven passengers, all strangers to him, still no one other than a young country girl in a blue dress and a white straw hat, whom he guessed to be from this vicinity, appeared to pay any particular attention to him. And her glances were admiring rather than otherwise, although sufficient, because of his keen desire for secrecy, to cause him to retire to the rear of the boat, whereas the others appeared to prefer the forward deck. And once in Sharon, knowing that the majority were making for the railway station to catch the first morning train down, he followed briskly in their wake, only to turn into the nearest lunch-room in order to break the trail, as he hoped. For although he had walked the long distance from Big Bittern to Three Mile Bay, and previously had rowed all afternoon, and merely made a pretense of eating the lunch which Roberta had prepared at Grass Lake, still even now he was not hungry. Then seeing a few passengers approaching from the station, yet none whom he knew, he joined these again as though just coming to the inn and launch from the train.

For at this time there had come to him the thought that this south train from Albany, as well as Utica being due here at this hour, it was only natural that he should seem to come on that. Pretending first, therefore, to be going to the station, yet stopping en route to telephone Bertine and Sondra that he was here, and being assured that a car rather than a launch would be sent for him, he explained that he would be waiting on the west veranda of the inn. En route also he stopped at a news stand for a morning paper, although he knew there could be nothing in it as yet. And he had barely crossed to the veranda of the inn and seated himself before the Cranston car approached.

And in response to the greeting of the Cranston family chauffeur, whom he knew well, and who smiled most welcomingly, he was now able to achieve a seemingly easy and genial smile, though still inwardly troubled by his great dread. For no doubt by now, as he persistently argued with himself,

the three men whom he had met had reached Big Bittern. And by now both Roberta and he must assuredly have been missed, and maybe, who knows, the upturned boat with his hat and her veil discovered! If so, might they not have already reported that they had seen such a man as himself, carrying a bag, and making his way to the south in the night? And, if so, would not that, regardless of whether the body was found or not, cause them to become dubious as to whether a double drowning had occurred? And supposing by some strange chance her body should come to the surface? Then what? And might there not be a mark left by that hard blow he had given her? If so, would they not suspect murder, and his body not coming up and those men describing the man they had seen, would not Clifford Golden or Carl Graham be suspected of murder?

But neither Clifford Golden nor Carl Graham were Clyde Griffiths by any means. And they could not possibly identify Clyde Griffiths – with either Clifford Golden or Carl Graham. For had he not taken every precaution, even searching through Roberta's bag and purse there at Grass Lake while at his request after breakfast she had gone back to see about the lunch? Had he not? True, he had found those two letters from that girl, Theresa Bouser, addressed to Roberta at Biltz, and he had destroyed them before ever leaving for Gun Lodge. And as for that toilet set in its original case, with the label "Whitely – Lycurgus" on it, while it was true that he had been compelled to leave that, still might not any one – Mrs. Clifford Golden, or Mrs. Carl Graham – have bought that in Whitely's, and so without the possibility of its being traced to him? Assuredly. And as for her clothes, even assuming that they did go to prove her identity, would it not be assumed, by her parents as well as others, that she had gone on this trip with a strange man by the name of Golden or Graham, and would they not want that hushed up without further ado? At any rate, he would hope for the best – keep up his nerve, put on a strong, pleasant, cheerful front here, so that no one would think of him as the one, since he had not actually killed her, anyhow.

Here he was in this fine car. And Sondra, as well as Bertine, waiting for him. He would have to say that he was just up from Albany – had been on some errand over there for his uncle which had taken all of this time since Tuesday. And while he should be blissfully happy with Sondra, still here were all of those dreadful things of which now all of the time he would be compelled to think. The danger that in some inadvertent way he had not quite covered all the tracks that might lead to him. And if he had not! Exposure! Arrest! Perhaps a hasty and unjust conviction – punishment, even! Unless he was able to explain about that accidental blow. The end of all his dreams in connection with Sondra – Lycurgus – the great life that he had hoped for himself. But could he explain as to that? Could he? God!

Chapter 7

From Friday morning until the following Tuesday noon, moving amid such scenes as previously had so exhilarated and enthralled him, Clyde was now compelled to suffer the most frightful fears and dreads. For, although met by Sondra, as well as Bertine, at the door of the Cranston lodge, and shown by them to the room he was to occupy, he could not help but contrast every present delight here with the danger of his immediate and complete destruction.

As he had entered, Sondra had poutingly whispered, so that Bertine might not hear: “Baddie! Staying down there a whole week when you might have been up here. And Sondra planning everything for you! You ought to have a good spanking. I was going to call up to-day to see where you were.” Yet at the same time her eyes conveying the infatuation that now dominated her.

And he, in spite of his troubled thoughts achieving a gay smile – for once in her presence even the terror of Roberta’s death, his own present danger appeared to dwindle. If only all went well, now – nothing were traced to him! A clear path! A marvelous future! Her beauty! Her love! Her wealth. And yet, after being ushered to his room, his bag having been carried in before him, at once becoming nervous as to the suit. It was damp and wrinkled. He must hide it on one of the upper shelves of a closet, maybe. And the moment he was alone and the door locked, taking it out, wet and wrinkled, the mud of the shores of Big Bittern still about the legs – yet deciding perhaps not – perhaps he had better keep it locked in his bag until night when he could better decide what to do. Yet tying up in a single bundle, in order to have them laundered, other odds and ends he had worn that day. And, as he did so, terribly, sickeningly conscious of the mystery and drama as well as the pathos of his life – all he had contacted since his arrival in the east, how little he had in his youth. How little he had now, really. The spaciousness and grandeur of this room as contrasted with the one he occupied in Lycurgus. The strangeness of his being here at all after yesterday. The blue waters of this bright lake without as contrasted with the darker ones of Big Bittern. And on the green-sward that reached from this bright, strong, rambling house, with its wide veranda and striped awnings to the shore of the lake itself, Stuart Finchley and Violet Taylor, together with Frank Harriet and Wynette Phant, in the smartest of sport clothes, playing tennis, while Bertine and Harley Baggott tolled in the shade of a striped marquee swing.

And, he himself, after bathing and dressing, assuming a jocular air although his nerves remained tense and his mood apprehensive. And then descending to where Sondra and Burchard Taylor and Jill Trumbull were laughing over some amusing experiences in connection with motor-boating the day before. Jill Trumbull called to him as he came out: “Hello, Clyde! Been playing hookey or what? I haven’t seen you in I don’t know when.” And he, after smiling wistfully at Sondra, craving as never before her sympathy as well as her affection, drawing himself up on the railing of the veranda and replying, as smoothly as he could: “Been working over at Albany since Tuesday. Hot down there. It’s certainly fine to be up here to-day. Who’s all up?” And Jill Trumbull, smiling: “Oh, nearly every one, I guess. I saw Vanda over at the Randalls’ yesterday. And Scott wrote Bertine he was coming to the Point next Tuesday. It looks to me as though no one was going over to Greenwood much this year.” And then a long and intense discussion as to why Greenwood was no longer what it had been. And then Sondra exclaiming: “That reminds me! I have to phone Bella to-day. She promised to come up to that horse show over at Bristol week after next, sure.” And then more talk of horses and dogs. And Clyde, listening intently in his anxiety to seem an integral part of it all, yet brooding on all that so desperately concerned him. Those three men. Roberta. Maybe they had found her body by now – who could tell, yet saying to himself – why so fearsome? Was it likely that in that depth of water – fifty feet maybe, for all he knew – that they would find her? Or that they could ever identify him with Clifford Golden or Carl Graham? How could they? Hadn’t he really and truly covered his tracks except for those three men? THOSE THREE MEN! He shivered, as with cold, in spite of himself.

And then Sondra, sensing a note of depression about him. (She had determined from his obvious lack of equipment on his first visit that perhaps the want of money was at the bottom of his present mood, and so proposed later this day to extract seventy-five dollars from her purse and force that upon him in order that at no point where petty expenditures should be required, should he feel the least bit embarrassed during his stay this time.) And after a few moments, thinking of the short golf course, with its variety of concealing hazards for unseen kisses and embraces, she now jumped up with: "Who's for a mixed foursome? Come on, Jill, Clyde, Burch! I'll bet Clyde and I can turn in a lower card than you two can!"

"I'll take that!" exclaimed Burchard Taylor, rising and straightening his yellow and blue striped sweater, "even if I didn't get in until four this morning. How about you, Jilly? If you want to make that for the lunches, Sonny, I'll take it."

And at once Clyde wincing and chilling, for he was thinking of the miserable twenty-five dollars left him from all his recent ghastly adventures. And a lunch for four here would cost not less than eight or ten dollars! Perhaps more. At the same time, Sondra, noting his expression, exclaimed: "That's a go!" and drawing near to Clyde tapped him gently with her toe, exclaiming: "But I have to change. I'll be right down. In the meantime, Clyde, I'll tell you what you do – go and find Andrew and tell him to get the clubs, will you? We can go over in your boat, can't we, Burchy?" And Clyde, hurrying to find Andrew, and thinking of the probable cost of the lunch if he and Sondra were defeated, but being caught up with by Sondra and seized by the arm. "Wait a minute, honey, I'll be right back." Then dashing up the steps to her room, and in a moment down again, a handful of bills she had reserved shut tightly in her little fist: "Here, darling, quick!" she whispered, taking hold of one of Clyde's coat pockets and putting the money into it. "Ssh! Not a word, now! Hurry! It's to pay for the lunch in case we lose, and some other things. I'll tell you afterwards. Oh, but I do love you, baby boy!" And then, her warm, brown eyes fixed on him for a moment in profound admiration, dashing up the stairs again, from where she called: "Don't stand there, silly! Get the golf clubs! The golf clubs!" And she was gone.

And Clyde, feeling his pocket and realizing that she had given him much – plenty, no doubt, for all of his needs while here, as well as to escape if need be. And exclaiming to himself: "Darling!" "Baby girl!" His beautiful, warm, generous Sondra! She loved him so – truly loved him. But if ever she should find out! Oh, God! And yet all for her, if she only knew. All for her! And then finding Andrew and returning with him carrying the bags.

And here was Sondra again, dancing down in a smart green knitted sports costume. And Jill in a new cap and blouse which made her look like a jockey, laughing at Burchard who was at the wheel of the boat. And Sondra calling back to Bertine and Harley Baggott in the swing as she was passing: "Hey, fellows! You won't come, eh?"

"Where?"

"Casino Golf Club."

"Oh, too far. See you after lunch on the beach, though."

And then Burchard shooting the boat out in the lake with a whir that set it bounding like a porpoise – and Clyde gazing half in a dream, half delight and hope and the other half a cloud of shadow and terror, with arrest and death, maybe, stalking close behind. For in spite of all his preliminary planning, he was beginning to feel that he had made a mistake in openly coming out of the wood this morning. And yet had it not been best, since the only alternative was that of remaining there by day and coming out at night and following the shore road on foot to Sharon? That would have required two or three days. And Sondra, anxious as well as curious about the delay, might have telephoned to Lycurgus, thereby raising some question in regard to him which might have proved dangerous later might it not?

But here now, this bright day, with seemingly no cares of any kind, for these others at least, however dark and bleak his own background might be. And Sondra, all gayety because of his presence,

now jumping up, her bright scarf held aloft in one hand like a pennant, and exclaiming foolishly and gayly: “Cleopatra sailing to meet – to meet – who was it she was sailing to meet, anyhow?”

“Charlie Chaplin,” volunteered Taylor, at the same time proceeding to ricochet the boat as roughly and erratically as possible in order to make her lose her balance.

“Oh, you silly!” returned Sondra, spreading her feet sufficiently apart to maintain her equilibrium, and adding for the benefit of Burchard: “No, you don’t either, Burchy,” then continuing: “Cleopatra sailing, a-a-oh, I know, aquaplaning,” and throwing her head back and her arms wide, while the boat continued to jump and lurch like a frightened horse.

“See if you can upset me now, Burchy,” she called.

And Burchard, throwing the boat from side to side as swiftly as he dared, with Jill Trumbull, anxious for her own safety, calling: “Oh, say, what do you want to do? Drown us all?” at which Clyde winced and blanched as though struck.

At once he felt sick, weak. He had never imagined that it was going to be like this; that he was going to suffer so. He had imagined that it was all going to be different. And yet here he was, blanching at every accidental and unintended word! Why, if he were put to any real test – an officer descending on him unexpectedly and asking him where he had been yesterday and what he knew of Roberta’s death – why, he would mumble, shiver, not be able to talk, maybe – and so give his whole case away wouldn’t he! He must brace up, try to look natural, happy – mustn’t he – for this first day at least.

Fortunately in the speed and excitement of the play, the others seemed not to notice the startling effect of the remark upon him, and he managed by degrees to recover his outward composure. Then the launch approached the Casino and Sondra, wishing to execute some last showy stunt, jumped up and catching the rail pulled herself up, while the boat rolled past only to reverse later. And Clyde, because of a happy smile in his direction, was seized by an uncontrollable desire for her – her love, sympathy, generosity, courage. And so now, to match her smiles, he jumped up and after assisting Jill to the steps, quickly climbed up after her, pretending a gayety and enthusiasm that was as hollow inwardly as outwardly it was accurate.

“Gee! Some athlete you are!”

And then on the links a little later with her, and under her guidance and direction, playing as successful a game as it was possible with his little experience and as troubled as he was. And she, because of the great delight of having him all to herself in shadowy hazards where they might kiss and embrace, beginning to tell him of a proposed camping trip which she, Frank Harriet, Wynette Phant, Burchard Taylor, her brother Stuart, Grant Cranston and Bertine, as well as Harley Baggott, Perley Haynes, Jill Trumbull and Violet Taylor, had been organizing for a week, and which was to begin on the morrow afternoon, with a motor trip thirty miles up the lake and then forty miles east to a lake known as Bear, along which, with tents and equipment, they were to canoe to certain beaches and scenes known only to Harley and Frank. Different days, different points. The boys would kill squirrels and catch fish for food. Also there would be moonlight trips to an inn that could be reached by boat, so they said. A servant or two or three from different homes was to accompany them, as well as a chaperon or two. But, oh, the walks in the woods! The opportunities for love – canoe trips on the lake – hours of uninterrupted love-making for at least a week!

In spite of all that had occurred thus far to give him pause, he could not help thinking that whatever happened, was it not best to go? How wonderful to have her love him so! And what else here could he do? It would take him out of this, would it not – farther and farther from the scene of the – of the – accident and in case any one were looking for any one who looked like him, for instance – well, he would not be around where he could be seen and commented upon. **THOSE THREE MEN.**

Yet, as it now instantly occurred to him, under no circumstances must he leave here without first finding out as definitely as possible whether any one was as yet suspected. And once at the Casino, and for the moment left alone, he learned on inquiring at the news stand that there would

be no Albany, Utica, or any local afternoon paper there until seven or seven-thirty. He must wait until then to know.

And so although after the lunch there was swimming and dancing, then a return to the Cranstons with Harley Baggott and Bertine – Sondra going to Pine Point, with an agreement to meet him afterwards at the Harriets' for dinner – still his mind was on the business of getting these papers at the first possible opportunity. Yet unless, as he now saw, he was so fortunate as to be able to stop on his way from the Cranstons' to the Harriets' and so obtain one or all, he must manage to come over to this Casino in the morning before leaving for Bear Lake. He must have them. He must know what, if anything, was either being said or done so far in regard to that drowned couple.

But on his way to Harriets' he was not able to get the papers. They had not come. And none at the Harriets' either, when he first arrived. Yet sitting on the veranda about a half hour later, talking with the others although brooding as to all this, Sondra herself appeared and said: "Oh, say, people! I've got something to tell you. Two people were drowned this morning or yesterday up at Big Bittern, so Blanche Locke was telling me just now over the phone. She's up at Three Mile Bay today and she says they've found the body of the girl but not the man yet. They were drowned in the south part of the lake somewhere, she said."

At once Clyde sat up, rigid and white, his lips a bloodless line, his eyes fixed not on anything here but rather the distant scene at Big Bittern – the tall pines, the dark water closing over Roberta. Then they had found her body. And now would they believe that his body was down there, too, as he had planned? But, listen! He must hear in spite of his dizziness.

"Gee, that's tough!" observed Burchard Taylor, stopping his strumming on a mandolin. "Anybody we know?"

"She says she didn't hear yet."

"I never did like that lake," put in Frank Harriet. "It's too lonely. Dad and I and Mr. Randall were up there fishing last summer, but we didn't stay long. It's too gloomy."

"We were up there three weeks ago – don't you remember, Sondra?" added Harley Baggott. "You didn't care for it."

"Yes, I remember," replied Sondra. "A dreadfully lonely place. I can't imagine any one wanting to go up there for anything."

"Well, I only hope it isn't any one we know from around here," added Burchard, thoughtfully. "It would put a crimp in the fun around here for a while, anyhow."

And Clyde unconsciously wet his dry lips with his tongue and swallowed to moisten his already dry throat.

"I don't suppose any of to-day's papers would have anything about it yet. Has any one looked?" inquired Wynette Phant, who had not heard Sondra's opening remark.

"There ain't no papers," commented Burchard Taylor. "Besides, it's not likely yet, didn't Sondra say she just heard it from Blanche Locke over the phone? She's up near there."

"Oh, yes, that's right."

And yet might not that small local afternoon paper of Sharon – The Banner, wasn't it – have something as to this? If only he could see it yet to-night!

But another thought! For Heaven's sake! It came to him now for the first time. His footprints! Were there any in the mud of that shore? He had not even stopped to look, climbing out so hastily as he did. And might there not have been? And then would they not know and proceed to follow him – the man those three men saw? Clifford Golden! That ride down this morning. His going out to the Cranstons' in their car. That wet suit over in the room at the Cranstons'! Had any one in his absence been in his room as yet to look, examine, inquire – open his bag, maybe? An officer? God! It was there in his bag. But why in his bag or anywhere else near him now? Why had he not hidden it before this – thrown it in the lake here, maybe, with a stone in it? That would keep it down. God! What was he thinking in the face of such a desperate situation as this? Supposing he did need the suit!

He was now up, standing – mentally and physically frozen really – his eyes touched with a stony glaze for the moment. He must get out of here. He must go back there, at once, and dispose of that suit – drop it in the lake – hide it somewhere in those woods beyond the house! And yet – he could not do that so swiftly, either – leave so instantly after this light conversation about the drowning of those two people. How would that look?

And as instantly there came the thought – no – be calm – show no trace of excitement of any kind, if you can manage it – appear cool – make some unimportant remark, if you can.

And so now, mustering what nervous strength he had, and drawing near to Sondra, he said: “Too bad, eh?” Yet in a voice that for all its thinly-achieved normality was on the borderline of shaking and trembling. His knees and his hands, also.

“Yes, it certainly is,” replied Sondra, turning to him alone now. “I always hate to hear of anything like that, don’t you? Mother worries so about Stuart and me fooling around these lakes as it is.”

“Yes, I know.” His voice was thick and heavy. He could scarcely form the words. They were smothered, choked. His lips tightened to a thinner white line than before. His face grew paler still.

“Why, what’s the matter, Clydie?” Sondra asked, of a sudden, looking at him more closely. “You look so pale! Your eyes. Anything wrong? Aren’t you feeling well tonight, or is it this light out here?”

She turned to look at some of the others in order to make sure, then back at him. And he, feeling the extreme importance of looking anything but the way she was describing him now drew himself up as best he could, and replied: “Oh, no. It must be the light, I guess. Sure, it’s the light. I had – a – a hard day yesterday, that’s all. I shouldn’t have come over to-night, I suppose.” And then achieving the weirdest and most impossible of smiles. And Sondra, gazing most sympathetically, adding: “Was he so tired? My Clydie-mydie boy, after his work yesterday. Why didn’t my baby boy tell me that this morning instead of doing all that we did today? Want me to get Frank to run you down to the Cranstons’ now? Or maybe you’d like to go up in his room and lie down? He won’t mind, I know. Shall I ask him?”

She turned as if to speak to Frank, but Clyde, all but panic-stricken by this latest suggestion, and yet angling for an excuse to leave, exclaimed earnestly and yet shakily: “Please, please don’t, darling. I – I – don’t want you to. I’ll be all right. I’ll go up after a bit if I want to, or maybe home a little early, if you’re going after a while, but not now. I’m not feeling as good as I should, but I’ll be all right.”

Sondra, because of his strained and as she now fancied almost peevish tone, desisted with: “All right, honey. All right. But if you don’t feel well, I wish you would let me get Frank to take you down or go upstairs. He won’t mind. And then after a while – about ten-thirty – I’ll excuse myself and you can go down with me to your place. I’ll take you there before I go home and whoever else wants to go. Won’t my baby boy do something like that?”

And Clyde saying: “Well, I think I’ll go up and get a drink, anyhow.” And disappearing in one of the spacious baths of the Harriet home, locking the door and sitting down and thinking, thinking – of Roberta’s body recovered, of the possibilities of a bruise of some kind, of the possibility of the print of his own feet in the mud and sandy loam of the shore; of that suit over at the Cranstons’, the men in the wood, Roberta’s bag, hat and coat, his own liningless hat left on the water – and wondering what next to do. How to act! How to talk! Whether to go downstairs to Sondra now and persuade her to go, or whether to stay and suffer and agonize? And what would the morrow’s papers reveal? What? What? And was it wise, in case there was any news which would make it look as though eventually he was to be sought after, or in any way connected with this, to go on that proposed camping trip tomorrow! Or, wiser, to run away from here? He had some money now. He could go to New York, Boston, New Orleans where Ratterer was – but oh, no – not where any one knew him.

Oh, God! The folly of all his planning in connection with all this to date! The flaws! Had he ever really planned it right from the start? Had he ever really imagined, for instance, that Roberta’s

body would be found in that deep water? And yet, here it was – risen so soon – this first day – to testify against him! And although he had signed as he had on those registers up there, was it not possible now, on account of those three men and that girl on that boat, for him to be traced? He must think, think, think! And get out of here as soon as possible, before anything really fatal in connection with that suit should happen.

Growing momentarily weaker and more terrorized, he now decided to return to Sondra below, and say that he was really feeling quite sick and that if she did not object he would prefer to go home with her, if she could arrange it. And consequently, at ten-thirty, when the evening still had hours to go, Sondra announced to Burchard that she was not feeling well and would he run her and Clyde and Jill down to her place, but that she would see them all on the morrow in time for the proposed departure for Bear Lake.

And Clyde, though brooding as to whether this early leaving on his part was not another of those wretched errors which had seemed to mark every step of this desperate and murderous scheme so far, finally entering the swift launch and being raced to the Cranston lodge in no time. And once there, excusing himself to Burchard and Sondra as nonchalantly and apologetically as might be, and then hurrying to his own room only to find the suit as he had left it – no least evidence that any one had been there to disturb the serenity of his chamber. Just the same, nervously and suspiciously, he now took it out and tied it up, and then waiting and listening for a silent moment in which to slip from the house unobserved – finally ambled out as though going for a short walk. And then, by the shore of the lake – about a quarter of a mile distant from the house – seeking out a heavy stone and tying the suit to that. And then throwing it out into the water, as far as his strength would permit. And then returning, as silently and gloomily and nervously as he had gone, and brooding and brooding as to what the morrow might reveal and what, if any appeared to question him, he would say.

Chapter 8

The morrow dawned after an all but sleepless night, harrowed by the most torturesome dreams in regard to Roberta, men who arrived to arrest him, and the hike, until at last he arose, his nerves and eyes aching. Then, venturing to come downstairs about an hour later, he saw Frederick, the chauffeur who had driven him out the day before, getting one of the cars out. And thereupon instructing him to bring all the morning Albany and Utica papers. And about nine-thirty, when he returned, proceeding to his room with them, where, locking the door and spreading one of the papers before him, he was immediately confronted by the startling headlines:

“MYSTERY IN GIRL’S DEATH BODY FOUND YESTERDAY IN ADIRONDACK LAKE
MAN COMPANION MISSING”

And at once strained and white he sat down in one of the chairs near the window and began to read:

“Bridgeburg, N. Y., July 9. – The body of an unknown girl, presumably the wife of a young man who registered first on Wednesday morning at Grass Lake Inn, Grass Lake, N. Y., as Carl Graham and wife, and later, Thursday noon, at Big Bittern Lodge, Big Bittern, as Clifford Golden and wife was taken from the waters of the south end of Big Bittern just before noon yesterday. Because of an upturned boat, as well as a man’s straw hat found floating on the water in Moon Cove, dredging with hooks and lines had been going on all morning. . . Up to seven o’clock last evening, however, the body of the man had not as yet been recovered, and according to Coroner Heit of Bridgeburg, who by two o’clock had been summoned to the scene of the tragedy, it was not considered at all likely that it would be. Several marks and abrasions found upon the dead girl’s head and face, as well as the testimony of three men who arrived on the scene while the search was still on and testified to having met a young man who answered to the description of Golden or Graham in the woods to the south of the lake the night before, caused many to conclude that a murder had been committed and that the murderer was seeking to make his escape.

“The girl’s brown leather traveling bag, as well as a hat and coat belonging to her, were left, the bag in the ticket agent’s room at Gun Lodge, which is the railway station five miles east of Big Bittern, and the hat and coat in the coatroom of the inn at the Lake, whereas Graham or Golden is said to have taken his suitcase with him into the boat.

“According to the innkeeper at Big Bittern, the couple on their arrival registered as Clifford Golden and wife of Albany. They remained in the inn but a few minutes before Golden walked to the boat-landing just outside and procured a light boat, in which, accompanied by the girl and his suitcase, he went out on the lake. They did not return, and yesterday morning the boat was found bottomside up in what is known as Moon Cove, a small bay or extension at the extreme south end of the lake, from the waters of which soon afterwards the body of the young woman was recovered. As there are no known rocks in the lake at that point, and the wounds upon the face are quite marked, suspicion was at once aroused that the girl might have been unfairly dealt with. This, together with the testimony of the three men, as well as the fact that a man’s straw hat found nearby contained no lining or other method of identification, has caused Coroner Heit to assert that unless the body of the man is found he will assume that murder has been committed.

“Golden or Graham, as described by innkeepers and guests and guides at Grass Lake and Big Bittern, is not more than twenty-four or twenty-five years of age, slender, dark, and not more than five feet eight or nine inches tall. At the time he arrived he was dressed in a light gray suit, tan shoes, and a straw hat and carried a brown suitcase to which was attached an umbrella and some other object, presumably a cane.

“The hat and coat left by the girl at the inn were of dark and light tan respectively, her dress a dark blue.

“Notice has been sent to all railroad stations in this vicinity to be on the lookout for Golden, or Graham, in order that he may be arrested if he is alive and attempts to make his escape. The body of the drowned girl is to be removed to Bridgeburg, the county seat of this county, where an inquest is later to be held.”

In frozen silence he sat and pondered. For would not the news of such a dastardly murder as this now appeared to be, together with the fact that it had been committed in this immediate vicinity, stir up such marked excitement as to cause many – perhaps all – to scan all goers and comers everywhere in the hope of detecting the one who had thus been described? Might it not be better, therefore, since they were so close on his trail already, if he were to go to the authorities at Big Bittern or here and make a clean breast of all that had thus far occurred, the original plot and the reasons therefor, only explaining how at the very last he had not really killed her – had experienced a change of heart and had not been able to do as he had planned? But, no. That would be to give away to Sondra and the Griffiths all that had been going on between him and Roberta – and before it was absolutely certain that all was ended for him here. And besides, would they believe him now, after that flight – those reported wounds? Did it not really look as though he had killed her, regardless of how he might try to explain that he had not?

It was not unlikely also that at least some among all those who had seen him would be able to detect him from this printed description, even though he no longer wore the gray suit or the straw hat. God! They were looking for him, or rather for that Clifford Golden or Carl Graham who looked like him, in order to charge him with murder! But if he looked exactly like Clifford Golden and those three men came! He began to shiver. And worse yet. A new and horrible thought, this – and at this instant, and for the first time flashing upon his mind – the similarity of those initials to his own! He had never thought of them in an unfavorable light before, but now he could see that they were detrimental. Why was it that he had never thought of that before? Why was it? Why was it? Oh, God!

Just then a telephone call for him came from Sondra. It was announced as from her. Yet even so he was compelled to brace himself in order to make even an acceptable showing, vocally. How was her sick boy this morning? Any better? How dreadful that illness last night to come on him so suddenly. Was he really all right now? And was he going to be able to go on the trip all right? That was fine. She had been so frightened and so worried all night for fear he might be too sick to want to go. But he was going, so everything was all right again now. Darling! Precious baby! Did her baby boy love her so? She was just sure that the trip would do him a lot of good. But until noon, now, dear, she would be using all her spare time getting ready, but at one, or one-thirty, everybody would be at the Casino pier. And then – oh, my! Ho! for a great old time up there! He was to come with Bertine and Grant and whoever else was coming from there, and then at the pier he could change to Stuart’s launch. They were certain to have so much fun – just loads of it – but just now she would have to go. Bye-bye!

And once more like a bright-colored bird she was gone.

But three hours to wait before he could leave here and so avoid the danger of encountering any one who might be looking for Clifford Golden or Carl Graham! Still until then he could walk up the lake shore into the woods, couldn’t he? – or sit below, his bag all packed, and watch who, if anybody, might approach along the long-winding path from the road or by launch across the lake. And if he saw any one who looked at all suspicious, he could take flight, could he not? And afterwards doing just that – first walking away into the woods and looking back, as might a hunted animal. Then later returning and sitting or walking, but always watching, watching. (What man was that? What boat was that? Where was it going? Was it coming here, by any chance? Who was in it? Supposing an officer – a detective? Then flight, of course – if there was still time.)

But, at last one o’clock, and the Cranston launch, with Bertine and Harley and Wynette, as well as Grant and himself, setting out for the pier. And once there, joined by all who were going, together with the servants. And at Little Fish Inlet, thirty miles north, on the eastern shore, they were met by

the cars of the Baggotts, Harriets and others, from where, with their goods and canoes, they were portaged forty miles east to Bear Lake, as lonely and as arresting almost as Big Bittern itself.

The joy of this trip if only that other thing were not hanging over him now. This exquisite pleasure of being near Sondra, her eyes constantly telling him how much she cared. And her spirit's flame so high because of his presence here with her now. And yet Roberta's body up! That search for Clifford Golden – Carl Graham. His identical description wired as well as published everywhere. These others – all of them in their boats and cars had probably read it. And yet, because of their familiarity with him and his connections – Sondra, the Griffiths – not suspecting him – not thinking of the description even. But if they should! If they should guess! The horror! The flight! The exposure! The police! The first to desert him – these – all save Sondra perhaps. And even she, too. Yes, she, of course. The horror in her eyes.

And then that evening at sundown, on the west shore of this same lake, on an open sward that was as smooth as any well-kept lawn, the entire company settled, in five different colored tents ranged about a fire like an Indian village, with cooks' and servants' tents in the distance. And the half dozen canoes beached like bright fish along the grassy shore of the lake. And then supper around an open fire. And Baggott and Harriet and Stuart and Grant, after furnishing music for the others to dance by, organizing by the flare of a large gasoline lamp, a poker game. And the others joining in singing ribald camping and college songs, no one of which Clyde knew, yet in which he tried to join. And shouts of laughter. And bets as to who would be the first to catch the first fish, to shoot the first squirrel or partridge, to win the first race. And lastly, solemn plans for moving the camp at least ten miles farther east, after breakfast, on the morrow where was an ideal beach, and where they would be within five miles of the Metissic Inn, and where they could dine and dance to their heart's content.

And then the silence and the beauty of this camp at night, after all had presumably gone to bed. The stars! The mystic, shadowy water, faintly rippling in a light wind, the mystic, shadowy pines conferring in the light breezes, the cries of night birds and owls – too disturbing to Clyde to be listened to with anything but inward distress. The wonder and glory of all this – if only – if only he were not stalked after, as by a skeleton, by the horror not only of what he had done in connection with Roberta but the danger and the power of the law that deemed him a murderer! And then Sondra, the others having gone to bed – or off into the shadow – stealing out for a few last words and kisses under the stars. And he whispering to her how happy he was, how grateful for all her love and faith, and at one point almost tempted to ask whether in case it should ever appear that he was not as good as she now seemed to imagine him, she would still love him a little – not hate him entirely – yet refraining for fear that after that exhibition of terror the preceding night she might connect his present mood with that, or somehow with the horrible, destructive secret that was gnawing at his vitals.

And then afterwards, lying in the four-cot tent with Baggott, Harriet and Grant, listening nervously for hours for any prowling steps that might mean – that might mean – God – what might they not mean even up here? – the law! arrest! exposure! Death. And waking twice in the night out of dread, destructive dreams – and feeling as though – and fearing – that he had cried out in his sleep.

But then the glory of the morning once more – with its rotund and yellow sun rising over the waters of the lake – and in a cove across the lake wild ducks paddling about. And after a time Grant and Stuart and Harley, half-clad and with guns and a great show of fowling skill, foolishly setting forth in canoes in the hope of bagging some of the game with long distance shots, yet getting nothing, to the merriment of all the others. And the boys and girls, stealing out in bright-colored bathing suits and silken beach robes to the water, there to plunge gayly in and shout and clatter concerning the joy of it all. And breakfast at nine, with afterwards the gayety and beauty of the bright flotilla of canoes making eastward along the southern lake shore, banjos, guitars and mandolins strumming and voices raised in song, jest, laughter.

“Whatever matter wissum sweet to-day? Face all dark. Cantum be happy out here wis Sondra and all these nicey good-baddies?”

And Clyde as instantly realizing that he must pretend to be gay and care-free.

And then Harley Baggott and Grant and Harriet at about noon announcing that there – just ahead – was the fine beach they had in mind – the Ramshorn, a spit of Land commanding from its highest point all the length and breadth of the lake. And with room on the shore below for all the tents and paraphernalia of the company. And then, throughout this warm, pleasant Sunday afternoon, the usual program of activities – lunching, swimming, dancing, walking, card-playing, music. And Clyde and Sondra, like other couples, stealing off – Sondra with a mandolin – to a concealed rock far to the east of the camp, where in the shade of the pines they could lie – Sondra in Clyde's arms – and talk of the things they were certain to do later, even though, as she now announced, Mrs. Finchley was declaring that after this particular visit of Clyde's her daughter was to have nothing more to do with him in any such intimate social way as this particular trip gave opportunity for. He was too poor – too nondescript a relative of the Griffiths. (It was so that Sondra, yet in a more veiled way, described her mother as talking.) Yet adding: "How ridiculous, sweetum! But don't you mind. I just laughed and agreed because I don't want to aggravate her just now. But I did ask her how I was to avoid meeting you here or anywhere now since you are as popular as you are. My sweetum is so good-looking. Everybody thinks so – even the boys."

At this very hour, on the veranda of the Silver Inn at Sharon, District Attorney Mason, with his assistant Burton Burleigh, Coroner Heit and Earl Newcomb, and the redoubtable Sheriff Slack, paunched and scowling, yet genial enough in ordinary social intercourse, together with three assistants – first, second and third deputies Kraut, Sissel and Swenk – conferring as to the best and most certain methods of immediate capture.

"He has gone to Bear Lake. We must follow and trap him before news reaches him in any way that he is wanted."

And so they set forth – this group – Burleigh and Earl Newcomb about Sharon itself in order to gather such additional data as they might in connection with Clyde's arrival and departure from here for the Cranstons' on Friday, talking with and subpoenaing any such individuals as might throw any light on his movements; Heit to Three Mile Bay on much the same errand, to see Captain Mooney of the "Cygnus" and the three men and Mason, together with the sheriff and his deputies, in a high-powered launch chartered for the occasion, to follow the now known course of the only recently-departed camping party, first to Little Fish Inlet and from there, in case the trail proved sound, to Bear Lake.

And on Monday morning, while those at Ramshorn Point after breaking camp were already moving on toward Shelter Beach fourteen miles east, Mason, together with Slack and his three deputies, arriving at the camp deserted the morning before. And there, the sheriff and Mason taking counsel with each other and then dividing their forces so that in canoes commandeered from lone residents of the region they now proceeded, Mason and First Deputy Kraut along the south shore, Slack and Second Deputy Sissel along the north shore, while young Swenk, blazing with a desire to arrest and handcuff some one, yet posing for the occasion as a lone young hunter or woodsman, paddled directly east along the center of the lake in search of any informing smoke or fires or tents or individuals idling along the shores. And with great dreams of being the one to capture the murderer – I arrest you, Clyde Griffiths, in the name of the law! – yet because of instructions from Mason, as well as Slack, grieving that instead, should he detect any signs, being the furthestmost outpost, he must, in order to avoid frightening the prey or losing him, turn on his track and from some point not so likely to be heard by the criminal fire one single shot from his eight-chambered repeater, whereupon whichever party chanced to be nearest would fire one shot in reply and then proceed as swiftly as possible in his direction. But under no circumstances was he to attempt to take the criminal alone, unless noting the departure by boat or on foot of a suspicious person who answered the description of Clyde.

At this very hour, Clyde, with Harley Baggott, Bertine and Sondra, in one of the canoes, paddling eastward along with the remainder of the flotilla, looking back and wondering. Supposing by now, some officer or some one had arrived at Sharon and was following him up here? For would it be hard to find where he had gone, supposing only that they knew his name?

But they did not know his name. Had not the items in the papers proved that? Why worry so always, especially on this utterly wonderful trip and when at last he and Sondra could be together again? And besides, was it not now possible for him to wander off by himself into these thinly populated woods along the shore to the eastward, toward that inn at the other end of the lake – and not return? Had he not inquired most casually on Saturday afternoon of Harley Baggott as well as others as to whether there was a road south or east from the east end of the lake? And had he not learned there was?

And at last, at noon, Monday, reaching Shelter Beach, the third spot of beauty contemplated by the planners of this outing, where he helped to pitch the tents again while the girls played about.

Yet at the same hour, at the Ramshorn site, because of the ashes from their fires left upon the shore, young Swenk, most eagerly and enthusiastically, like some seeking animal, approaching and examining the same and then going on – swiftly. And but one hour later, Mason and Kraut, reconnoitering the same spot, but without either devoting more than a cursory glance, since it was obvious that the prey had moved farther on.

But then greater speed in paddling on the part of Swenk, until by four he arrived at Shelter Beach. And then, descriing as many as a half dozen people in the water in the distance, at once turning and retreating in the direction of the others in order to give the necessary signal. And some two miles back firing one shot, which in its turn was responded to by Mason as well as Sheriff Slack. Both parties had heard and were now paddling swiftly east.

At once Clyde in the water – near Sondra – hearing this was made to wonder. The ominous quality of that first shot! Followed by those two additional signals – farther away, yet seemingly in answer to the first! And then the ominous silence thereafter! What was that? And with Harley Baggott jesting: “Listen to the guys shooting game out of season, will you. It’s against the law, isn’t it?”

“Hey, you!” Grant Cranston shouted. “Those are my ducks down there! Let ’em alone.”

“If they can’t shoot any better than you, Granty, they will let ’em alone.” This from Bertine.

Clyde, while attempting to smile, looked in the direction of the sound and listened like a hunted animal.

What was it now that urged him to get out of the water and dress and run? Hurry! Hurry! To your tent! To the woods, quick! Until at last heeding this, and while most of the others were not looking, hurrying to his tent, changing to the one plain blue business suit and cap that he still possessed, then slipping into the woods back of the camp – out of sight and hearing of all present until he should be able to think and determine, but keeping always safely inland out of the direct view of the water, for fear – for fear – who could tell exactly what those shots meant?

Yet Sondra! And her words of Saturday and yesterday and to-day. Could he leave her in this way, without being sure? Could he? Her kisses! Her dear assurances as to the future! What would she think now – and those others – in case he did not go back? The comment which was certain to be made in the Sharon and other papers in regard to this disappearance of his, and which was certain to identify him with this same Clifford Golden or Carl Graham! was it not?

Then reflecting also – the possible groundlessness of these fears, based on nothing more, maybe, than the chance shots of passing hunters on the lake or in these woods. And then pausing and debating with himself whether to go on or not. Yet, oh, the comfort of these tall, pillared trees – the softness and silence of these brown, carpeting needles on the ground – the clumps and thickets of underbrush under which one could lie and hide until night should fall again. And then on – and on. But turning, none-the-less, with the intention of returning to the camp to see whether any one had come there. (He might say he had taken a walk and got lost in the woods.)

But about this time, behind a protecting group of trees at least two miles west of the camp, a meeting and conference between Mason, Slack and all the others. And later, as a result of this and even as Clyde lingered and returned somewhat nearer the camp, Mason, Swenk paddling the canoe, arriving and inquiring of those who were now on shore if a Mr. Clyde Griffiths was present and might he see him. And Harley Baggott, being nearest, replying: "Why, yes, sure. He's around here somewhere." And Stuart Finchley calling: "Eh-o, Griffiths!" But no reply.

Yet Clyde, not near enough to hear any of this, even now returning toward the camp, very slowly and cautiously. And Mason concluding that possibly he was about somewhere and unaware of anything, of course, deciding to wait a few minutes anyhow – while advising Swenk to fall back into the woods and if by any chance encountering Slack or any other to advise him that one man be sent east along the bank and another west, while he – Swenk – proceeded in a boat eastward as before to the inn at the extreme end, in order that from there word might be given to all as to the presence of the suspect in this region.

In the meanwhile Clyde by now only three-quarters of a mile east, and still whispered to by something which said: Run, run, do not linger! yet lingering, and thinking SONDRÄ, this wonderful life! Should he go so? And saying to himself that he might be making a greater mistake by going than by staying. For supposing those shots were nothing – hunters, mere game shots meaning nothing in his case – and yet costing him all? And yet turning at last and saying to himself that perhaps it might be best not to return at present, anyhow at least not until very late – after dark – to see if those strange shots had meant anything.

But then again pausing silently and dubiously, the while vesper sparrows and woodfinches sang. And peering. And peeking nervously.

And then all at once, not more than fifty feet distant, out of the long, tall aisles of the trees before him, a whiskered, woodsman-like type of man approaching swiftly, yet silently – a tall, bony, sharp-eyed man in a brown felt hat and a brownish-gray baggy and faded suit that hung loosely over his spare body. And as suddenly calling as he came – which caused Clyde's blood to run cold with fear and rivet him to the spot.

"Hold on a moment, mister! Don't move. Your name don't happen to be Clyde Griffiths, does it?" And Clyde, noting the sharp inquisitorial look in the eye of this stranger, as well as the fact that he had already drawn a revolver and was lifting it up, now pausing, the definiteness and authority of the man chilling him to the marrow. Was he really being captured? Had the officers of the law truly come for him? God! No hope of flight now! Why had he not gone on? Oh, why not? And at once he was weak and shaking, yet, not wishing to incriminate himself about to reply, "No!" Yet because of a more sensible thought, replying, "Why, yes, that's my name."

"You're with this camping party just west of here, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"All right, Mr. Griffiths. Excuse the revolver. I'm told to get you, whatever happens, that's all. My name is Kraut. Nicholas Kraut. I'm a deputy sheriff of Cataraqui County. And I have a warrant here for your arrest. I suppose you know what for, and that you're prepared to come with me peaceably." And at this Mr. Kraut gripped the heavy, dangerous-looking weapon more firmly even, and gazed at Clyde in a firm, conclusive way.

"Why – why – no – I don't," replied Clyde, weakly and heavily, his face white and thin. "But if you have a warrant for my arrest, I'll go with you, certainly. But what – what – I don't understand" – his voice began to tremble slightly as he said this – "is – is why you want to arrest me?"

"You don't, eh? You weren't up at either Big Bittern or Grass Lake by any chance on last Wednesday or Thursday, eh?"

"Why, no, sir, I wasn't," replied Clyde, falsely.

"And you don't happen to know anything about the drowning of a girl up there that you were supposed to be with – Roberta Alden, of Biltz, New York, I believe."

“Why, my God, no!” replied Clyde, nervously and staccatically, the true name of Roberta and her address being used by this total stranger, and so soon, staggering him. Then they knew! They had obtained a clue. His true name and hers! God! “Am I supposed to have committed a murder?” he added, his voice faint – a mere whisper.

“Then you don’t know that she was drowned last Thursday? And you weren’t with her at that time?” Mr. Kraut fixed a hard, inquisitive, unbelieving eye on him.

“Why, no, of course, I wasn’t,” replied Clyde, recalling now but one thing – that he must deny all – until he should think or know what else to do or say.

“And you didn’t meet three men walking south last Thursday night from Big Bittern to Three Mile Bay at about eleven o’clock?”

“Why, no, sir. Of course I didn’t. I wasn’t up there, I told you.”

“Very well, Mr. Griffiths, I haven’t anything more to say. All I’m supposed to do is to arrest you, Clyde Griffiths, for the murder of Roberta Alden. You’re my prisoner.” He drew forth – more by way of a demonstration of force and authority than anything else – a pair of steel handcuffs, which caused Clyde to shrink and tremble as though he had been beaten.

“You needn’t put those on me, mister,” he pleaded. “I wish you wouldn’t. I never had anything like that on before. I’ll go with you without them.” He looked longingly and sadly about at the trees, into the sheltering depths of which so recently he ought to have plunged. To safety.

“Very well, then,” replied the redoubtable Kraut. “So long as you come along peaceful.” And he took Clyde by one of his almost palsied arms.

“Do you mind if I ask you something else,” asked Clyde, weakly and fearsomely, as they now proceeded, the thought of Sondra and the others shimmering blindingly and reducingly before his eyes. Sondra! Sondra! To go back there an arrested murderer! And before her and Bertine! Oh, no! “Are you, are you intending to take me to that camp back there?”

“Yes, sir, that’s where I’m intending to take you now. Them’s my orders. That’s where the district attorney and the sheriff of Cataraqui County are just now.”

“Oh, I know, I know,” pleaded Clyde, hysterically, for by now he had lost almost all poise, “but couldn’t you – couldn’t you – so long as I go along just as you want – those are all my friends, you know, back there, and I’d hate... couldn’t you just take me around the camp somewhere to wherever you want to take me? I have a very special reason – that is – I – I, oh, God, I hope you won’t take me back there right now – will you please, Mr. Kraut?”

He seemed to Kraut very boyish and weak now – clean of feature, rather innocent as to eye, well-dressed and well-mannered – not at all the savage and brutal or murderous type he had expected to find. Indeed quite up to the class whom he (Kraut) was inclined to respect. And might he not after all be a youth of very powerful connections? The conversations he had listened to thus far had indicated that this youth was certainly identified with one of the best families in Lycurgus. And in consequence he was now moved to a slight show of courtesy and so added: “Very well, young man, I don’t want to be too hard on you. After all, I’m not the sheriff or the district attorney – just the arresting officer. There are others down there who are going to be able to say what to do about you – and when we get down to where they are, you can ask ’em, and it may be that they won’t find it necessary to take you back in there. But how about your clothes? They’re back there, ain’t they?”

“Oh, yes, but that doesn’t matter,” replied Clyde, nervously and eagerly. “I can get those any time. I just don’t want to go back now, if I can help it.”

“All right, then, come along,” replied Mr. Kraut.

And so it was that they walked on together now in silence, the tall shafts of the trees in the approaching dusk making solemn aisles through which they proceeded as might worshipers along the nave of a cathedral, the eyes of Clyde contemplating nervously and wearily a smear of livid red still visible through the trees to the west.

Charged with murder! Roberta dead! And Sondra dead – to him! And the Griffiths! And his uncle! And his mother! and all those people in that camp!

Oh, oh, God, why was it that he had not run, when that something, whatever it was, had so urged him?

Chapter 9

In the absence of Clyde, the impressions taken by Mr. Mason of the world in which he moved here, complementing and confirming those of Lycurgus and Sharon, were sufficient to sober him in regard to the ease (possibly) with which previously he had imagined it might be possible to convict him. For about him was such a scene as suggested all the means as well as the impulse to quiet such a scandal as this. Wealth. Luxury. Important names and connections to protect no doubt. Was it not possible that the rich and powerful Griffiths, their nephew seized in this way and whatever his crime, would take steps to secure the best legal talent available, in order to protect their name? Unquestionably – and then with such adjournments as it was possible for such talent to secure, might it not be possible that long before he could hope to convict him, he himself would automatically be disposed of as a prosecutor and without being nominated for and elected to the judgeship he so craved and needed.

Sitting before the circle of attractive tents that faced the lake and putting in order a fishing-pole and reel, was Harley Baggott, in a brightly-colored sweater and flannel trousers. And through the open flies of several tents, glimpses of individuals – Sondra, Bertine, Wynette and others – busy about toilets necessitated by the recent swim. Being dubious because of the smartness of the company as to whether it was politically or socially wise to proclaim openly the import of his errand, he chose to remain silent for a time, reflecting on the difference between the experiences of his early youth and that of Roberta Alden and these others. Naturally as he saw it a man of this Griffiths' connections would seek to use a girl of Roberta's connections thus meanly and brutally and hope to get away with it. Yet, eager to make as much progress as he could against whatever inimical fates might now beset him, he finally approached Baggott, and most acidly, yet with as much show of genial and appreciative sociability as he could muster, observed:

“A delightful place for a camp, eh?”

“Yeh, we think so.”

“Just a group from the estates and hotels about Sharon, I suppose?”

“Yeh. The south and west shore principally.”

“Not any of the Griffiths, other than Mr. Clyde, I presume?”

“No, they're still over at Greenwood, I think.”

“You know Mr. Clyde Griffiths personally, I suppose?”

“Oh, sure – he's one of the party.”

“You don't happen to know how long he's been up here this time, I presume – up with the Cranstons, I mean.”

“Since Friday, I think. I saw him Friday morning, anyhow. But he'll be back here soon and you can ask him yourself,” concluded Baggott, beginning to sense that Mr. Mason was a little too inquisitive and in addition not of either his or Clyde's world.

And just then, Frank Harriet, with a tennis racquet under his arm, striding across the foreground.

“Where to, Frankie?”

“To try those courts Harrison laid out up here this morning.”

“Who with?”

“Violet, Nadine and Stuart.”

“Any room for another court?”

“Sure, there's two. Why not get Bert, and Clyde, and Sondra, and come up?”

“Well, maybe, after I get this thing set.”

And Mason at once thinking: Clyde and Sondra. Clyde Griffiths and Sondra Finchley – the very girl whose notes and cards were in one of his pockets now. And might he not see her here, along with Clyde – possibly later talk to her about him?

But just then, Sondra and Bertine and Wynette coming out of their respective tents. And Bertine calling: “Oh, say, Harley, seen Nadine anywhere?”

“No, but Frank just went by. He said he was going up to the courts to play with her and Violet and Stew.”

“Yes? Well, then, come on, Sondra. You too, Wynette. We’ll see how it looks.”

Bertine, as she pronounced Sondra’s name, turned to take her arm, which gave Mason the exact information and opportunity he desired – that of seeing and studying for a moment the girl who had so tragically and no doubt all unwittingly replaced Roberta in Clyde’s affections. And, as he could see for himself, more beautiful, more richly appareled than ever the other could have hoped to be. And alive, as opposed to the other now dead and in a morgue in Bridgeburg.

But even as he gazed, the three tripping off together arm in arm, Sondra calling back to Harley: “If you see Clyde, tell him to come on up, will you?” And he replying: “Do you think that shadow of yours needs to be told?”

Mason, impressed by the color and the drama, looked intently and even excitedly about. Now it was all so plain why he wanted to get rid of the girl – the true, underlying motive. That beautiful girl there, as well as this luxury to which he aspired. And to think that a young man of his years and opportunities would stoop to such a horrible trick as that! Unbelievable! And only four days after the murder of the other poor girl, playing about with this beautiful girl in this fashion, and hoping to marry her, as Roberta had hoped to marry him. The unbelievable villainies of life!

Now, half-determining since Clyde did not appear, that he would proclaim himself and proceed to search for and seize his belongings here, Ed Swenk re-appearing and with a motion of the head indicating that Mason was to follow him. And once well within the shadow of the surrounding trees, indicating no less an individual than Nicholas Kraut, attended by a slim, neatly-dressed youth of about Clyde’s reported years, who, on the instant and because of the waxy paleness of his face, he assumed must be Clyde. And at once he now approached him, as might an angry wasp or hornet, only pausing first to ask of Swenk where he had been captured and by whom – then gazing at Clyde critically and austere as befitted one who represented the power and majesty of the law.

“So you are Clyde Griffiths, are you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, Mr. Griffiths, my name is Orville Mason. I am the district attorney of the county in which Big Bittern and Grass Lake are situated. I suppose you are familiar enough with those two places by now, aren’t you?”

He paused to see the effect of this sardonic bit of commentary. Yet although he expected to see him wince and quail, Clyde merely gazed at him, his nervous, dark eyes showing enormous strain. “No, sir, I can’t say that I am.”

For with each step through the woods thus far back, there had been growing within him the utter and unshakable conviction that in the face of whatever seeming proof or charges might now appear, he dared not tell anything in regard to himself, his connection with Roberta, his visit to Big Bittern or Grass Lake. He dared not. For that would be the same as a confession of guilt in connection with something of which he was not really guilty. And no one must believe – never – Sondra, or the Griffiths, or any of these fine friends of his, that he could ever have been guilty of such a thought, even. And yet here they were, all within call, and at any moment might approach and so learn the meaning of his arrest. And while he felt the necessity for so denying any knowledge in connection with all this, at the same time he stood in absolute terror of this man – the opposition and irritated mood such an attitude might arouse in him. That broken nose. His large, stern eyes.

And then Mason, eyeing him as one might an unheard-of and yet desperate animal and irritated also by his denial, yet assuming from his blanched expression that he might and no doubt would shortly be compelled to confess his guilt, continuing with: “You know what you are charged with, Mr. Griffiths, of course.”

“Yes, sir, I just heard it from this man here.”

“And you admit it?”

“Why, no sir, of course I don’t admit it,” replied Clyde, his thin and now white lips drawn tight over his even teeth, his eyes full of a deep, tremulous yet evasive terror.

“Why, what nonsense! What effrontery! You deny being up to Grass Lake and Big Bittern on last Wednesday and Thursday?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, then,” and now Mason stiffened himself in an angry and at the same time inquisitorial way, “I suppose you are going to deny knowing Roberta Alden – the girl you took to Grass Lake, and then out on Big Bittern in that boat last Thursday – the girl you knew in Lycurgus all last year, who lived at Mrs. Gilpin’s and worked under you in your department at Griffiths & Company – the girl to whom you gave that toilet set last Christmas! I suppose you’re going to say that your name isn’t Clyde Griffiths and that you haven’t been living with Mrs. Peyton in Taylor Street, and that these aren’t letters and cards from your trunk there – from Roberta Alden and from Miss Finchley, all these cards and notes.” And extracting the letters and cards as he spoke and waving them before Clyde. And at each point in this harangue, thrusting his broad face, with its flat, broken nose and somewhat aggressive chin directly before Clyde’s, and blazing at him with sultry, contemptuous eyes, while the latter leaned away from him, wincing almost perceptibly and with icy chills running up and down his spine and affecting his heart and brain. Those letters! All this information concerning him! And back in his bag in the tent there, all those more recent letters of Sondra’s in which she dwelt on how they were to elope together this coming fall. If only he had destroyed them! And now this man might find those – would – and question Sondra maybe, and all these others. He shrunk and congealed spiritually, the revealing effects of his so poorly conceived and executed scheme weighing upon him as the world upon the shoulders of an inadequate Atlas.

And yet, feeling that he must say something and yet not admit anything. And finally replying: “My name’s Clyde Griffiths all right, but the rest of this isn’t true. I don’t know anything about the rest of it.”

“Oh, come now, Mr. Griffiths! Don’t begin by trying to play fast and loose with me. We won’t get anywhere that way. You won’t help yourself one bit by that with me, and besides I haven’t any time for that now. Remember these men here are witnesses to what you say. I’ve just come from Lycurgus – your room at Mrs. Peyton’s – and I have in my possession your trunk and this Miss Alden’s letters to you – indisputable proof that you did know this girl, that you courted and seduced her last winter, and that since then – this spring – when she became pregnant on your account, you induced her first to go home and then later to go away with you on this trip in order, as you told her, to marry her. Well, you married her all right – to the grave – that’s how you married her – to the water at the bottom of Big Bittern Lake! And you can actually stand here before me now, when I tell you that I have all the evidence I need right on my person, and say that you don’t even know her! Well, I’ll be damned!”

And as he spoke his voice grew so loud that Clyde feared that it could be clearly heard in the camp beyond. And that Sondra herself might hear it and come over. And although at the outrush and jab and slash of such dooming facts as Mason so rapidly outlined, his throat tightened and his hands were with difficulty restrained from closing and clinching vise-wise, at the conclusion of it all he merely replied: “Yes, sir.”

“Well, I’ll be damned!” reiterated Mason. “I can well believe now that you would kill a girl and sneak away in just such a way as you did – and with her in that condition! But then to try to deny her own letters to you! Why, you might as well try to deny that you’re here and alive. These cards and

notes here – what about them? I suppose they're not from Miss Finchley? How about those? Do you mean to tell me these are not from her either?"

He waved them before Clyde's eyes. And Clyde, seeing that the truth concerning these, Sondra being within call, was capable of being substantiated here and now, replied: "No, I don't deny that those are from her."

"Very good. But these others from your trunk in the same room are not from Miss Alden to you?"

"I don't care to say as to that," he replied, blinking feebly as Mason waved Roberta's letters before him.

"Tst! Tst! Tst! Of all things," clicked Mason in high dudgeon. "Such nonsense! Such effrontery! Oh, very well, we won't worry about all that now. I can easily prove it all when the time comes. But how you can stand there and deny it, knowing that I have the evidence, is beyond me! A card in your own handwriting which you forgot to take out of the bag you had her leave at Gun Lodge while you took yours with you. Mr. Carl Graham, Mr. Clifford Golden, Mr. Clyde Griffiths – a card on which you wrote 'From Clyde to Bert, Merry Xmas.' Do you remember that? Well, here it is." And here he reached into his pocket and drew forth the small card taken from the toilet set and waved it under Clyde's nose. "Have you forgotten that, too? Your own handwriting!" And then pausing and getting no reply, finally adding: "Why, what a dunce you are! – what a poor plotter, without even the brains not to use your own initials in getting up those fake names you had hoped to masquerade under – Mr. Carl Graham – Mr. Clifford Golden!"

At the same time, fully realizing the importance of a confession and wondering how it was to be brought about here and now, Mason suddenly – Clyde's expression, his frozen-faced terror, suggesting the thought that perhaps he was too frightened to talk at once changed his tactics – at least to the extent of lowering his voice, smoothing the formidable wrinkles from his forehead and about his mouth.

"You see, it's this way, Griffiths," he now began, much more calmly and simply. "Lying or just foolish thoughtless denial under such circumstances as these can't help you in the least. It can only harm you, and that's the truth. You may think I've been a little rough so far, but it was only because I've been under a great strain myself in connection with this case, trying to catch up with some one I thought would be a very different type from yourself. But now that I see you and see how you feel about it all – how really frightened you are by what has happened – it just occurs to me that there may be something in connection with this case, some extenuating circumstances, which, if they were related by you now, might throw a slightly different light on all this. Of course, I don't know. You yourself ought to be the best judge, but I'm laying the thought before you for what it's worth. For, of course, here are these letters. Besides, when we get to Three Mile Bay to-morrow, as we will, I hope, there will be those three men who met you the other night walking south from Big Bittern. And not only those, but the innkeeper from Grass Lake, the innkeeper from Big Bittern, the boatkeeper up there who rented that boat, and the driver who drove you and Roberta Alden over from Gun Lodge. They will identify you. Do you think they won't know you – not any of them – not be able to say whether you were up there with her or not, or that a jury when the time comes won't believe them?"

And all this Clyde registered mentally like a machine clicking to a coin, yet said nothing – merely staring, frozen.

"And not only that," went on Mason, very softly and most ingratiatingly, "but there's Mrs. Peyton. She saw me take these letters and cards out of that trunk of yours in your room and from the top drawer of your chiffonier. Next, there are all those girls in that factory where you and Miss Alden worked. Do you suppose they're not going to remember all about you and her when they learn that she is dead? Oh, what nonsense! You ought to be able to see that for yourself, whatever you think. You certainly can't expect to get away with that. It makes a sort of a fool out of you. You can see that for yourself."

He paused again, hoping for a confession. But Clyde still convinced that any admission in connection with Roberta or Big Bittern spelled ruin, merely stared while Mason proceeded to add:

“All right, Griffiths, I’m now going to tell you one more thing, and I couldn’t give you better advice if you were my own son or brother and I were trying to get you out of this instead of merely trying to get you to tell the truth. If you hope to do anything at all for yourself now, it’s not going to help you to deny everything in the way you are doing. You are simply making trouble and condemning yourself in other people’s eyes. Why not say that you did know her and that you were up there with her and that she wrote you those letters, and be done with it? You can’t get out of that, whatever else you may hope to get out of. Any sane person – your own mother, if she were here – would tell you the same thing. It’s too ridiculous and indicates guilt rather than innocence. Why not come clean here and now as to those facts, anyhow, before it’s too late to take advantage of any mitigating circumstances in connection with all this – if there are any? And if you do NOW, and I can help you in any way, I promise you here and now that I’ll be only too glad to do so. For, after all, I’m not out here just to hound a man to death or make him confess to something that he hasn’t done, but merely to get at the truth in the case. But if you’re going to deny that you even knew this girl when I tell you I have all the evidence and can prove it, why then – ” and here the district attorney lifted his hands aloft most wearily and disgustedly.

But now as before Clyde remained silent and pale. In spite of all Mason had revealed, and all that this seemingly friendly, intimate advice seemed to imply, still he could not conceive that it would be anything less than disastrous for him to admit that he even knew Roberta. The fatality of such a confession in the eyes of these others here. The conclusion of all his dreams in connection with Sondra and this life. And so, in the face of this – silence, still. And at this, Mason, irritated beyond measure, finally exclaiming: “Oh, very well, then. So you’ve finally decided not to talk, have you?” And Clyde, blue and weak, replied: “I had nothing to do with her death. That’s all I can say now,” and yet even as he said it thinking that perhaps he had better not say that – that perhaps he had better say – well, what? That he knew Roberta, of course, had been up there with her, for that matter – but that he had never intended to kill her – that her drowning was an accident. For he had not struck her at all, except by accident, had he? Only it was best not to confess to having struck her at all, wasn’t it? For who under such circumstances would believe that he had struck her with a camera by accident. Best not to mention the camera, since there was no mention anywhere in the papers that he had had one with him.

And he was still cogitating while Mason was exclaiming: “Then you admit that you knew her?”
“No, sir.”

“Very well, then,” he now added, turning to the others, “I suppose there’s nothing for it but to take him back there and see what they know about him. Perhaps that will get something out of this fine bird – to confront him with his friends. His bag and things are still back there in one of those tents, I believe. Suppose we take him down there, gentlemen, and see what these other people know about him.”

And now, swiftly and coldly he turned, while Clyde, already shrinking at the horror of what was coming, exclaimed: “Oh, please, no! You don’t mean to do that, do you? Oh, you won’t do that! Oh, please, no!”

And at this point Kraut speaking up and saying: “He asked me back there in the woods if I wouldn’t ask you not to take him in there.” “Oh, so that’s the way the wind blows, is it?” exclaimed Mason at this. “Too thin-skinned to be shown up before ladies and gentlemen of the Twelfth Lake colony, but not even willing to admit that you knew the poor little working-girl who worked for you. Very good. Well, then, my fine friend, suppose you come through with what you really do know now, or down there you go.” And he paused a moment to see what effect that would have. “We’ll call all those people together and explain just how things are, and then see if you will be willing to stand there and deny everything!” But noting still a touch of hesitation in Clyde he now added: “Bring him

along, boys.” And turning toward the camp he proceeded to walk in that direction a few paces while Kraut taking one arm, and Swenk another, and beginning to move Clyde he ended by exclaiming:

“Oh, please, no! Oh, I hope you won’t do anything like that, will you, Mr. Mason? Oh, I don’t want to go back there if you don’t mind. It isn’t that I’m guilty, but you can get all my things without my going back there. And besides it will mean so much to me just now.” Beads of perspiration once more burst forth on his pale face and hands and he was deadly cold.

“Don’t want to go, eh?” exclaimed Mason, pausing as he heard this. “It would hurt your pride, would it, to have ’em know? Well, then, supposing you just answer some of the things I want to know – and come clean and quick, or off we go – and that without one more moment’s delay! Now, will you answer or won’t you?” And again he turned to confront Clyde, who, with lips trembling and eyes confused and wavering, nervously and emphatically announced:

“Of course I knew her. Of course I did. Sure! Those letters show that. But what of it? I didn’t kill her. And I didn’t go up there with her with any intention of killing her, either. I didn’t. I didn’t, I tell you! It was all an accident. I didn’t even want to take her up there. She wanted me to go – to go away with her somewhere, because – because, well you know – her letters show. And I was only trying to get her to go off somewhere by herself, so she would let me alone, because I didn’t want to marry her. That’s all. And I took her out there, not to kill her at all, but to try to persuade her, that’s all. And I didn’t upset the boat – at least, I didn’t mean to. The wind blew my hat off, and we – she and I – got up at the same time to reach for it and the boat upset – that’s all. And the side of it hit her on the head. I saw it, only I was too frightened the way she was struggling about in the water to go near her, because I was afraid that if I did she might drag me down. And then she went down. And I swam ashore. And that’s the God’s truth!”

His face, as he talked, had suddenly become all flushed, and his hands also. Yet his eyes were tortured, terrified pools of misery. He was thinking – but maybe there wasn’t any wind that afternoon and maybe they would find that out. Or the tripod hidden under a log. If they found that, wouldn’t they think he hit her with that? He was wet and trembling.

But already Mason was beginning to question him again.

“Now, let’s see as to this a minute. You say you didn’t take her up there with any intention of killing her?”

“No, sir, I didn’t.”

“Well, then, how was it that you decided to write your name two different ways on those registers up there at Big Bittern and Grass Lake?”

“Because I didn’t want any one to know that I was up there with her.”

“Oh, I see. Didn’t want any scandal in connection with the condition she was in?”

“No, sir. Yes, sir, that is.”

“But you didn’t mind if her name was scandalized in case she was found afterwards?”

“But I didn’t know she was going to be drowned,” replied Clyde, slyly and shrewdly, sensing the trap in time.

“But you did know that you yourself weren’t coming back, of course. You knew that, didn’t you?”

“Why, no, sir, I didn’t know that I wasn’t coming back. I thought I was.”

“Pretty clever. Pretty clever,” thought Mason to himself, but not saying so, and then, rapidly: “And so in order to make everything easy and natural as possible for you to come back, you took your own bag with you and left hers up there. Is that the way? How about that?”

“But I didn’t take it because I was going away. We decided to put our lunch in it.”

“We, or you?”

“We.”

“And so you had to carry that big bag in order to take a little lunch along, eh? Couldn’t you have taken it in a paper, or in her bag?”

“Well, her bag was full, and I didn’t like to carry anything in a paper.”

“Oh, I see. Too proud and sensitive, eh? But not too proud to carry a heavy bag all the way, say twelve miles, in the night to Three Mile Bay, and not ashamed to be seen doing it, either, were you?”

“Well, after she was drowned and I didn’t want to be known as having been up there with her, and had to go along – ”

He paused while Mason merely looked at him, thinking of the many, many questions he wanted to ask him – so many, many more, and which, as he knew or guessed, would be impossible for him to explain. Yet it was getting late, and back in the camp were Clyde’s as yet unclaimed belongings – his bag and possibly that suit he had worn that day at Big Bittern – a gray one as he had heard – not this one. And to catechize him here this way in the dusk, while it might be productive of much if only he could continue it long enough, still there was the trip back, and en route he would have ample time to continue his questionings.

And so, although he disliked much so to do at the moment, he now concluded with: “Oh, well, I tell you, Griffiths, we’ll let you rest here for the present. It may be that what you are saying is so – I don’t know. I most certainly hope it is, for your sake. At any rate, you go along there with Mr. Kraut. He’ll show you where to go.”

And then turning to Swenk and Kraut, he exclaimed: “All right, boys. I’ll tell you how we’ll do. It’s getting late and we’ll have to hurry a little if we expect to get anywhere yet tonight. Mr. Kraut, suppose you take this young man down where those other two boats are and wait there. Just halloo a little as you go along to notify the sheriff and Sissel that we’re ready. And then Swenk and I’ll be along in the other boat as soon as we can.”

And so saying and Kraut obeying, he and Swenk proceeded inward through the gathering dusk to the camp, while Kraut with Clyde went west, hallooing for the sheriff and his deputy until a response was had.

Chapter 10

The effect of Mason's re-appearance in the camp with the news, announced first to Frank Harriet, next to Harley Baggott and Grant Cranston, that Clyde was under arrest – that he actually had confessed to having been with Roberta at Big Bittern, if not to having killed her, and that he, Mason, was there with Swenk to take possession of his property – was sufficient to destroy this pretty outing as by a breath. For although amazement and disbelief and astounded confusion were characteristic of the words of all, nevertheless here was Mason demanding to know where were Clyde's things, and asserting that it was at Clyde's request only that he was not brought here to identify his own possessions.

Frank Harriet, the most practical of the group, sensing the truth and authority of this, at once led the way to Clyde's tent, where Mason began an examination of the contents of the bag and clothes, while Grant Cranston, as well as Baggott, aware of Sondra's intense interest in Clyde, departed first to call Stuart, then Bertine, and finally Sondra – moving apart from the rest the more secretly to inform her as to what was then occurring. And she, following the first clear understanding as to this, turning white and fainting at the news, falling back in Grant's arms and being carried to her tent, where, after being restored to consciousness, she exclaimed: "I don't believe a word of it! It's not true! Why, it couldn't be! That poor boy! Oh, Clyde! Where is he? Where have they taken him?" But Stuart and Grant, by no means as emotionally moved as herself, cautioning her to be silent. It might be true at that. Supposing it were! The others would hear, wouldn't they? And supposing it weren't – he could soon prove his innocence and be released, couldn't he? There was no use in carrying on like this now.

But then, Sondra in her thoughts going over the bare possibility of such a thing – a girl killed by Clyde at Big Bittern – himself arrested and being taken off in this way – and she thus publicly – or at least by this group – known to be so interested in him – her parents to know, the public itself to know – maybe –

But Clyde must be innocent. It must be all a mistake. And then her mind turning back and thinking of that news of the drowned girl she had first heard over the telephone there at the Harriets'. And then Clyde's whiteness – his illness – his all but complete collapse. Oh, no! – not that! Yet his delay in coming from Lycurgus until the Friday before. His failure to write from there. And then, the full horror of the charge returning, as suddenly collapsing again, lying perfectly still and white while Grant and the others agreed among themselves that the best thing to be done was to break up the camp, either now or early in the morning, and depart for Sharon.

And Sondra returning to consciousness after a time tearfully announcing that she must get out of here at once, that she couldn't "endure this place," and begging Bertine and all the others to stay close to her and say nothing about her having fainted and cried, since it would only create talk. And thinking all the time of how, if this were all true, she could secure those letters she had written him! Oh, heavens! For supposing now at this time they should fall into the hands of the police or the newspapers, and be published? And yet moved by her love for him and for the first time in her young life shaken to the point where the grim and stern realities of life were thrust upon her gay and vain notice.

And so it was immediately arranged that she leave with Stuart, Bertine and Grant for the Metissic Inn at the eastern end of the Lake, since from there, at dawn, according to Baggott, they might leave for Albany – and so, in a roundabout way for Sharon.

In the meantime, Mason, after obtaining possession of all Clyde's belongings here, quickly making his way west to Little Fish Inlet and Three Mile Bay, stopping only for the first night at a farmhouse and arriving at Three Mile Bay late on Tuesday night. Yet not without, en route, catechizing Clyde as he had planned, the more particularly since in going through his effects in the tent at the camp he had not found the gray suit said to have been worn by Clyde at Big Bittern.

And Clyde, troubled by this new development, denying that he had worn a gray suit and insisting that the suit he had on was the one he had worn.

“But wasn’t it thoroughly soaked?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, where was it cleaned and pressed afterward?”

“In Sharon.”

“In Sharon?”

“Yes, sir.”

“By a tailor there?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What tailor?”

Alas, Clyde could not remember.

“Then you wore it crumpled and wet, did you, from Big Bittern to Sharon?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And no one noticed it, of course.”

“Not that I remember – no.”

“Not that you remember, eh? Well, we’ll see about that later,” and deciding that unquestionably Clyde was a plotter and a murderer. Also that eventually he could make Clyde show where he had hidden the suit or had had it cleaned.

Next there was the straw hat found on the lake. What about that? By admitting that the wind had blown his hat off, Clyde had intimated that he had worn a hat on the lake, but not necessarily the straw hat found on the water. But now Mason was intent on establishing within hearing of these witnesses, the ownership of the hat found on the water as well as the existence of a second hat worn later.

“That straw hat of yours that you say the wind blew in the water? You didn’t try to get that either at the time, did you?”

“No, sir.”

“Didn’t think of it, I suppose, in the excitement?”

“No, sir.”

“But just the same, you had another straw hat when you went down through the woods there. Where did you get that one?”

And Clyde, trapped and puzzled by this pausing for the fraction of a second, frightened and wondering whether or not it could be proved that this second straw hat he was wearing was the one he had worn through the woods. Also whether the one on the water had been purchased in Utica, as it had. And then deciding to lie. “But I didn’t have another straw hat.” Without paying any attention to that, Mason reached over and took the straw hat on Clyde’s head and proceeded to examine the lining with its imprint – Stark & Company, Lycurgus.

“This one has a lining, I see. Bought this in Lycurgus, eh?”

“Yes, sir.”

“When?”

“Oh, back in June.”

“But still you’re sure now it’s not the one you wore down through the woods that night?”

“No, sir.”

“Well, where was it then?”

And Clyde once more pausing like one in a trap and thinking: My God! How am I to explain this now? Why did I admit that the one on the lake was mine? Yet, as instantly recalling that whether he had denied it or not, there were those at Grass Lake and Big Bittern who would remember that he had worn a straw hat on the lake, of course.

“Where was it then?” insisted Mason.

And Clyde at last saying: “Oh, I was up here once before and wore it then. I forgot it when I went down the last time but I found it again the other day.”

“Oh, I see. Very convenient, I must say.” He was beginning to believe that he had a very slippery person to deal with indeed – that he must think of his traps more shrewdly, and at the same time determining to summon the Cranstons and every member of the Bear Lake party in order to discover, whether any recalled Clyde not wearing a straw hat on his arrival this time, also whether he had left a straw hat the time before. He was lying, of course, and he would catch him.

And so no real peace for Clyde at any time between there and Bridgeburg and the county jail. For however much he might refuse to answer, still Mason was forever jumping at him with such questions as: Why was it if all you wanted to do was to eat lunch on shore that you had to row all the way down to that extreme south end of the lake when it isn't nearly so attractive there as it is at other points? And: Where was it that you spent the rest of that afternoon – surely not just there? And then, jumping back to Sondra's letters discovered in his bag. How long had he known her? Was he as much in love with her as she appeared to be with him? Wasn't it because of her promise to marry him in the fall that he had decided to kill Miss Alden?

But while Clyde vehemently troubled to deny this last charge, still for the most part he gazed silently and miserably before him with his tortured and miserable eyes.

And then a most wretched night spent in the garret of a farmhouse at the west end of the lake, and on a pallet on the floor, while Sissel, Swenk and Kraut, gun in hand, in turn kept watch over him, and Mason and the sheriff and the others slept below stairs. And some natives, because of information distributed somehow, coming toward morning to inquire: “We hear the feller that killed the girl over to Big Bittern is here – is that right?” And then waiting to see them off at dawn in the Fords secured by Mason.

And again at Little Fish Inlet as well as Three Mile Bay, actual crowds – farmers, store-keepers, summer residents, woodsmen, children – all gathered because of word telephoned on ahead apparently. And at the latter place, Burleigh, Heit and Newcomb, who, because of previously telephoned information, had brought before one Gabriel Gregg, a most lanky and crusty and meticulous justice of the peace, all of the individuals from Big Bittern necessary to identify him fully. And now Mason, before this local justice, charging Clyde with the death of Roberta and having him properly and legally held as a material witness to be lodged in the county jail at Bridgeburg. And then taking him, along with Burton, the sheriff and his deputies, to Bridgeburg, where he was promptly locked up.

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