

carpet, where, Mrs. Hartley explained, the folding Japanese screen had stood before they cleared this room of lumber.

"Now, Mrs. Hartley was terrified of something. That I'll swear. She has very expressive hazel eyes, and she did not even seem to hear what I was saying. She stood there with her face flushed, hugging her dressing-gown round her in the cold, but she seemed as much puzzled as terrified. I warned her, for her own good, that if she was having anything to do with thieves and killers she would regret it."

He moved his neck.

"The worst of it occurred when her husband came bursting in, tying on *his* dressing-gown, and alleging that *he* had been roused by our voices 'yelling' in his flat in the middle of the night. I was not yelling. But he was in a vile temper. His hair, which was rumpled, stuck straight out in front like the peak of a cap; and his face, which I should have described as nondescript and rather unpleasant, now looked concretely sinister.

"By this time the constable had grown apologetic, but I would have none of this. 'Never apologize, never explain' is my motto; an aristocratic motto, if I may say so. Hartley, I am afraid, was angry. He denied that he had ever seen or heard of the old man.

" 'So,' he said, 'you saw a pair of gloves pick up a gun and shoot somebody who doesn't exist? Blast my ears with lightning! Did you wake me up in the middle of the night just to tell me that? You didn't see a line of cigars hanging in the air and smoking themselves, did you?

Look at this flat. It's an ordinary flat, or at least I thought it was. Look at this door. It's a practical door, and no invisible man walked through it. If you want to search the place, go ahead. And then get out.'

"But this did not last. When we went into the sitting-room, where it was warm, something occurred that struck the anger off his face. Up to that time I was at my wits' end. Perhaps I talked sharply, and turned things out of drawers; but I am accustomed to being obeyed unquestioningly, as any clerk of mine will tell you. Then I knew I was right, for I saw it: a photograph, in an old-fashioned frame, brightly lighted by a table-lamp. There was no mistaking those staring spectacled eyes; it was a photograph of the old man who had disappeared.

"Hartley knew that I had seen it, and his expression altered. The whole atmosphere of the room changed, too. He made a quick movement to get in front of the picture, or snatch it away, but I was there ahead of him. His forward movement was so violent that he slipped on the smooth pile of the carpet; he must have twisted his ankle, for he went down with a crash that turned him muddy pale. Mrs. Hartley ran to him, screaming his first name. When she lifted up his shoulders I was rather appalled by the look she gave me; for what had I done?

"A few minutes later I was out in the street, advised by the constable to go home. They showed me proofs of the truth. I could not doubt the truth, and you will sympathize with me when I say I had the horrors all night. But I'm a taxpayer, and a decent citizen, and I insist on knowing the meaning of it. That photograph was a picture of Hartley's grandfather, who died before the war."

At this point, quietly, a constable came into the room with an official form filled up. There was a rattle as Inspector Roberts put coal on the fire. The echo of Rodman's shrill voice still seemed to linger; firelight grew brighter in the big room while Roberts used the poker. And the constable said:

"A Mr. and Mrs. Hartley to see you, sir."

"Ask Mr. and Mrs. Hartley to wait a moment," said Colonel March blandly.

He got up and went over to stand with his back to the fire. He had the military trick of standing as though bent a little forward from the waist, his arms slightly curved at his sides; but this stiffness contrasted with the amusement of his speckled face. A bland blue eye surveyed them, and his short pipe seemed in danger of scorching his nose as he sniffed amusedly at it.

"We must discuss the matter first," he explained. "Mr. Rodman, I rather envy you. Your adventure is what a younger generation would describe as hot stuff."

"If," said Rodman, freezing up, "you prefer to make fun of——"

"Not at all," the other assured him. "I believe every word you say."

Inspector Roberts, though youngish, was well trained. He did not actually drop the poker with which he was stirring the fire, though he looked as if it had been a near thing.

"You think," cried Rodman, "I saw a——?"

"Ghost? Oh, no." Colonel March added, as though consolingly: "Not this time, anyhow."

"Then it was a real crime after all? A real man was shot with a real bullet in that room? Is that what you think?"

"I am quite sure of it."

Rodman seemed as taken aback as though he had never believed this. "But how? I ask you, *how?* There was nobody in the room; there was no corpse, as your friend says; there was no bullet-hole in the window; there was——"

"Wait a bit," urged March. "Never mind your notebook for the moment, Roberts. Before we consider any course of action, I should like to dig a few more gems out of our friend's admirable narrative style. Mr. Rodman, how long have the Hartleys lived in that flat?"

"Two weeks last Monday, I think."

"Previous to last night, had you ever been inside the room where the man was shot?"

"Never."

"That little table in the room, now. You said it was a round table. Was it also a three-legged table?"

"Didn't I tell you it was? But please listen to me," begged Rodman, as though he had not been able to get in a word edgewise. "If a man was killed there, who was he? I've questioned people till I'm blue in the face, and nobody ever saw him or heard of him. Where's his body? And how was it done? And did Hartley kill him? I ask you, as a public servant, to answer relevant questions, if you can think of any answer. What difference does it make whether the table had three legs or four legs? Or whether the room had one door or two doors or six doors, for that matter?"

"On the contrary," said Colonel March, "the number