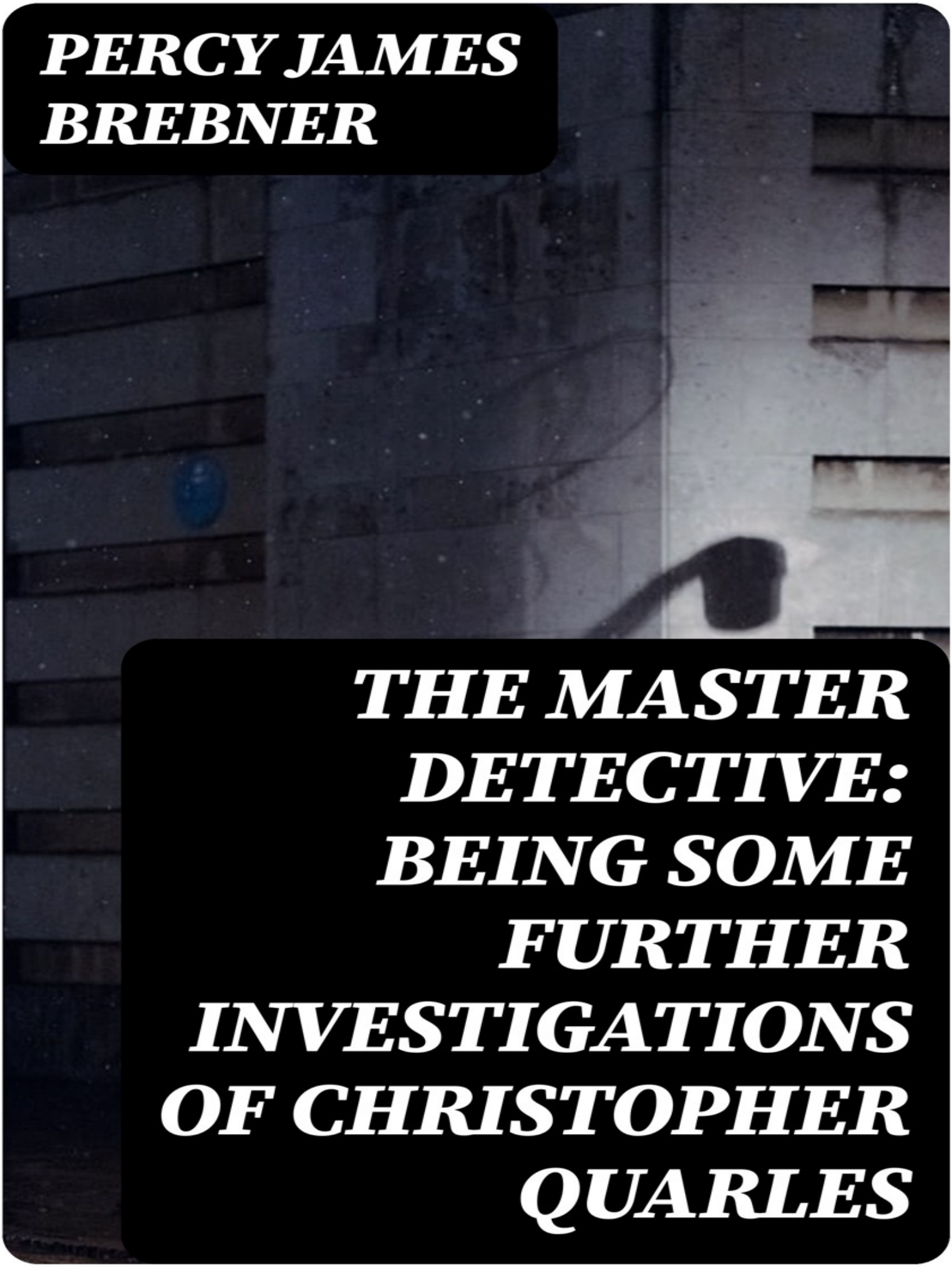

PERCY JAMES BREBNER

THE MASTER DETECTIVE: BEING SOME FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS OF CHRISTOPHER QUARLES

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EAN 8596547330240

DigiCat, 2022
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THE MASTER DETECTIVE

CHAPTER I

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THE STRANGE CASE OF SIR GRENVILLE RUSHOLM

Sir Grenville Rusholm, Baronet, was dead. The blinds were down at the Lodge, Queen's Square. For the last few days lengthy obituary notices had appeared in all the papers, innumerable wreaths and crosses had arrived at the house, and letters of sympathy and condolence had poured in upon Lady Rusholm. The dead man had filled a considerable space in the social world, although politically he had counted for little. Politics were not his metier, he had said. He had consistently refused to stand for parliament, his wealth had supported neither party, and perhaps his social success was due more to his wife's charm than to his own importance.

To-day the funeral was to take place. By his own desire his body was not being taken to Moorlands, the family seat in Gloucestershire, but was to be buried at Woking. The family chapel did not appeal to him. Indeed, he had never spent much of his time at Moorlands, preferring his yacht or the Continent when he was not at Queen's Square.

Last night the coffin had been brought downstairs and placed in the large drawing-room, the scene of many a brilliant function, although by day it was a somewhat dreary apartment. The presence of the coffin there added to the depression, and the scent of the flowers was almost overpowering.

Many of the mourners were going direct to Woking, but there was a large number of guests at the house who were received by the young baronet. Naturally, Sir Arthur was of a sunny disposition, and his personality and expectations had made him a favorite in society since he had left Cambridge a year ago. To-day his face was more than grave. It was drawn as if he were in physical pain, and it was evident how keenly he felt his father's death. Lady Rusholm did not appear until the undertakers entered the house. She came down the wide stairs, a pathetic figure in her deep mourning, heavier than present-day fashion has made customary. She spoke to no one, but went straight to the drawing-room and, standing just inside the doorway, watched the men whose business is with death, as if she feared some indignity might be offered to her dear one. In a few moments her husband must pass out of that room for ever, and it was hardly wonderful if she visualized for an instant the many occasions on which he had been a central figure there.

The bearers stooped to lift the coffin from the trestles on to their shoulders, then they straightened themselves under their burden, but they did not move, at least only to start slightly, while their faces changed from gravity to horror. Lady Rusholm uttered a short cry, and there was

consternation in the faces of the guests in the hall. There could be no mistake; the sound, though dull and muffled, was too loud for that. It was a knock from inside the coffin.

The man in charge whispered to the bearers. No, none of them had inadvertently caused the sound. The coffin was replaced on the trestles, and for a moment there was silence. No one moved; every one was waiting for that knock again. It did not come.

The chief man stood looking at the coffin, then at the carpet, and, after some hesitation, he crossed the room to Sir Arthur, who stood in the doorway beside his mother.

"Was—was anything put into the coffin?" he whispered. "Something which
Sir Grenville wished buried with him, something which may have slipped?"

"No."

"I think—I think the coffin should be opened," whispered Dr. Coles, the family physician.

"But he is dead! You know he is dead, doctor!"

"A trance—sometimes a mistake may happen, Sir Arthur. It was a distinct knock. The coffin should certainly be opened."

"And quickly—quickly!"

It was Lady Rusholm who spoke, in a strained and unnatural voice.

Sir Arthur tried to persuade his mother to leave the room while this was done, but she would not go. With a great effort she calmed herself and remained with her son, the doctor, and two or three guests while the coffin was

unscrewed. The lid was lifted off, and for a moment no one spoke.

"Empty!" the doctor cried.

As he spoke Lady Rusholm swayed backwards, and would have fallen had not her son caught her.

There were two masses of lead in the coffin. There was no body.

Sir Arthur Rusholm immediately communicated with Scotland Yard, and the utter confusion which followed this gruesome discovery had only partially subsided when I, Murray Wigan, entered the house to enquire into a mystery which was certainly amongst the most remarkable I have ever had to investigate.

Some of those invited to the funeral had left the house before I arrived, but the more personal friends were still there, and the story as I have set it down was corroborated by different people with a wealth of detail which seemed to leave nothing unsaid. Besides interviewing Sir Arthur and the doctor, I saw Lady Rusholm for a few moments. She was exceedingly agitated, as was natural, and I only asked her one or two questions of a quite unimportant nature, but I was glad to see her. I like to get into personal touch with the various people connected with my cases as soon as possible.

I was in the house two hours or more, questioning servants, examining doors and windows, and, to be candid, my investigations told me little. When I left Queen's Square I knew I had a complex affair to deal with, and it was natural my thoughts should fly to the one man who might help me. If I could only interest Christopher Quarles in the case!

I remember speaking casually of a well-known person once and being met with the question: Who is he? It may be that some of you have never heard of Christopher Quarles, professor of philosophy, and one of the most astute crime investigators of this or any other time. It has been my privilege to chronicle some of our adventures together, and his help has been of infinite benefit to me. Without it, not only should I have failed to elucidate some of those mysteries the solving of which have made me a power in the detective force, but I should never have seen his granddaughter, Zena, who is shortly to become my wife.

For some months past the professor had given me no assistance at all. He would not be interested in my cases, and would not enter the empty room in his house in Chelsea where we had had so many discussions. It was a fad of his that he could think more clearly in this room, which had only three chairs and an old writing table in it, yet perhaps I ought not to call it a fad, remembering the results of some of our consultations there.

Months ago we had investigated a curious case in which jewels had been concealed in a wooden leg. The solution had brought us a considerable reward, and upon receiving the money Quarles had declared he would investigate no more crimes. He had kept his word, had locked up the empty room, and although I think I had sorely tempted him to break his vow on more than one occasion, I had never quite succeeded.

As I got into a taxi I considered how very seldom it is that the ruling passion ever dies. The Queen's Square mystery ought to shake Quarles's resolution if anything could.

Zena was out when I got to Chelsea, but the professor seemed pleased to see me.

"Are you out of work, Wigan?" he asked, looking at the clock.

I did not want him to think I had come with any deliberate intention, so
I answered casually:

"No. As a fact I am rather busy. I came out to Chelsea to think. Chelsea air is rather good for thinking, you know."

"It used to be," he answered. "I'm glad I have given up criminal hunting, Wigan."

"I still find excitement in it," I answered carelessly, "and really I think criminals have grown cleverer since your time."

He looked at me sharply. I thought the remark would pique his curiosity.

"That means you have had some failures lately."

"On the contrary, I have been remarkably successful."

"Glad to hear it," he returned. "What makes you say criminals are more clever then?"

"The Queen's Square Mystery."

"I don't read the papers as carefully as I did," he remarked.

"It only happened this morning," I answered. "I daresay you noticed that Sir Grenville Rusholm died the other day. Some one has stolen his body, that is all."

"Stolen his—"

"Yes, it is rather a curious case, but we won't talk about it. I know that sort of thing doesn't interest you now."

I talked of other things—anything and everything—but I noted that he was restless and uninterested.

"What did Sir Grenville die of?" he asked suddenly.

"A sudden and most unexpected collapse after influenza."

"And the body has been stolen?"

"Yes."

"I should like to hear about it, Wigan."

I hesitated until he began to get angry, and then I told him the story as
I have told it here. I had just finished when Zena came in.

"You, Murray! What has brought you here at this hour of the day?" she asked in astonishment.

"Two pieces of lead," murmured Quarles.

"A case! Have you got interested in a case, dear? I am glad. What is the mystery, Murray?"

"Where is the key of my room, Zena?" Quarles asked.

She took it from the drawer in a cabinet.

"I am not going to begin again," said the professor, "but this—this is an exception. Come with us, Zena. Come and ask some of your absurd questions. I wonder whether my brain is atrophied. There are cleverer criminals than there used to be in my time, are there, Wigan? We shall see."

He led the way to the empty room at the back of the house, muttering to himself the while, and Zena and I smiled at each other behind his back as we followed him. He was like an old dog on the trail again, and I did not believe for a moment this case would be an exception.

"Tell the story, Wigan," he said when we were seated. "All the details, mind, great and small."

So I went through the facts again.

"I made a careful study of the house and garden," I went on. "The Lodge is a corner house, the garden is small, and a garage with an opening into the other road—Connaught Road—has been built there. A 'Napier' car was in the garage."

"Did you see the chauffeur?" asked Quarles.

"Yes. The car had not been used for a week. I could find no trace of an entry having been made from the garden, but the latch of one of the French windows of the drawing-room was unfastened. When I saw it this window could be pushed open from outside. No one seems to have undone it that morning, so the fact is significant."

Quarles nodded.

"Besides the servants only five people slept in the house that
night—Lady Rusholm, her son, two elderly ladies—cousins of Sir
Grenville's who had come from Yorkshire for the funeral—and a Mr.
Thompson, a friend of the family who was staying in the house when Sir
Grenville died."

"Who closed the windows after the body was taken to the drawing-room?" asked Quarles.

"One of the undertaker's men."

"Is he positive he fastened them?"

"He is, but under the circumstances he is not anxious to swear to it."

"And the door of the room, had that been kept locked?"

"Yes. The key was in Sir Arthur's possession."

"Who first entered the room this morning?"

"Sir Arthur when he took in two or three wreaths which arrived late last night. The room was just as it had been left on the previous day. The wreaths and crosses were not disarranged in any way."

"And there were only two pieces of lead in the coffin when it was opened?" queried Zena.

"A large lump and a small one," I answered.

"Couldn't they have been packed in such a way that they would not have slipped?"

"Of course they could. No doubt that was the intention, but the work was badly done because the thieves did it hurriedly," I answered.

"One of your foolish questions, Zena," said Quarles, looking keenly at her. He always declared that her foolish inquiries put him on the right road.

"It is a good thing the lead did slip, or the gruesome theft might never have been discovered," she said.

"Was the coffin a very elaborate one?" Quarles asked, after nodding an acquiescence to Zena's remark.

"No, quite a plain one."

"Has the drawing-room more than one door?"

"Only one into the hall. There is a small room out of the drawing-room—a small drawing-room in fact. Lady Rusholm does her correspondence there. It can only be reached by going through the large room, and the door between the rooms was locked. Sir Arthur got the key from his mother and opened the door for me."

"What could any one want with a dead body?" asked Zena.

"If we could answer that question we should be nearing the end of the affair," said Quarles. "Years ago there were two men—Burke and Hare—who—"

"Oh, the day of resurrectionists is past," I said.

"Don't be so dogmatic," returned Quarles sharply. "A corpse has been stolen; can you suggest any use a corpse can be put to if it is not to serve some anatomical or medical purpose? Remember, Wigan, that mentally and materially there is always a tendency to move in a circle. What has been will be again—altered according to environment—but practically the same. Always start with the assumption that a similar case has happened before. Our difficulties would be much greater if Solomon had been wrong, and there were constantly new things under the sun. Undoubtedly there are some interesting points in this case. Have you arrived at a theory?"

"No, at least only a very vague one. Sir Arthur seems certain that his father had no enemies, and my theory would require an enemy; some one who, having failed to injure him in life, had found an opportunity of wreaking vengeance on the dead clay by preventing the body having Christian burial."

"That is a very interesting idea, Wigan; go on."

"I daresay you remember that the Rusholm baronetcy caused some excitement about twenty years ago. The papers have recalled it in connection with Sir Grenville's death. Sir John Rusholm—the baronet at that time—was a very old man, and during the two years before his death several relations died. He had no son living, so the heir was a nephew, the son of a much younger brother who had gone

to Australia and died there. This nephew had not been heard of for a long time, and as soon as he became the heir, Sir John advertised for him in the Australian papers. There was no answer, and the Yorkshire Rusholms, who are poor, expected to inherit. Then at the very time when Sir John was on his death-bed news came of the nephew. He had been in India for some years, had proposed there, had married and had a son. There had been so many lives between him and the title that he had thought nothing about it until a chance acquaintance had shown him the advertisement in an old Australian paper. He wrote that he was starting for England at once, but Sir John was dead when he arrived. That is how Sir Grenville came into the property."

"Was his claim disputed?" asked Zena.

"Oh, no, there was no question about it. He had family papers which only the nephew could possibly have, and you may depend the Yorkshire Rusholms would have found a flaw in the title if they could. Their disappointment must have been great, and if I could discover that Sir Grenville had an enemy amongst them—some relation he had refused to help, for instance—I should want to know all about him."

"Yours is a very interesting idea," said Quarles. "Do you happen to know who Lady Rusholm was?"

"The daughter of a tea planter in Ceylon. Her social success here has been very great, as you know."

"A very charming woman I should say," said the professor. "I saw her once—not many months ago. She was distributing the prizes at a technical institute in North London. I remember how well she spoke, and what an exceedingly poor second the chairman was in spite of his

being a Member of Parliament. You have got a constable at The Lodge, I suppose?"

"Two. I have given instructions that no one is to be allowed in the room, on any pretext whatever."

"Good. You and I will go there to-morrow. I'll be your assistant, Wigan—say an expert in finger prints. I'll meet you outside The Lodge at ten o'clock. There are so many clues in this case, the difficulty is to know which one to follow, I must have a few quiet hours to decide."

I smiled. It was like Quarles to make such a statement, especially after I had declared that criminals were becoming cleverer. Never were clues more conspicuous by their absence, I imagine. I was, however, delighted to have the professor's help. It was like old times.

The next morning I met Quarles in Queen's Square, and his appearance was proof of his enthusiasm. He posed as rather a feeble, inquisitive old man who could talk of nothing but finger prints and their significance. Sir Arthur was evidently not impressed with his ability to solve any mystery. When we entered the drawing-room he seemed lost in admiration of the apartment, and did not even glance at the open coffin which stood on the trestles. He walked to the window, drew aside the blind, and looked into the garden. Then he looked into the small room.

"No other exit here but the window. An entrance might have been made by that window."

"The door between the two rooms was locked," said Sir Arthur. "I had to get the key from my mother when Mr. Wigan wanted to go in. It is my mother's special room, but

she had been so occupied in nursing my father that she had not used it for more than a week."

Then Quarles looked at the wreaths, wanted to know which ones had been left near the coffin when the room was locked for the night, and the wreaths which Sir Arthur pointed out he examined carefully. Then he pointed to a large cross lying on an armchair.

"Has that one been there all the time?"

Sir Arthur explained that two or three wreaths had come late in the evening. He had himself brought them into the room on the morning of the funeral. That cross was one of them.

"Ah, it is a pity you didn't bring them in that night. You might have surprised the villains at work."

"We were in bed by eleven. Do you imagine they began before that?"

"Possibly," said Quarles, as he turned his attention to the coffin. He examined the lid with a lens, for the finger marks, he said, which one might expect to find near the screw holes. Then he studied the sides of the coffin. The two pieces of lead did not appear to interest him very much, but he asked me to push the smaller piece from the foot of the coffin. He examined the lining, felt the padding, tried its thickness with the point of a penknife, and in doing so he slit the lining.

"Sorry," he said. "My old hands are not as steady as they used to be.

Quite a thick padding, and quite a substantial coffin."

He had brought out some of the padding with his knife, and this left part of the floor of the coffin near the foot

visible. This he tapped with the handle of his penknife to test its thickness.

"Quite an ordinary coffin—plain but good," he went on, looking at the brass fittings.

"It was my father's wish that it should be so," said Sir Arthur.

"Strange what a lot of trouble some men take about their funerals, while others never trouble at all," said the professor, looking round the room again. "I suppose, Sir Arthur, like the rest of us your father had enemies."

"Not that I know of."

"An old rival, for instance, in your mother's affections."

"There was nothing of the kind. Mr. Thompson, who is still in the house—you saw him yesterday, Mr. Wigan—will endorse this. He knew my mother before her marriage."

"Still, some people must have envied your father. But for him, another branch of the family would have inherited the estates, I understand. Has he always been on friendly terms with this branch of the family?"

"Always, and has helped them considerably."

"Experience teaches us that it is often the most difficult thing to forgive those who do us favors," said Quarles sententiously.

"Do you believe that some one out of wanton cruelty has stolen the body with no purpose beyond mere revenge?"

"It looks like it, Sir Arthur. The body will probably be discovered presently. Possibly the thief will furnish you with a clue so that you may know he or she has taken revenge. I am afraid there is nothing to be done but to wait. I feel greatly for Lady Rusholm."

"The waiting will be dreadful. I am trying to persuade my mother to go away at once."

"Why not? You will remain in London, of course. Your father's papers may throw some light on the mystery."

"I have interviewed lawyers, and I have already gone through some of his private papers. I do not think any light will come that way. Do you want to look at anything else in the house?"

"I think not," I said.

"My specialty is finger prints," said Quarles, "nothing else. In this case my specialty has proved useless." When we left the house Quarles turned toward Connaught Road.

"Is it your real opinion that the only thing to do is to wait?" I asked.

"Let's go and see if we can find any more finger prints," he chuckled.

The garage was shut. Cut into the big gates was a small door.

"Not a difficult lock," said Quarles. "I may have a key that will fit it.
We must get in somehow."

"There is a door into the garage from the garden. We could have gone that way."

"And advertised ourselves to the servants. I wanted to avoid that."

He found a key to open the door, and he made no pretense of looking for finger prints now. He examined the car. It was a big one—open—with a cape hood—capable of carrying five or six persons besides the driver. He was interested in the seating accommodation, and the make of

the car generally. There was a window which had a shutter to it high up in the garage looking into the side road, and a small window at the back looking into the garden which had no shutter. Quarles got on a stool to examine the frame of this window, and then inspected the cloths for cleaning and the towels which were in the garage.

"Come on. The interest of this place is soon exhausted," he said.

In less than a quarter of an hour we were walking along Connaught
Road again.

"By the way, what is Dr. Coles's address?" asked Quarles.

I gave it to him. It was a turning off Connaught Road.

"I shall go and see him, and then I have a call to make elsewhere. Come to Chelsea to-night, Wigan. Take my word for it, criminals are no cleverer than they used to be."

When I went to Chelsea that evening I found the professor and Zena waiting for me in the empty room. He was evidently impatient to talk.

"My brain may possibly require oiling, Wigan, but Zena's questions are just as absurd as they ever were," he began. "She wanted to know why the lead had been packed so carelessly, and what use a dead body could be to any one. No bad points of departure for an inquiry. Now, when the coffin was opened after the knock had been heard, a little sawdust from the screw holes fell on the carpet. It was there when we went into the room this morning. We may reasonably argue that some sawdust must have fallen when the coffin was opened during the night. But no one seems to have noticed it."

"It might easily have escaped casual notice even if the thieves neglected to remove it, which is unlikely," I returned.

"It would not be so easy to remove, for the carpet is a thick one, and the thieves would be in a hurry, you know. Also there were wreaths about and I could find no trace of sawdust in them. But further, the screw holes show a clear, perfect thread which one would hardly expect if the coffin had been opened and closed again. Small points, but they promote speculation. Yesterday, before I met you in Queen's Square, I went to see the undertakers, and the man who was in charge of the arrangements says emphatically that there was no sign of the coffin having been opened. A little sawdust was the first thing he looked for."

"Are you trying to prove that the lead was already in the coffin when it was taken to the drawing-room?" I asked.

"No. I am only trying to show that it is doubtful whether the coffin was opened in the drawing-room."

"The change could not have been made in the bedroom, or the lead would have slipped during the journey downstairs," I said.

"I agree, and we are therefore forced to the assumption that the body was actually carried to the drawing-room, yet we are doubtful whether the coffin was opened there."

"I have no doubt," I returned.

"That is a mistake on your part, Wigan. Doubts are often the forerunners of convictions. My doubt led me to a curious discovery. When I went to the undertaker's I saw the men who actually made the coffin. It was a very plain coffin, less expensive than might have been expected for a man in Sir Grenville's position. Now one of the men, in answer to a

careful question or two, mentioned a curious fact. In the floor of the coffin, close to the foot of it, there was a wart in the wood. This morning you saw me slit the lining and remove some of the padding. There was no wart in the floor of the coffin, Wigan."

"You mean the coffins were changed?" said Zena.

"I do. One with the body in it was removed, and another with lead in it was placed on the trestles in its stead. The plainer the coffin the easier it would be to duplicate it by description. The makers of the second coffin would not have the original before them to copy, you must remember."

"But only Lady Rusholm and her son could possess the necessary knowledge to give such a duplicate order," I said.

"You forget Mr. Thompson. He was an intimate friend, and staying in the house at the time."

"I do not understand why the lead was not packed securely," said Zena.

"It puzzles me," said Quarles. "I could only find one answer. It was such an obvious blunder that it must have been intentional. The lumps of lead endorsed this idea. Whilst the large piece was flat and difficult to move, the small piece was like a ball and meant to roll and strike the side the moment the coffin was moved. It was presumably necessary that the theft should be discovered, and your ingenious idea of a revengeful enemy appealed to me, Wigan. I elaborated the idea to Sir Arthur, you will remember."

I had nothing to say—no fault to find with his argument so far. Quarles rather enjoyed my silence, I fancy.

"Sir Arthur unconsciously gave me a great deal of information," he went on. "First, it was curious that the wreaths which came that night should be left in the hall. It would have been more natural to place them in the drawing-room. Why were they not put there? It looked as if there were a desire not to open the room again. Another wreath might have come later when it would have been very inconvenient to open the door, and not to have put the other wreath into the room might have caused comment in the light of after events. Again, influenza is a fairly common complaint, and Sir Grenville died of a sudden and unexpected collapse; yet Sir Arthur said it was by his father's desire that the coffin was plain. A man suffering from influenza does not expect to die, and it seemed strange to me that he should arrange details of his funeral. By itself it is not a very important point, since Sir Grenville's wishes may have been known for a long time, but almost in the same breath, emphasis was laid on the fact that Lady Rusholm had not used the small room out of the drawing-room for more than a week. Why not? There was absolutely no reason why she should not continue to do her correspondence there, since her husband was not seriously ill and could not require constant nursing. I think an excuse was wanted for locking up that room, and I believe you will find that none of the servants have entered the room during this period, and that the blind has been down all the time. I believe the duplicate coffin was hidden there."

"But how was the duplicate coffin got into the house?" asked Zena.

"In much the same way as the real coffin was got out of it, I imagine. You remember the arrangement of the motor, Wigan; its size and swivel seats give ample room to put the coffin on the floor of the car. In the dead of night the coffin was carried across the garden, placed in the car and driven away. On some previous night the same car had driven away and brought back the duplicate coffin."

"The chauffeur said the car had not been out for a week," I said.

"So far as he knew," Quarles returned. "It was cleaned afterwards. There is a shutter to the window in Connaught Road, and over the window looking into the garden one of the towels had been nailed, clumsily, and with large nails which were still on a shelf. I found the towel with the nail holes in it."

"Where was the body taken?" asked Zena.

"That I do not know."

"And what was the use of it to any one?"

"Ah, I think I can answer that," said Quarles. "I had an interesting talk with Dr. Coles after I left you to-day, Wigan. He told me he was not altogether surprised at Sir Grenville's sudden collapse. The attack of influenza was comparatively slight, but when Mr. Thompson arrived unexpectedly from India it was evident to the doctor that he had brought bad news. Both Sir Grenville and his wife were worried. Coles says Sir Grenville was a man of a nervous temperament, who would have been utterly lost without his wife. The doctor believes the sudden worry occasioned the collapse."

"He had no suspicion of suicide, I suppose?"

"As a matter of form I put the question to him. I even suggested the possibility of foul play. He scouted both ideas, and enlarged upon the affectionate relations which existed between husband and wife. He imagined the trouble had something to do with financial affairs. To-day, you will remember, Wigan, Sir Arthur spoke about his mother going away. That is not quite in keeping with the rest of her actions. We have ample testimony and proof that Lady Rusholm is courageous and resourceful. Dr. Coles is greatly impressed with her character; her personality appealed to me when I heard her speak at the technical institute. She would be present when the undertakers were removing the body, which is not customary. She remained while the coffin was opened, and although she apparently fainted—it was her son who caught her, remember—she saw you soon afterwards. It seems to me two questions naturally ask themselves. What was the ill news Mr. Thompson brought from India? Was Lady Rusholm prepared for that knock from the coffin?"

"We are becoming speculative, indeed," I said.

"Are we? Consider for a moment the amount of evidence we have that the theft of the body could only be contrived with the knowledge and help of Lady Rusholm, her son, or Mr. Thompson; or, which is more likely, by the connivance of all three. Then try to imagine their purpose. What use could they make of a dead body? Why take such trouble that the theft should be discovered?"

"We have not accumulated enough facts to tell us," I answered.

"I think we may indulge in a guess," said Quarles. "Sir Grenville, on his own showing, had not expected to come into the title. Has it occurred to you, Wigan, how exceedingly complete his claim was? Every possible doubt seems to have been considered and arranged for. It was almost too complete. Now, supposing Sir Grenville was not really Sir Grenville Rusholm, supposing he had acquired the family knowledge and papers from the real man—when that man was dying, perhaps—and in due time used them to claim the estates. For about twenty years he has enjoyed the result of his fraud, his intimate friend, Mr. Thompson, being in his confidence, and very likely receiving some of the spoil. Suddenly Mr. Thompson learns that some one else knows the secret, and hurries to England to warn Sir Grenville."

"But why steal the body?" asked Zena.

"On leaving Dr. Coles, Wigan, I went to see Professor Sayle, who, with the exception of the German physician Hauptmann, probably knows more about oriental diseases and medicine than any man living. He proved to me that it is possible by means of a certain vegetable drug to produce apparent death. Fakirs often use it. The ordinary medical man would certainly be deceived. Ultimately actual death would ensue were not the antidote to the drug administered, but the suspension of life will continue for a considerable time."

"It is pure speculation," I said.

"We have got to explain the theft of a dead body. I explain it by saying there was no dead body," said Quarles sharply, as if I were denying a self-evident fact. "I go still

further. Judging by Coles's description of the man calling himself Sir Grenville, I doubt his courage for carrying through either the original fraud or the plan of escape. I believe his wife was the moving spirit throughout, and it is quite possible the drug was administered without her husband's knowledge."

"And where is the body now?" asked Zena.

"I do not know, but you tempt me to guesswork. Sir Grenville was a keen yachtsman, and probably he is on board his yacht still resting in his coffin, waiting for his wife to bring the antidote to the drug. His son and Mr. Thompson took the body that night in the car. There must have been two of them to deal with the burden, for I imagine the yacht had no crew on her at the time. They would hardly take others into their confidence. As everything had to be accomplished between eleven o'clock at night and before dawn the next day, I imagine the yacht was lying somewhere in the Thames estuary. I grant this is guesswork, Wigan."

"I do not see why it was necessary the theft should become known," I said.

"It would occasion delay in the settlement of the estate. It placed difficulties in the way of the rightful heir, It would help to throw a distinct doubt whether, in spite of all the evidence that might be forthcoming, Sir Grenville had committed fraud. There was even a possibility that the son might be left in possession after all. I daresay we shall learn more when we tackle Lady Rusholm and her son to-morrow."

When we went to Queen's Square next morning we found that Lady Rusholm was gone. She had, in fact, already gone

when her son told us he was trying to persuade her to go. Mr. Thompson had left later in the day.

We found that even Quarles's guesswork was very near the actual facts, although he had hardly given Lady Rusholm sufficient credit for the working out of the scheme. The real heir, Sir John's nephew, had died in Ceylon before Baxter—that was Sir Grenville's real name—had married. On his death-bed he had entrusted his papers to Baxter to send to England, and Baxter had shown them to his future wife. The scheme came full grown into her head. They left Ceylon to meet again in India, and there they were married, Baxter giving his name as Grenville Rusholm. Thompson was their only confidant. He could not be left out because he had known all about Rusholm. There was one other who knew, but they believed him to be dead. He was a wanderer, somewhat of a ne'er-do-well, and to Thompson's consternation, after twenty years, he had turned up in Calcutta very much alive. He was going to England to expose the fraud. He did not suspect Thompson, who came to England first.

All this we heard from the son who for a short hour or two had called himself Sir Arthur Rusholm. He was able to prove quite conclusively that he was in entire ignorance of the fraud until Thompson's arrival. His mother confessed everything to him then. It was she who had planned how to get out of the difficulty. The duplicate coffin had been made at Harwich, for a yachtsman who was to be taken abroad to be buried, they had explained, but it was brought to Queen's Square and hidden in the small drawing-room as Quarles had surmised. It was only to spare his mother and

father that the son had entered into the scheme, and I fancy Quarles was a little annoyed that he had not suspected this.

Mrs. Baxter was not caught. Indeed, there were many people who disbelieved the whole story of the fraud, even when the man who knew arrived from India—a very strong proof of Mrs. Baxter's charm and personality. I have heard from her son that she is in South America, and that her husband is not dead. So far as I am aware the new baronet has taken no steps to bring them to justice.

As Quarles says, she is a genius, and it would be a thousand pities if she were in prison.

CHAPTER II

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THE KIDNAPING OF EVA WILKINSON

The Queen's Square affair seemed to have exhausted Quarles's enthusiasm. I tried to interest him in several cases without success, and I began to think we really had done our last work together, when on his own initiative he mentioned Ewart Wilkinson to me. He had a personal interest in the man; I had only just heard his name.

The multi-millionaire is not such a figure in this country as he is in America, but Ewart Wilkinson was undoubtedly on the American scale. He had made his money abroad, how or exactly where remained matters of uncertainty, and if one were inclined to believe the stories told in irresponsible journals, there must have been much in the past which he found it wiser not to talk about. With such tales I have nothing to do. I never met the millionaire, was, in fact, quite uninterested in him until his wealth was concerned in a case which came into my hands.

With Christopher Quarles it was different. For a few days on one occasion he had stayed in the same house with the millionaire in Scotland, and had been impressed with him. Wilkinson was rough, but a diamond under the rough, according to Quarles. He may have had his own ideas of