

A photograph of a waterfall cascading over a stone bridge in a lush forest. The waterfall is the central focus, with water splashing over the bridge's edge and falling into a rocky stream below. The surrounding area is filled with dense green foliage, including trees and bushes, creating a vibrant and natural setting. The lighting is soft, highlighting the textures of the rocks and the movement of the water.

***FRANK  
FROEST***

***THE GRELL  
MYSTERY***

**Frank Froest**

# **The Grell Mystery**

**Including "The Maelstrom"**

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# Chapter I

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Hallett blundered into an unlit lamp-post, swore with fervour, and stood for a second peering for some identifiable landmark in the black blanket of fog that muffled the street. Where he stood, a sluggish dense drift had collected, for following the treacherous habit of London fogs, it lay in patches. About him he could hear ghostly noises of traffic muffled and as from afar, but whether the sounds came from before or behind, from right or left, was more than his bewildered senses could fathom.

For the last ten minutes he had been walking in a spectral city among spectres. A by-street had trapped him and no single wayfarer had come within his limited area of sight. He lifted his hat and rubbed his head perplexedly as he came to the conclusion that he was lost. It was as though London had set out to teach the young man from New York a lesson. The fog had him beat.

"Guess I shall fetch somewhere, sometime," he muttered and strode doggedly on.

He had gone perhaps a dozen yards when from ahead a quick burst of angry voices broke out. Then there came a running of feet on the sodden pavement. Hallett came to a stop, listening. The fog seemed to thin a trifle.

Out of the thickness the outlines of a woman's figure loomed vaguely. She was running swiftly and easily with lithe grace. As she noted the motionless figure of a man, she swerved towards him and he caught the hurried pant of her breath caused rather, he judged, by emotion than by exertion. She halted impetuously as she came opposite to

him and he caught a glimpse of her face the mobile face of a girl, with parted lips and arresting blue eyes. She was hatless, and though Hallett could not have described her attire, he got an impression of some soft black stuff, clinging to a slim figure. She surveyed him in a quick, appraising glance, and before he could speak had thrust something into his hand.

"Take it run," she gasped, and tore forward into the fog.

It had all happened in a fraction of time. She had checked rather than halted in her flight. An exclamation burst from Hallett's lips, and he was almost startled into obedience of the hurried command. Then heavier footsteps thudding near brought him to himself. He moved to interrupt the pursuer. As a man came into view, Hallett's hand fell on his shoulder.

"One moment, my friend--"

An oath was spat at him as the man wrenched himself free and was blotted out in gloom. Hallett shrugged his shoulders philosophically, and made no attempt at pursuit.

"Alarums and excursions," he murmured. "Wonder what it's all about?"

In nine and twenty years of life Jimmie Hallett had acquired something of a philosophy that made him content to accept things as they were, save only when they affected his personal well-being. Then he would sit up and kick with both feet. His lack of curiosity was almost cold-blooded. There was indeed a certain inoffensive arrogance in his attitude towards the ordinary affairs of life. He was the sort of man who would not cross the road to see a dog-fight.

Yet he always had a zest for excitement, providing it had novelty. A man who has scrambled for a dozen years in a hotch-potch of vocations retains little enthusiasm for commonplaces. When Hallett Senior had gone out from the

combined effects of a Wall Street cyclone and an attack of heart failure, his son and heir had found himself with a hundred thousand dollars less than nothing. Young Hallett went to his only surviving relative an elderly uncle with a liver and with the confidence of youth rejected the offer of a cheap stool in that millionaire's office. He believed he could get a living as an actor but a five weeks' tour in a fortieth-rate company, which finally stranded in the wilds of Michigan convinced him of the futility of that idea. Thereafter he drifted over a wide area of the United States. Farm-hand, railwayman, cow-puncher, prospector, and one very vivid voyage as a deck-hand on a cattle boat. It was inevitable that of course he should eventually drift into that last refuge of the unskilled intellectual classes journalism. Equally of course it was inevitable that fate, who delights to take a hand at unexpected moments, should interfere when he showed signs of making a mark in his profession. His uncle died intestate and Jimmie leapt at a bound to affluence beyond his wildest dreams.

He had stayed long enough in New York after that to realise how extensive and variegated were the acquaintances who had stood by him in adversity. They took pains that he should not forget it. And forthwith he had taken counsel of Sleath, the youthful-looking city editor of *The Wire*, who breathed words of wisdom in his ear.

"Go to Europe, Jimmie. Travel and improve your mind. Let the sharks forget you."

So Jimmie Hallett stood lost in a fog, somewhere within hail of Piccadilly Circus, with an unopened package in his hand and the memory of a girl's voice in his mind. A less observant man than Hallett could not have failed to perceive that the girl was of a class unlikely to be involved in any street broil. The man flattered himself that he was



not impressionable. But he retained an impression of both breeding and looks.

He dangled the package it was small and light on his finger, and moved forward till an electric standard gave him an opportunity of examining it more closely. It was closely sealed at both ends with red sealing wax, but the wrapping itself had apparently been torn from an ordinary newspaper. He hesitated for a moment and then tore it open. He could scarcely have told what he expected to find. Certainly not the thirty or forty cheques that lay in his hand. One by one he turned them slowly over, as though the inspection would afford some indication of why they had been so unexpectedly thrust upon him. A bare possibility that he had been made an unwitting accomplice in a theft was dismissed as he noticed that the cheques were dead they all bore the cancelling mark of the bank. Why on earth should the girl have been running away with the useless cheques? And why should she have so impulsively confided them to a stranger to avoid them falling into the hands of her headlong pursuer?

Not that Hallett would have worried overmuch about these problems had the central figure been plain or commonplace. She had interested him, and his interest, once aroused in any person or thing, was always vivid.

Keen-eyed, he scrutinised the cheques, in an endeavour to decipher the signature. They were all made out by the same person, and payable to "self." The name he read as J. E. Greye-Stratton. Whoever J. E. Greye-Stratton was he had drawn within three months, in turns ranging from fifty to three hundred pounds, an amount totalling Hallett reckoned in United States terms more than fifteen thousand dollars.

He stuffed the cheques into his pocket as an idea materialised in his mind. An opportune taxi pushed its nose

stealthily through the wall of fog and halted at his hail.

"Think you can fetch a post-office, sonny?" he demanded.

"Get you anywhere, sir," assented the driver cheerfully.

"Find your way by the stars, I suppose," commented Hallett, the tingle of fog still in his eyes.

Nevertheless, the driver justified his boast and his fare was shortly engrossed with the letter "G "in the London directory. There was only one entry of the name he sought, and he swiftly transcribed the address to a telegraph blank.

"Greye-Stratton, James Edward, Thirty-four, Linstone Terrace Gardens, Kensington, W."

Shortly the cab was again crawling through the fog, sounding its siren like a liner in mid-channel. All that the passenger could make out was a hazy world, dotted with faint yellow specks, which now and again transformed themselves into lights as they drew near them. Later the yellow specks grew less as they swerved off the main road, and in a little while the car drew to a halt.

The driver indicated the house opposite which they were standing, with a jerk of his thumb, as Hallett descended.

"That's the place, sir."

It was little that Hallett could see of the house, save that it was a big old-fashioned building, with heavy bow-windows, and a basement, protected by wrought iron rails. There was no light in any part of the house, not even the hall. Twice the young man wielded the big brass knocker, arousing nothing apparently but an echo. As he raised it a third time, the door was thrown open with disconcerting suddenness, and he was aware of someone standing within the blackness of the hall. Hallett could distinguish nothing of his features.

"I wish to see Mr. Greye-Stratton," said Hallett, and tendered a card.

The other made no attempt to take it. "He won't see you," he declared with harsh abruptness, and only a sudden movement of Hallett's foot prevented the door being slammed in his face.

His teeth gritted together, and he thrust the door back and himself over the lintel. He was an easy-tempered man, but the deliberate discourtesy had roused him to a cold anger. "That will do, my man," he said, clipping off each word sharply. "I want ordinary civility, and I'm going to see that I get it. My name is Hallett James Hallett, of New York. Now you go and tell your master that I want to see him about certain property of his that has come into my hands. Quick's the word."

There was a pause. When the man in the hall spoke again his tone had changed. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Hallett. It is dark I mistook you for someone else. I am sure Mr. Greye-Stratton would have been happy to see you, but unfortunately he is ill. If you will leave whatever you have, I will see that it reaches him. By the way, I am not a servant, I am a doctor. Gore is my name."

Hallett thrust his hand in the pocket that contained the cheques. He had no intention of handing them over without some information about the girl in black. And he fancied he detected a note of anxiety in the doctor's voice, as though, while forced in a way to civility, he was anxious for the visitor to go.

"I quite understand, Dr. Gore," he said coldly, "I will call at some other time. I should like to return the property to its owner in person for a special reason. Good-night."

"Then you will not entrust whatever you have to me?"

"I would rather see Mr. Greye-Stratton at some future time." He half turned to go.

"One moment." The doctor laid a detaining hand upon his sleeve. "I did not wish to disturb my patient unnecessarily, but if you insist I will arrange you shall see him. Will you come with me? I am afraid it is rather dark. The electric light has gone wrong frightfully awkward."

Hallett groped his way after his guide, his brain busy. It was queer that the light should have given out queerer still that no apparent attempt had been made at illumination, either with oil or candles. The place was deadly quiet, but that was only natural with a sick man in the house. He wondered why some servant had not answered the door. A man of less hardened temperament would have felt nervous.

The doctor's footsteps falling with ghostly softness on the carpet in front of him ceased.

"Here we are, Mr. Hallett. Keep to your left. This is the room. If you will wait here a second, I will see if I can get a light. Where are you? Give me your hand."

Slim delicate fingers gripped Hallett's hand as he followed the direction. He passed through a doorway and for a moment his back was turned towards the doctor. He heard something whirl in the air and a blow descended with crushing force on his right shoulder. He wheeled with a cry, but there was no question of resistance. A second blow fell, this time better directed, and a million stars danced before his eyes. He dropped like a felled ox.

# Chapter II

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Punctually at half-past six, the little plated alarm clock exploded and Weir Menzies kicked off the blankets. Punctually at seven o'clock he had breakfast. Punctually at half-past seven he delved and weeded in the square patch of ground that was the envy and despair of Magersfontein Road, Upper Tooting. Punctually at twenty-past eight he left his semi-detached house and boarded a car for Westminster Bridge.

There were occasions when the routine was upset, but it will be observed that on the whole Weir Menzies was a creature of habit. He had all that respect for order and method that has made Upper Tooting what it is. From the heavy gold watch-chain that spanned his ample waist, to his rubicund face and heavy black moustache, he wore Tooting respectability all over him. It was a cause of poignant regret to him that circumstance prevented him taking any part in the local government of the borough. Nevertheless, he belonged to the local constitutional club, and was the highly esteemed people's warden at the Church of All Saints. The acute observer, knowing all this, might have judged him a deserving wholesale ironmonger.

And the acute observer would have been wrong.

Punctually at half-past nine, Weir Menzies would pass up a flight of narrow stone stairs at the back of

New Scotland Yard into the chief inspector's room of the Criminal Investigation Department. From his buttonhole he would take the choice blossom gathered that day at Magersfontein Road, Upper Tooting place it carefully in a

freshly-filled vase, exchange his wellbrushed morning coat for a jacket of alpaca, place paper protectors on his cuffs, and settle down on his high stool he preferred a high stool to half an hour's correspondence.

Mr. Weir Menzies, churchwarden of Upper Tooting, was in fact Chief Detective Inspector Menzies of the Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard. Not that he made any secret of it. There was no reason why he should. It is only on rare occasions that a detective needs to conceal his profession.

Although the residents of Magersfontein Road, Upper Tooting, knew that Mr. Weir Menzies was an admirable churchwarden, they had to take his reputation as a detective on trust. And being constant subscribers to circulating libraries, they knew him as an innocent fraud. A man something over forty, with an increasing waist-line and a ruddy face, was obviously against the rules of all the established authorities. It was only understandable because he was at Scotland Yard. Everyone knows that official detectives are heavy, dull, unimaginative fellows, always out of their depths, and continually receiving the good-natured assistance of amateurs, by whom they are held in tolerant contempt.

Magersfontein Road, Upper Tooting, would have smiled broadly had anyone remarked that Chief Detective Inspector Menzies held an international reputation that he was held one of the subtlest brains in the service; that he was a man who had time and again shown reckless courage and audacity in bringing off a coup; that he, in short, had individuality and a perfect knowledge of every resource at his disposal in carrying out any purpose to which he was assigned.

He looked a commonplace business man; he was a commonplace business man with many of the traits of his class. He hated the unexpected and protested that he loathed with a fierce abomination those cases in which he was engaged that meant a departure from the ordinary routine. But yet those cases, when they arose, there was no man more capable of dealing with their baffling intricacies than he. He had a faculty of adjusting himself to an emergency, of ruthlessly discarding the superfluous that in twenty-three years had carried him to within one rung of the top of the ladder.

It was shortly before midnight. He had returned from a remote suburb where with a corps of assistants he had made an entirely successful raid upon certain pickpockets, who had been too well acquainted with the resident detectives to give them any chance. It had been a triumph of organisation and vigilance, and Menzies had gone back to headquarters to arrange that the histories of the birds he had caged should be ready before the police court proceedings in the morning. He was struggling into his overcoat when he was summoned to the telephone. He picked up the receiver irritably.

"Hello," he said.

A musical buzz answered him, and Menzies allowed himself an expression that should be foreign to a churchwarden. Then far away and faint he caught a voice. "That Mr. Menzies?"

"Yes," he answered impatiently. "Speak up. Who is it? What do you want?"

A prolonged buzz reached him. He was conscious of someone speaking, but only intermittently could he hear what was said.

"Pretty done up buz-z come at once buz-z at thirty-four buzz-z Gardens, Kensington buzz-z."

"Number, please?" said a new and distinct voice.

"Blast," said Menzies simply, and put down the telephone. This addiction to forcible language on occasions of annoyance was a constant regret to him in his more reflective moments.

Jimmie Hallett's first impression on awakening had been that someone was swinging a sledge-hammer irregularly on to his temples. He lay still for a little, wondering why it should be. By and by he sat up and tried to piece together the events of the evening. His head ached intolerably, and he found consecutive thought painful.

It was totally dark, and he could make out nothing of where he was. Then the whole thing flashed across his mind and he staggered rather uncertainly to his feet and, steadying himself against the wall, struck a match.

The feeble nicker showed him a blue papered apartment, furnished as a dining-room. He had been lying just inside the door, which he now tried. It refused to answer to his tug, and he realised how weak he was as he all but toppled backwards. The match went out and he struck another.

Then it was that he noticed an electric switch and pulled it over. A rush of light flooded the room and he tottered to one of the Jacobean armchairs at the head of the table. The sledge-hammer was still swinging at his temples and things swayed dizzily to and fro before his eyes. He made a resolute effort to pull himself together. His eyes roved over the room, and he noticed a pedestal telephone on a small table in the corner furthest from him.

"What was the name of the chap Pinkerton gave me an introduction to," he muttered, and drawing a bundle of



papers from his breast pocket, sorted them till the envelope he needed lay at the top.

Chief Detective Inspector Weir Menzies' New Scotland Yard, S. W.

Cautiously the man began to move across the hearthrug towards the telephone. Four shambling steps he took, then something that had been hidden by the table tripped him and he sprawled on all fours. He gave a little gasp of horror, and steadying himself on his knees, held his hands a foot in front of his face, gazing at them stupidly. They were wet wet with blood, and the thing that had tripped him was the body of a man.

It is one thing to be brought in association at secondhand, so to speak, with a crime, as are doctors, reporters, and detectives, but quite another to be so closely identified with it as to be an actor in the drama. Hallett had seen violence, and even death in his time, but never had cold horror so thrilled him as it did now. In ordinary condition, with nerves previously unshaken, he would have been little more moved than a spectator at a play perhaps even less so, for real life tragedies are rarely well stage managed.

Circumstances, however, had conspired to bring home to him the last touch of terror. The sudden assault, the locked room, and now the dead man, had played the mischief with his nerves. He could have shrieked aloud.

He wiped his hands on his handkerchief, but the stain still remained. Carefully he stepped over the body and made his way to the telephone. His imagination was beginning to work, and he recalled cases where perfectly innocent men had been the victims of circumstantial evidence that had convicted them of hideous crimes. The story of the cheques thrust upon him in the fog seemed to him ridiculously

unconvincing. Had his mind been less overwrought, had he been able to take a calmer survey of the matter, he would probably never have given his own position a thought. He fingered the telephone book clumsily and his mind reverted to the coincidence that he should hold a letter of introduction to one of the senior detectives of Scotland Yard.

"Queer that it should come in so handy," he grinned feebly, and then weakness overcame him,

He gave the number. Hours seemed to elapse before he got Menzies. In a quick rush of words he made himself known to the detective and recited the happenings of the evening. He did not know that barely a dozen disconnected words had reached him. His strength was waning and he wanted Menzies to know everything before he gave way. As he finished the receiver dropped listlessly from his hand, and for the first time in his life Jimmie Hallett fainted.

At the other end of the wire Weir Menzies was left with one of those harassing little problems that he hated. It was an irregular hour an hour when, he had reckoned on being safely on his way home. For all the insistence of the voice at the telephone, it might be quite a trivial affair. Menzies did not like losing sleep for trivialities. People in trouble are apt to take distorted views of the importance of their difficulties. That is why private enquiry agencies flourish.

He was impatient with ambiguous messages. He thought of his well-aired bed and sighed. But the fact that he had been appealed to by name ultimately swayed him.

In two minutes he had set in motion the machinery which would reveal the point from which the voice originated. It needed no complex reasoning, no swift flash of inspiration: merely to look up in the Kensington directory a list of thoroughfares ending in "Gardens," and the names of persons who resided at the respective thirty-fours.

"And get a move on," he said to one of his men. "I don't want to hang about all night. Ask Riddle to come up and 'phone 'em through to the local people as you check 'em off. Tell 'em they'll oblige me by sending out as many spare men as they've got to ask at each address if anyone rang me up."

He adjusted his coat with precision, lit a cigar, and sauntered over to the underground station opposite. Barring accidents, the address would be ready for him by the time he reached Kensington.

He was not disappointed. One of the advantages which the Criminal Investigation Department has over the individual amateur detective, beloved by Magersfontein Road, is the co-operation at need of a practically unlimited number of trained men. True, the detective staff at Kensington had long since gone home, since there was no extraordinary business to detain them, but in this case a dozen ordinary constables served as well. Nine of them had returned when Menzies walked in. There was only one who interested him. He had reported that he could get no reply from Linstone Terrace Gardens.

"Did you find who lives there?" questioned the chief inspector.

The reply was prompt. "Yes, sir. Old gentleman named Greye-Stratton. He lives alone. Had two servants until last week, when he sacked 'em both because he said they had been bribed to poison him."

"Ah!" Menzies nodded approval. "You've got your wits about you, my lad. Where did you get all this from?"

The constable flushed with pleasure. He was young enough in the force to appreciate a compliment from the veteran detective. "The servant next door, sir," he answered.

"That will do. Thank you." Menzies rubbed his hands with satisfaction as he turned to the uniformed inspector by his side. "It begins to sound like a case," he muttered. All his petulance had gone. When it came to the point, the man was an enthusiast in his profession. "I'll get you to come along with me, inspector. It sounds uncommonly like a case."

# Chapter III

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The eminent Tooting churchwarden, perched on the stalwart shoulders of his uniformed colleague, wriggled his way on to the roof of the porch with an agility that was justifiable neither to his years nor his weight. He was taking a certain amount of risk, if there were no serious emergency within the place, for even a chief detective inspector may not break into a house without justification.

He worked for a while with a big clasp knife on the little landing window, with a skill that would have done credit to many of the professional practitioners who had passed through his hands, and at last threw up the sash and squeezed himself inside.

"Wonder if I'm making a damned fool of myself, after all?" he muttered with some misgiving as he struck a match and softly picked his way along the corridor. He was peculiarly sensitive to ridicule, and he knew the chaff that would descend on his head if it leaked out that he had elaborately picked out and broken into an empty house.

There would be no way of keeping the matter dark, for every incident of the night would have to be embodied in reports. Every detective in London keeps an official diary of his work.

He burned only one match to enable him to get his bearings. Noiselessly he descended the stairs into the hall, and his quick eye observed a splash of light across the floor. It came from under a doorway. He turned the handle and pushed. The door resisted.

"Locked," he murmured, and knocked thunderously.  
"Hello in there! Anyone about?"

Only the muffled reverberation of his own voice came back to him. Frowning, he strode to the doorway, slipped back the Yale lock, and admitted the uniformed man.

"If I had nerves, Mr. Hawksley, this place would give me the jumps," he observed. "There's something wrong here and I guess it's in that room. See, there's a light on."

"That's queer," commented the other. "It could only just have been switched on. I didn't notice it outside."

"Shutters," said Menzies. "Shutters and drawn curtains. Come on. I'm going to see what's behind that door."

There was no finesse about forcible entry this time. Half a dozen well-directed kicks shattered the hasp of the lock and sent the door flying open. Menzies and his companion moved inside.

For the moment the blaze of the electric light dazzled them. Menzies shaded his eyes with his hand. Then his glance fell from the overturned telephone down to the prostrate figure of Jimmie Hallett. He was across the room in an instant, and made swift examination of the prostrate man.

"Knocked clean out of time," he diagnosed. "Help me get him on the couch. Hello, there's another of 'em." He had observed the body on the hearth-rug.

He bent over the murdered man in close scrutiny but without touching the corpse. His lips pursed into a whistle as he marked the bullet wound that showed among the grey locks at the back of the head. He was startled but scarcely shocked.

He straightened himself up. "This looks a queer business altogether, Hawksley. You'd better get back to the station. Send up the divisional surgeon and 'phone through to the

Yard. They'd better let Sir Hilary Thornton and Mr. Foyle know. I shall need Congreve and a couple of men, and you'd better send for Carless and as many of his staff as can be reached quickly. They'll know the district."

The faculty of quick organisation is one of the prime qualities of a chief of detectives, and Menzies was at no loss. The first step in the investigation of most great mysteries is automatic the determination of the facts. It is a kind of circle from facts to possibilities, from possibilities to probabilities, and from probabilities to facts. But the original facts must be settled first, and for any one person to fix them single-handed is an impossibility.

There are certain aspects that must be settled by specialists; there may be a thousand and one enquiries to make in rapid succession. Menzies had no idea of playing a lone hand.

For a couple of hours a steady stream of officials and others descended on the house, and Linstone Terrace Gardens became the centre of such police activity as it had never dreamed would affect its austere respectability.

Men worked from house to house, interviewing servants, masters, mistresses, gleaning such facts as could be obtained of the lonely, eccentric old man, his habits, his visitors, friends, and relations. Inside the house the divisional surgeon had attended to Hallett (" No serious injury. May come round any moment "), and waited till flash-light photographs of the room had been taken from various angles ere examining the dead man. Draughtsmen made plans to scale of the room and every article in it. A fingerprint expert peered round searchingly, scattering black or grey powder on things which the murderer might have touched. In the topmost rooms Congreve, Menzies' right-

hand man, had begun a hasty search of the house that would become more minute the next day.

Menzies occupied a morning room at the back of the house and was deep in consultation with Sir Hilary Thornton, the grizzled assistant commissioner, and Heldon Foyle, the square-shouldered, well-groomed superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department.

There was little likeness between the three men, unless it lay in a certain hint of humour in the eyes and a firmness of the mouth. A detective without a sense of humour is lost.

Now and again Menzies broke off the conversation to issue an order or receive a report. Thornton observed for the first time the characters in which he made a few notes on the back of an envelope.

"I didn't know you knew Greek, Menzies," he remarked.

The chief inspector twiddled his pencil awkwardly. "I use it now and again, Sir Hilary. You see, if I should lose my notes by any chance it's odds against the finder reading them. I used to do them in shorthand, but I gave it up. There are too many people who understand it. Yes, what is it, Johnson?"

The man who had entered held out a paper. "Addresses of the cook and housemaid, sir. One lives at Potters Bar, the other at Walthamstow."

"Have them fetched by taxi," ordered Menzies curtly.

"Couldn't you have statements taken from them?" asked Hilary mildly. "It's rather a drag for women in the middle of the night."

Menzies smoothed his moustache. "We don't know what may develop here, sir. We may want to put some questions quickly."

While thus Menzies was straining every resource which a great organisation possessed to gather together into his



hands the ends of the case, Jimmie Hallett awoke once more. The throbbing in his head had gone and he lay for a while with closed eyes, listlessly conscious of the mutter of low voices in the room.

He sat up, and at once a dapper little man was by his side. "Ah, you've woke up. Feeling better? That's right. Drink this. We want you to pull yourself together for a little while."

"Thanks. I'm all right," returned Hallett mechanically. He drank something which the other held out to him in a tumbler, and a rush of new life thrilled through him. "Are you Mr. Menzies?"

"No, I'm the police divisional surgeon. Mr. Menzies is in the next room. Think you're up to telling him what has happened? He's anxious to know the meaning of all this."

"So am I," said Hallett grimly, and staggered to his feet. "Just a trifle groggy," he added as he swayed, and the little doctor thrust a supporting shoulder under his arm.

The three in the next room rose as Hallett was ushered in. It was Foyle who sprang to assist Hallett and lifted him bodily on to the settee, which Menzies pushed under the chandelier. The doctor went out.

"Quite comfortable, eh?" asked Foyle. "Let me make that cushion a bit easier for you. Now you're better. We won't worry you at present more than we can help, will we, Menzies?"

The three great detectives, for all that their solicitude seemed solely for the comfort of the young man, were studying him keenly and unobtrusively. Already they had talked him over, but any suspicions that they might have held were quite indefinite. At the opening stage of a murder investigation everyone is suspected. In that lies the difference between murder and professional crime. A burglary, a forgery, is usually committed for one fixed

motive by a fixed class of criminal, and the search is narrowed from the start. A millionaire does not pick pockets, but he is quite as likely as anyone else to kill an enemy. In a murder case, no detective would say positively that any person is innocent until he is absolutely certain of the guilt of the real murderer.

Hallett, whose brain was beginning to work swiftly, held out his hand to the chief inspector. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Menzies. I've got a letter of introduction to you from Pinkerton. That's how I came to ring you up. My name's Hallett."

Menzies shook hands. "Glad to know you, Mr. Hallett. This is Sir Hilary Thornton Mr. Heldon Foyle."

"And now," said Jimmie decisively, when the introductions were done. "Do you people think I killed this man, Greye-Stratton?"

The possibility had been in the minds of everyone in the room, but they were taken aback by the abruptness of the question. Weir Menzies laughed as though the idea were preposterous.

"Not unless you've swallowed the pistol, Mr. Hallett. We've found no weapon of any kind. You were locked in, you know. Now tell us all about it. I couldn't hear a word you said on the telephone."

They all listened thoughtfully until he had finished. Thornton elevated his eyebrows in question at his two companions as the recital closed.

"Where are those cheques?" asked Foyle. "They may help us."

Hallett patted his pockets in rapid succession. "They're gone!" he exclaimed. "They must have been taken off me when I was knocked out."

"H'm," said Foyle reflectively. "Can you make anything of it, Menzies?"

The chief inspector was gnawing his moustache a sure sign of bewilderment with him. He shrugged his shoulders. "There's little enough to take hold of," he returned. "Could you recognise any of the people you saw again, Mr. Hallett? the girl, the man who was running after her, or the chap in the house."

"I haven't the vaguest idea of what the face of either of the men was like," said Hallett.

"But the woman the girl?" persisted Menzies.

Hallett hesitated. "I--I think it possible that I might," he admitted. Then an impulse took him. "But I'm sure she's not the sort of person to be mixed up in in--"

The three detectives smiled openly. "In this kind of she-mozzle you were going to say," finished Menzies. "There's only one flaw in your reasoning. She is."

Wrung as dry of information as a squeezed sponge, Hallett was permitted to depart. The courtesy of Sir Hilary Thornton supplied him with a motor-car back to his hotel, the forethought of Menzies provided him with an escort in the shape of a detective sergeant. Hallett would have been less pleased had he known that that same mentioned detective sergeant was to be relieved from all other duties for the specific purpose of keeping an eye upon him. Weir Menzies was always cautious, and though his own impression of the young man had been favourable enough, he was taking no chances.

All through that night Weir Menzies drove his allies hither and thither in the attempt to bring the ends of the ravelled threads of mystery into his hand. No one knew better than he the importance of a first hot burst of pursuit. An hour in the initial stages of an investigation is worth a week later

on. The irritation at being kept out of bed had all vanished now that he was on the warpath. He could think without regret of a committee meeting of the Church Restoration Fund the following day from which he would be forced to absent himself.

Scores of messages had been sent over the private telegraph and telephone systems of the Metropolitan Police before, at seven o'clock in the morning, he took a respite. It was to an all-night Turkish bath in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly Circus that he made his way.

At nine o'clock, spruce and ruddy, showing no trace of his all-night work beyond a slight tightening of the brows, he was in Heldon Foyle's office. The superintendent nodded as he came in.

"You look fine, Menzies. Got your man?"

The other made a motion of his hand deprecatory of badinage. "Nope," he said. "But I've got a line on him."

Foyle sat up and adjusted his pince-nez. "The deuce you have. Who is he?"

"His name is Errol," said Menzies. "He's a prodigal stepson of Greye-Stratton, and was pushed out of the country seven years ago."

"Menzies," said Foyle, laying down his pince-nez. "You ought to be in a book."

# Chapter IV

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Weib, Menzies fitted his form to the big armchair that flanked Foyle's desk, and dragged a handful of reports secured by an elastic band from his breast pocket. Foyle snipped the end off a cigar and leaning back puffed out a blue cloud of smoke.

"It's been quick work, though I say it myself," observed Menzies complacently, "especially considering it's a night job. This night work is poisonous no way of getting about, no certainty of finding the witnesses you want, everyone angry at being dragged out of bed, and all your people knocked out the next day when they ought to be fresh."

Foyle flicked the ash from his cigar, and a mischievous glimmer shone in his blue eyes. "It's tough luck, Menzies. I know you hate this kind of thing. Now there's Forrester he's got nothing in particular on: if you like--"

Menzies' heavy eyebrows contracted as he scrutinised his chief suspiciously. Untold gold would not have induced him to willingly relax his hold of a case that interested him. "I'm not shifting any job of mine on to anyone else's shoulders, Mr. Foyle," he said acidly.

"That's all right," said Foyle imperturbably. "Go ahead."

Menzies tapped his pile of statements. "As far as I can boil down what we've got, this is how it stands. Old Greye-Stratton was a retired West Indian merchant dropped out of harness eight years ago, and has lived like a hermit by himself in Linstone Terrace Gardens ever since. It seems there was some trouble about his wife she was a widow named Errol when he married her, and she had one son.

Five years before the crash there was a daughter born. Anyway, as I was saying, trouble arose, and he kicked his wife out, sent the baby girl abroad to be educated, and the boy he would then be about twenty with his mother. Well, the woman died a few years after. Young Errol came down to Greye-Stratton, kicked up a bit of a shindy, and was given an allowance on condition that he left the country. He went to Canada, and thence on to the States, and must have been a bit of a waster. A year ago he returned to England and turned up in Linstone Terrace Gardens; there was a row and he went away swearing revenge. Old Greye-Stratton stopped supplies, and neither the lawyers nor anyone else have seen anything of Errol since."

Foyle rolled a pencil to and fro across his blottingpad with the palm of his hand. He interrupted with no question. What Menzies stated as facts he knew the chief inspector would be able to prove by sworn evidence, if necessary. He was merely summarising evidence. The inference he allowed to be drawn, and so far it seemed an inference that bade fair to place a noose round young Errol's neck.

"We have got this," went on Menzies, "from people in Linstone Terrace Gardens, from Greye-Stratton's old servants, from the house agents from whom he rented his house, and from Pembroke, of Pembroke and Stephens, who used to be his solicitors. Greye-Stratton was seventy years old, as deaf as a beetle, and as eccentric as a monkey. I don't believe he has kept any servant for more than three months at a stretch we have traced out a dozen, and there must be scores more. But it is only lately that he has taken to accusing them of being in a plot to murder him. The last cook he had he made taste everything she prepared in his presence.